

“WCHL News” will be emailed out as usual and is also available from our Facebook group page and on the Brunswick Valley Landcare website. With this edition there will also be a letterbox drop.

To be sure you don't miss out on events and news from a broader area, please refer to the Byron Shire Landcare and Dunecare newsletter. <http://brunswickvalleylandcare.org.au/newsletters/> to subscribe or to look up current and archived editions.

Wilsons Creek Huonbrook Landcare News

Happy 2021 to all our landcarers and we hope that you and your local environments are enjoying the very pleasant seasonal conditions.

Some belated news from our AGM on November 11th, 2020, when officebearers were elected as follows:

President: Barbara Stewart

Vice-President: Peter Hall

Treasurer and Public Officer: Robyn Berrington

Secretary: Julie Gardner

Other committee members

Paul Hudson (Newsletter editor)

Steve Millard (Social secretary)

Ryan Nunn (Fire Brigade Liaison)

John Wynberg (Pest Animal Officer)

Mary Fox (Assistant Secretary)

Marg East, Graham Watson, Saxon Ryan, Darryl Larkin, David Oliver, Margie Hall.

We thank outgoing committee members Suzi Lechner and Jess Poulson, and we hope they will return when their lives permit.

Who is doing Landcare in our valleys?

Barbara Stewart

We've had a lot of Landcare attention in the last year, and have welcomed:

- Rainforest Forever (RF4) a private foundation undertaking rainforest plantings and regeneration, running volunteer projects.
- Trails for Tails auspiced by the Northern Rivers Fire and Biodiversity Consortium Inc and conducting surveys for Marbled Frogmouth and Albert's Lyrebird.
- Brunswick Valley Landcare, whose Wildlife Safe Havens project has provided nest boxes, trees to plant and bush regen advice.
- Byron Shire Council, supplying Koala food trees.



So, if you are curious about Landcare activities at any particular location, it may be a small challenge to find out who to ask. In addition, contractors may be engaged by more than one organisation. And of course, many landholders work privately.

External groups bring funds, projects and collaborations into our valleys. It's a win win for all concerned as outside bodies benefit from our local knowledge and coordinated, long term presence on the ground and we love to have the extra resources for our environment. When we add in our own projects, we can look forward to some fantastic regeneration, tree planting, weed management and fauna habitat outcomes.

Some of the additional activities are due to our bushfire damage, the only affected area in the Byron Shire, and so a focus for funding opportunities. We have a couple of fire-related projects as well, having recently completed works for our Landcare Australia Bushfire Recovery and currently managing Giant Devil's Fig infestations with Local Land Services.

Valley stories

In this edition we begin a series of personal stories on life and properties in the Valley by profiling three of the Landcare Committee. Here are their stories:

Julie Gardner

We began the stewardship of our Wilsons Creek property in 2001 by removing the car bodies and a lot of other ancient and assorted junk and lantana from an area near the shed where we based ourselves while our house was built. What we uncovered was an exquisite rainforest gully which roars with water after heavy rain. We planted trees and weeded, and now the gully largely takes care of itself. This is hard work, but I much prefer it to teaching adolescents which was my job when we left Canberra to live in Wilsons Creek.

We have lived here for 20 years now and were introduced to Wilsons Creek Huonbrook Landcare by my mother, Shirley, in about 2001. Although Mum passed away 15 years ago, my sister and I still work on Landcare sites which Mum initiated. It is a great way to catch up and keep up the good work on the weeds. If you have lived in the valley for a while you will have come to the realisation that weed control will probably take generations. Summer can feel especially overwhelming.

I have no official botanical qualifications, but I love the rainforest and find it so satisfying to see the transformation from weeds to forest. Belonging to the Landcare group has increased my knowledge and skills enormously.

Robyn Berrington

I came to live in the valley in 1994 with my partner Paul and toddler son, Charlie. The following year Robyn Herklots (a long standing local) and myself, the other Robyn, started the Landcare group. My aim was to learn from others, meet the locals, and improve our natural environment. Whilst our progress was slower in those early years, the group enthusiasm was wonderful – we would work on each other's properties, learning bush regeneration skills along the way, and getting to know each other and having fun. Now the Landcare group is more focussed on obtaining grants to employ bush regenerators, thereby achieving bigger outcomes, with occasional community workdays. I have been on the committee most years since inception, mostly as treasurer and public officer. When I first came to Wilsons Creek, I didn't even know what a camphor laurel was!!! Since then, I have weeded thousands of camphors and other weeds, which has allowed the rainforest to naturally regenerate. In the early days we planted, but now we just help nature regenerate by removing weeds. The result has been so uplifting, and wonderful to see more wildlife taking up residence. I get so excited seeing and nurturing baby rainforest plants growing in new areas. It's an extremely satisfying pastime. I wish I'd taken more pre photos....

Mary Fox

Mary, Ziji and Jonathan arrived in the small area of Wanganui on the far north coast of NSW by what felt like magic. They were captivated by the life and diversity on their property. The backdrop of Nightcap World Heritage National Park gave a tremendous reserve of plants and animals. There were permanent creeks with moss covered boulders, waterfalls, private pools where no sun ever entered. It was and is sacred and special. That was almost a decade ago.

Living here has brought all of us into our senses, to see more, to stop look and listen, to smell where a plant is flowering and where the rats are nesting. Mary is becoming wild like the other inhabitants here and is joining the forest community. Living here gives us all the invitation to find what we really love to do, as the native animals and plants do, and to express that in our lives.

Naively Mary felt restoring the land to its full rainforest glory was a project for her. She had no idea how much work would be needed to get the weeds under control. She began, like the Bradley sisters who pioneered the chem free bush regen movement in Australia, just doing the amount she could, by hand, using kitchen knives to uproot giant devil figs, using a brush cutter and long handled clippers to clear lantana. Ziji contributed by enthusing Helpx volunteers to come and stay often for months at a time. These were usually young couples who had never been in rainforest before, and who also became entranced by the wild places and the chance to contribute. On one of the steepest properties in the valley, the work is hard. They now employ bush regenerators once a month, which is a high point of their regen calendar.

"Life and its diversity are the most sacred thing there is" Mary says. Landcare gives her a community of people whose lives are in the forest. People to reflect with and people who are elders in the understanding of the biodiversity.



Are you interested in contributing to the conservation of our unique native plants and animals, but don't want to sign a legal agreement? Do you have half a hectare or more of native bushland on your property?

Then, joining Land for Wildlife may be of interest to you.

What is Land for Wildlife?

Land for Wildlife is a voluntary property registration scheme for landholders who wish to manage areas of biodiversity and wildlife habitat on their property.

Land for Wildlife encourages and assists landholders to include nature conservation along with other land management objectives.

Land for Wildlife is free to join and is not legally binding. Registration in the scheme will not change the legal status of your property.

What are the benefits for members?

Land for Wildlife supports people who want information about wildlife management on your property and provides opportunities for landholders to share your experiences, increase your knowledge, and make contact with other local landholders and participants and as well as professionals and specialists in associated fields.

Land for Wildlife delivery includes:

- site assessment from a trained assessor;
- advice on suggested management strategies and actions for the property;
- support and encouragement for landholders to carry out nature conservation on their land;
- access to education programs and activities such as workshops and field days;
- membership links and contacts with like-minded people.

Land for Wildlife participants are able to apply for grants through the Biodiversity Conservation Trust.

If you'd like to know more, email wilsonscreeklandcare@yahoo.com.au

A Journey to 'Weed-Free'

Graham Watson and Gwynn Guyatt

When we moved onto our 170 acre Huonbrook block in 1974, we were only the second owners to actually live here. We are assuming, of course, that the First Nations people, in their maybe 100,000 years of occupation, did not “live” here in the sedentary sense that applies to us colonisers. After the valley had been surveyed for settlement in the early years of the twentieth century, the property lay unselected until 1921 when Englishman Tommy Savage took up the lease.

Under the Crown Lands Act of 1884, in order to retain the lease, Tommy, as were all leaseholders, was required to live on his land and build boundary fences. This Act ensured that the forests on small holdings were removed so that fences could be built, and, with crops or livestock, the land made productive. Tommy diligently commenced the clearing of his property erecting a small timber mill down on Coopers Creek and acquiring a small dairy herd that kept him financially afloat. But in 1932, Tommy and his mate were chopping down some palm trees when tragedy struck as one of the palms fell on him and killed him. Tommy’s grief-struck fiancée in Mullumbimby, who we were to meet years later, never recovered and never married anyone else.

In the ensuing years, three other parties took up the lease, but all surrendered it within a few months. I am guessing that they were simply after his house and bails and fencing as only relics of all these infrastructures remained by the time we came along. The result of Tommy’s premature death was that the property was left with about 15 acres of subtropical lowland rainforest that was never cleared – although it was apparent that over the years there had been some desultory attempts at selective logging. The other result was that the land that he had cleared had gone to weeds. Lantana was spread across about 50 acres in pure stands as well as in many smaller patches. Pigeons had kindly distributed seeds from the camphor laurels first planted at the nearby Huonbrook school site so that about 25 acres were a monoculture of that species and they were actively spreading as if in cahoots with the lantana. Other weeds such as privet, tobacco bush, coral tree, buddleja and even bougainvillea were common often in dense clumps. Extensive patches of lawyer cane and cockspur vine also made getting about somewhat problematical. Tommy had left small patches of rainforest trees on very steep slopes but many of those trees were burdened with an incredible load of canopy vines – vine towers were everywhere. For some reason the blackbutt forest on the ridgeline was structurally intact – although we knew the best specimens would have been long gone.

So, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, we set about clearing the lantana in an essentially ad-hoc manner attacking those areas close to our house site and those areas easily accessed by our tractor. We used the tractor to push the lantana into windrows which were then burned. We had a lot to learn.

By the mid 1980s, our uni studies and subsequent careers took us away from Huonbrook for over 20 years, so it wasn’t until 2006 that we seriously started developing a property management strategy that was totally focused on conservation.

The first step was to sign a Voluntary Conservation Agreement with the National Parks and Wildlife Service which guaranteed that all future owners of the property would be required to continue to manage the property according to this new paradigm.



Lantana formed vine towers as well as the native vines.

Then, in 2008 a chance meeting with two bush regenerators and the generosity of a conservation-oriented funding body enabled us to begin the de-weeding journey systematically. Over the next three years, we completely rehabilitated a remnant 4 acre patch of rainforest which contained the first known location of the smooth-leaved Davidson's plum. This small patch now supports over 150 species of native woody plants.

Our next challenge was the huge area dominated by camphor laurel. In 2010, the Federal Government established the BIOFUND program which allocated millions of dollars to approved projects in the hope that significant contributions would be made to the rehabilitation of ecosystems around the nation. We could see that if we were able to replace the camphor infestation with native forest, we would at

the same time create a corridor of native flora linking Mt Jerusalem and Goonengerry National Parks. Our project was approved and funding was provided for the five years 2011-2016. This area is now an entirely self-supporting native forest which includes warm temperate species such as crabapple, sassafras, prickly ash and exciting finds of onion cedar, southern corynocarpus, muskwood, white beech and several others not previously known on the property. We are also delighted to witness the increasing utilisation of the regenerating forest by the native animals which had previously eschewed the camphor forest.

By this stage, Wilsons Creek and Huonbrook Landcare had developed all the skills to win grants and in partnership with Goonengerry Landcare was becoming very influential in assisting the rehabilitation of weedy or degraded forest lands in the valleys. And we still had about 25 acres of lantana with which to deal. Landcare was very helpful by including our property in some of its rehab. projects mostly sponsored by the State Government funded Environmental Trust. By 2019 we had just 15 acres left. We were getting there bit by bit.



Then in 2019 the Biodiversity Conservation Trust agreed to fund the replacement of 10 acres of lantana with regenerated rainforest and Landcare's "Linkages in the Headwaters" project funded



There were several large lantana patches of 10 acres or more.

similar treatment for the remaining 5 acres. This stage of the journey has been rewarded with the finding of southern fontainea and more specimens of the locally rare Queensland whitebark. It is now done – all the lantana is gone and the next few years will be spent nurturing the incipient rainforest that is already emerging. There are little red cedars, pencil cedars, celerywoods, pepperberries, kurrajongs and stinging trees everywhere. We have now started

enhancing the success of the regeneration diversity result with hundreds of strategic plantings of poorly distributed tertiary stage trees such as giant water gum, yellow carabeen, white booyong, red lilly pilly and some others that have been germinated from seed collected elsewhere on the property.

Throughout this journey we have been looked after by those same two bush regenerators we happened to meet all those years ago and the result is a testament to their extraordinary expertise. We will be forever grateful.

One of the most moving results of all this lantana eradication was the chance finding of Tommy Savage's branding iron, buried in the lantana litter for eighty years but still in near perfect condition – like finding a very historic needle in a haystack.

Bushfire Recovery

David Oliver

I bought this piece of our Magic Valley in 1981; a sparkling tumbling creek, many wonderful trees, numerous rocks and acres of weeds, that had once been cleared. I cleared an area, reclaimed it and eventually planted some Macadamia trees over the years. I have replaced several acres of weeds with Maccas and other forest trees.

The recent fires burnt approximately 60 acres of Rainforest and some lantana. This has produced a huge crop of weeds, spreading happily into my regenerated areas. The fire killed celery wood, stinging trees and others which is creating falling trees over tracks and around the orchards. Landcare is assisting me in some regeneration and replanting rainforest trees.

As an active member of the Rural Fire Brigade and having seen our Rainforest burn, we must all upgrade any protection we can give and pressure our Politicians to remove their heads from the sand and act on our behalf on relevant and sensible suggestions for protection and regeneration. Landcare and some dedicated members particularly have achieved great things despite the red tape. It is about the people who care and the trees, I am sure, are grateful, as am I.

Giant Devil's Fig Project



Our project, working with NSW Local Land Services, to manage this rapidly spreading and unpopular weed is underway. Giant Devil's Fig rapidly invades disturbed sites, forming dense stands of thorny stems, outcompeting native vegetation and taking over agricultural land.

We are developing a comprehensive information leaflet, but for now, this is a rundown on ways to deal with it. (We've put out identification material before, and it's easy to find online. But if you want help confirming ID please ask a knowledgeable neighbour or landcare person.)

How does it get here and how is it spread?

The seeds are bird and bat dispersed, also spread by water and contaminated soil. The fleshy fruits contain numerous small seeds, many of which germinate when freshly dropped from mature plants or under bird and bat perches. Seeds are also incorporated into the soil where they persist in a dormant state until disturbance stimulates germination. Carpets of seedlings may develop.

Giant Devil's Figs also reproduce vegetatively. Live roots which are left in the soil when larger plants are removed will reshoot. Cut stems stay alive for long periods and, if lying on the ground, will take root readily as soon as moisture permits. So do hand-pulled seedlings.

How can we manage Giant Devil's Fig?

Methods have pros and cons and can be tailored to the situation, landholders' wishes and their plans for the site. The bush regen team will be available at worksites (subject to landholder permission) during the project and can talk through and demonstrate.

THICK GLOVES AND PROTECTIVE CLOTHING SHOULD BE WORN TO PREVENT THORN INJURIES.

Prevention

Putting the most important project objective first, we want to minimise future problems will be critical. Luckily, there are very many people out there who tell us that they do not have a problem with this weed. (Hooray!!!! We need an honour roll or something.) They are the ones who search all likely establishment areas on their land, several times a year, removing seedlings while they are small enough for hand-weeding. They make the extra effort to get to larger plants before they fruit (there is always a large plant somewhere that escapes notice). The weeds do not usually invade solid rainforest, but they are pretty shade-tolerant and will colonise open ground and edges, grow up through quite dense weeds and love disturbance. All these environments need regular searching.

It will be worth helping out neighbours whose plants will otherwise be seed sources for the surrounds. New residents could be pointed to information sources or otherwise helped with identification and control methods.

Unfortunately, seeds will arrive continuously and accumulate in the soil. Our prevention measures will need to become land management habit. We can't hope to eradicate this weed, but can contain it, prevent stress and problems for ourselves, our neighbours and environment and minimise future herbicide use.

Managing the plants

Seedlings: handpull when small or carefully dig out all roots. Pretty effective, but seedlings must not be left on the ground. Collect them up and pile in a sunny spot, off the ground, where they can be observed easily. Bag and remove small numbers of seedlings.

Seedlings carpets can be sprayed if a landholder wishes, though not on creek banks.

Shrubs: Smaller shrubs can be dug out or pulled with tree poppers. The bush regen team has one and you can try it out. Be sure roots have been removed. This method disturbs the soil and is likely to stimulate germination of soil-stored seed, so be sure to check regularly. Pulled material must be removed and stacked off the ground.

Alternatively, cut, scrape and paint stump with herbicide. The cut stems must be stacked off the ground or removed from the site. Check techniques with experienced operators, as roots left in the ground will resprout if not killed completely.

Large plants: Stem inject with herbicide. Correctly done, this kills both the stem and roots. The stems can be left in place, but may fall over. Dead thorny stems have been known puncture tractor tyres – be aware. It is possible to dig large plants but follow up is needed in case roots have been left behind. It is too labour intensive for paid contractors. Efficiency is important!

If fruit are present and can be collected, bag and remove from the site (do not compost – it might be necessary to send to landfill).

Herbicide use

There are strict controls on herbicide use. Our info leaflet will have more details. We act legally, with very minimal risk, layer on the precautions and engage qualified and experienced contractors. Please ask if you have specific questions.

How to be involved

Check your place for infestations. Creek banks are a priority but tell us about any other plants that you cannot manage yourselves. This is a short-term project with limited funding, so please get in quickly.

wilsonscreeklandcare@yahoo.com or 66840378

Cane Toad Control

John Wynberg

I accidentally ran over a cane toad on our driveway the other night. I was surprised as this is only one of three cane toads that I have seen on our property over the past 4 years.



Cane toads prefer open areas



Cane toads have quite particular egg strings.

I know it is very different for two friends of mine. They both have significant cane toad populations but like many people in similar situations find it difficult to deal with them. Irrespective of the fact that cane toads are a huge pest problem, (and here I quote the RSPCA) “Cane toads are capable of experiencing pain and distress and so any measures to control them must not cause suffering. It is the responsibility of both the government and the community to ensure that only humane methods are used.”

Currently there are 3 methods that are regarded as being a humane way to kill cane toads:

1. spraying with Hopstop®.
2. stunning followed by decapitation and;
3. prolonged exposure to carbon dioxide.
4. A 4th method of cooling followed by freezing, is now also regarded as being a humane way of dealing with cane toads

Theoretically, as my friends are not trained to deliver a stunning blow and decapitation as in the case of number 2 and they are certainly not qualified for method number 3, they can only kill cane toads by spraying them with Hopstop, (a useful product that comes in an aerosol spray can that you spray directly onto the toad with a short and accurate blast of about 3 seconds). A can of Hopstop costs around \$20 and can kill 40 to 50 average sized cane toads, therefore a cost of less than 50 cents per toad.

My friends would still then need to deal with the corpses and that means picking them up with a gloved hand or tongs and disposing of them in their landfill bin.

It's little wonder the adults of this *highly invasive species continue their destruction of our environment and will continue do so until we identify additional ways to control them.*

Peter Hall

I've written before on Cane toad trapping both for adult females and for toad tadpoles (December 2019 and April 2020 editions) however with the wet weather, it is timely to do so again. We're working with Brunswick Valley Landcare (BVL) and the rollout of BufoTabs.

In looking to control cane toad numbers, 2019/2020 saw BufoTabs being tried for the first time by a number of BVL and WCHL members with varying success. These Bufo Tabs are being trialled under a program run by University of Queensland whereby cane toad toxin is removed from dead adult toads and made up into large tablets that can be used to bait funnel traps. These traps are then used in and around waterways to attract and capture toad tadpoles thus removing them from the environment.

Our trial in Wilsons Creek yielded many thousands of toad tadpoles last season and with a new consignment of Bufo tabs, more Valley landowners and managers can now utilise this new pheromone technology. The Bufo Tabs are available to those who are keen to try and remove toad tadpoles in this way. Under BVL's agreement with UQ, triallists are required to humanely dispose of toad tadpoles and to download an app and lodge their results in a simple process.

Contact Peter Hall on pbhall@bigpond.com for further information on making funnel traps or to request a package of Bufo tabs for use on your property. Further useful links are:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=504552587071747>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2brtmSozjEw>



funnel trap after 2 hours (with BufoTabs evident)



funnel trap after 24 hours showing hundreds of toad tadpoles

Anyone interested in cane toad control and has open grassy areas near their water body may want to look at the dam on Mullum Golf Course at the Myocum Road turnoff. This project saw the building of a low cane toad fence to minimise cane toad access whilst the three offset lines/rows of lomandra grew to maintain an effective barrier.

Tree of the Month

Graham Watson

Giant Water Gum (*Syzygium francisii*) is a member of the Australian rainforest tree aristocracy. It grows to huge proportions and exhibits a number of unique characteristics. First described back in 1911, it was named *Eugenia francisii* to honour the 22-year-old botanist W.D. ("Bill") Francis, who would later become Australia's first great rainforest botanist. Three years after Francis' death in 1959, the tree was moved to its new home in the *Syzygium* genus.

The name "Water Gum" was coined by the early tree loggers who noticed that quantities of a watery sap were sometimes contained in a central cavity in the trunk and which poured out when the trees were felled. The "Giant" part of the name distinguishes this species from other smaller rainforest trees described as Water Gums.

This species is reasonably widespread, but not so much in the rainforests of our area. Magnificent



Distinctive fawn stem with prominent buttressing

specimens can be encountered among the rainforests of the Cambridge Plateau, including Richmond Range National Park, especially Bundoozle Flora Reserve and Toonumbar National Park. Nevertheless, some individuals can be found in Nightcap National Park but, importantly, also in Wanganui Gorge and Huonbrook. The rainforest remnants in the headwater areas of Coopers Creek that support this species are an important ecological asset to Byron Shire and it is gratifying to see a number of landowners working with Landcare and other sponsors to rid these remnants of invasive exotic plants. A particularly impressive Giant Water Gum was recently encountered in Huonbrook and this individual has so far reached a height of over 30 metres.

The buttressing on this specimen is prominent but not yet fully developed, indicating that it still has a lot of living and growing ahead of it (see picture).

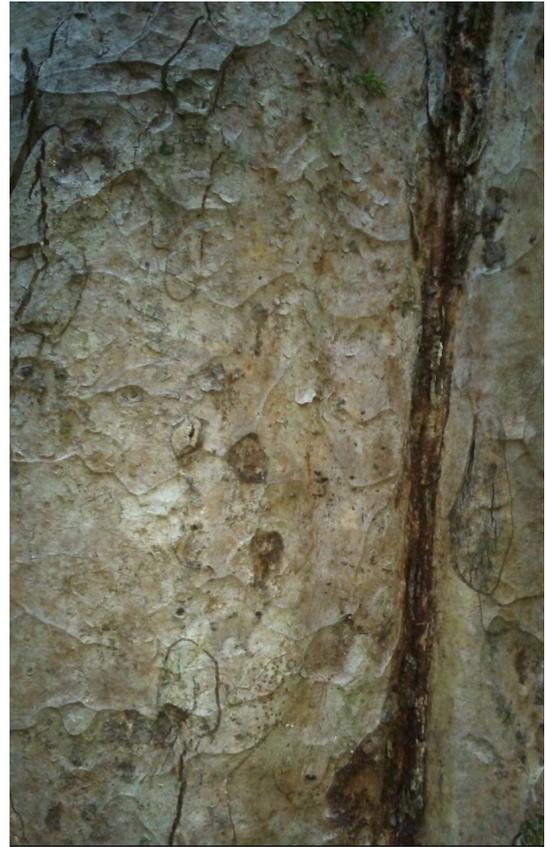
When in the rainforest, you can't confuse this species with any other tree. The bark is a distinctive fawn colour and the trunk is decorated with numerous craterous depressions left by bark

shedding. Sometimes in older trees, the trunk develops very large swollen protuberances up to a metre across.

Unlike almost all of its congeners, the leaves of Giant Water Gum do not have a spattering of translucent oil dots and are further distinctive by the close lateral venation, prominent intramarginal vein and wavy leaf margins.

The fruiting frequency is reasonably regular during late summer to autumn but the tree irregularly produces a massive fruiting. By the end of winter, after one of these major fruiting events, the ground underneath the tree can be completely green with the first leaves of hundreds of thousands of germinating seedlings. This “lawn” of green can easily occupy over 100 square metres. Unfortunately, in that situation almost all the seedlings ultimately just fade away. Only those seedlings that are at some distance from the parent tree seem to succeed.

In my opinion, anyone embarking on establishing a planted rainforest plot should definitely consider including at least one of this species.



Numerous craterous depressions decorate the trunk of Giant Water Gum

Contact us: Barbara 66840378, Julie 66840242 Email wilsonscreeklandcare@yahoo.com.au

WCHL is on Facebook



To become a member of our Facebook group, go into Facebook, search for Wilsons Creek Huonbrook Landcare and request to join. Any member can approve you. Alternatively, you can go to the URL below: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/551428364915585/?ref=ts> Once accepted as a member, feel free to post photos and stories, ask and answer questions and check in regularly.