

“WCHL News” will be emailed out as usual and is also available from our Facebook group page and on the Brunswick Valley Landcare website.

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

We trust that 2021 is proving to be a good year for all our landcarers and we hope that you and your local environments are enjoying the very pleasant seasonal conditions following what turned out to be a substantial and sustained wet period.

In this edition we cover a myriad of topics including post-bushfire stories, conservation agreements, Landcare project reports and some great landcarers success stories. Hope you enjoy!

Landcare involved with Valley Community Day

You will remember that after the bushfires, the community held a very enthusiastic drop-in day at the Hall to discuss ways of being better prepared next time around. Nothing much moved forward because the drought ended, Covid interrupted our lives and this summer's rain put the thought of a bad fire season off until at least next year.

However, the local Red Cross has been busy helping local communities like ours set up resilience committees so that we will be prepared for any future emergencies. Led by Kamala Rose, there have been several meetings to plan a **Community Resilience Day**, Sunday July 4th, 10am-2pm at the Wilsons Creek Community Hall. The RFS, SES, Brunswick Valley Rescue, our Landcare and the Red Cross will make presentations and a number of our own who experienced the fires at close hand will be on a panel to discuss what was learnt for future planning.

Red Cross have the template to enable us to create our own resilience organisation, before stepping away to leave us to run our own show to suit our unique community. Please join in to make this a success.

Who is doing Landcare in our valleys?

Barbara Stewart

In our last newsletter, we reported on some new participants and their great works in our Landcare area. It's time to look at some examples as we celebrate the results of a fairly normal wet season. The forests and creeks have loved it.

Our Landcare group has worked in forest and creek restoration for 25 years and we have many fine examples of mature plantings and forests in advanced stages of regeneration to showcase. We have won a few battles against serious weeds along the way too. In recent times, funding from the NSW Environmental Trust has supported bush regeneration over some BIG areas, continuing through our current Bush Connect and Linkages in the Headwaters projects. Big, connected habitat areas are key to ensuring the persistence and recovery of our native species. We'll keep it going for sure, but to have some extra help from Rainforest 4 Foundation's tree planting teams is really good, especially, as in the recent volunteer day at Huonbrook, planting is also helping the recovery of burnt areas.



Said one of the RF4 participants "It is great to see the regen work happening on this property at the same time we are planting. We can see the dead camphors from the planting! "

Contract bush regenerator from Northern Rivers Ecological carrying trays of seedlings for a RF4 planting against a burnt forest backdrop.

The location illustrates the way that many years of staged works have acted together to make connections across the valleys to neighbouring National Parks.

Now we are adding on Trails for Tails surveys (see this newsletter) and pest animal management (this edition as well as further stories soon). Nest boxes from Brunswick Valleys Landcare's Wildlife Safe Havens project have been installed and management of Giant Devil's Fig is continuing (be in touch if you have mature stems you would like to have injected; please hand pull the small ones).

There are many examples of "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" and good news for our local environment.



Valley stories

In the last edition we began a series of personal stories on life and properties in the Valley by profiling three of the Landcare Committee. Here are the stories from two more:

John and Glenda

We moved to our Wilsons Creek property at the end of 2016. Prior to moving here, we had spent 3 years travelling around Australia in a caravan after retiring and selling our home in Sydney. We loved our new home here in Wilsons Creek. Everything grew so fast and was lovely and green and occasionally on a Summers evening there was even a scent of sweet perfume in the air.

And so our journey began!

I joined Wilsons Creek Huonbrook Landcare with the encouragement of a neighbour and the lure of a social drink post the AGM the following year. Sometimes I wish I hadn't joined, particularly this summer as I watch pest weeds grow like crazy. Ignorance is bliss! However, ignorance is ignorance and Glenda and I now have adopted a plan for our property to in short leave it in a better place than we found it. This is something that cannot be done on one's own so we welcome the information, support and knowledge that we have received from our fellow members of the Wilsons Creek Huonbrook Landcare Group. Recently I have started coordinating the Feral Pest Animal role for our Landcare Group. Yet another steep learning curve and having grown up as a lover of cats and dogs also a very confronting one.

Ryan and Donna

Landowner/custodianship and connection to it is an ever-learning sensory experience. Depending on weather and season the contours and nooks, animal tracks, fallen trees, grazed grasses, fruits and perfumed foliage change with every passage, much like the spinning rolodex of "things to do" when walking through it. Sprawling singapore daisy, wandering jew, shoots of lantana, cassia and tobacco plants, access tracks washed out, fallen sally wattles, eroded soil banks, pademelons treating themselves to soft tip shoots on new plantings, and then..... a juvenile Koala backs down a gum and plods past you without a care for your existence, and all is restored.

We settled into the end of Cedar Rd on 8 acres of mostly "Koala endorsed" eucalypts and regenerated wet sclerophyll forest. In the late 80's former owners Neil and Wendy Ralph seeded the vision for their block, removing introduced species, extending water storage capacity and irrigation points throughout the block to cater for the first planting of eucalypt species. Their aim was to provide a Koala food sanctuary to support their finicky diet, planting 4000 plus tube stock throughout the 90's. (During the big dry in 2002 and again in 2019 many Koalas migrated to the property to enjoy the mature trees) In 1998 the Ralph's were encouraged by the establishment of the Cedar Rd Habitat Conservation Zone (1998) (an agreement between Cedar Rd landowners to limit multi dwelling accommodation/tourism operations or activity increasing traffic flow, in support for environment controls that foster native habitat within the Cedar Rd hamlet) and in 2000 placed the property into a NSW private land conversation property agreement. (See further article in this edition).

The Ralph's left the Valley in 2004, however their legacy and support for wildlife live on. Since that time, some mid stratum species have matured and died while the ever-sneaky Camphor's continue their infiltration into the renewed forest. Our 2015 program to sweep and eradicate the remaining Camphor Laurel continue, together with felling of aged Camphor tree trunks (the Ralph's first camphor eradication program trees in the 80's are becoming a hazard). Downpours from Cyclone Debbie and recent heavy rains (quarter 1, 2021) have caused soil subsidence on steeper slopes, washing out access tracks and lower stratum vegetation, inviting weeds in sunnier spots and destabilising mature trees root structures in others. While the mature canopy is in good shape, the conservation grants will go a long way to maintain ongoing weeding, planting out lower stratum (under-canopy) species, re-stabilising access trials and retaining structures on steeper terrain.



Trails for Tails – Finding the elusive Marbled Frogmouth

Following on from a successful season monitoring Albert's Lyrebird, Trails for Tail's latest efforts have focussed on locating the elusive Marbled Frogmouth. The project funded by Environmental Trust's Saving our Species program and Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife is establishing where these species occur on private property in the Northern Rivers. The survey aims to help improve the fauna record which currently shows the majority of birds occurring within park estate. Since June 2020, the team has installed 20 song meters and 30 wildlife cameras in selected locations within Kyogle, Lismore, Ballina and Byron Shires, confirming a strong population of both Albert's and Marbled within the Wilsons Creek Huonbrook Valley.

Project Manager, Jane Baldwin, says improving the fauna record is an important step in having private properties recognised as critical habitat and an essential part of the species' range. The surveys also allow us to assess threats and work with landowners to develop strategies or plans to ensure these species persist.

"The valley here is surrounded by large areas of protected habitat and the land between provides crucial pathways for Albert's Lyrebird and Marbled Frogmouth to move in response to climate

change, habitat loss and degradation, foraging and breeding opportunities and dispersal. The importance of these connecting corridors is what inspired the project following an anecdote of an Albert's Lyrebird running along a gravel road near Bentley looking for somewhere to go," Jane says.

While Albert's Lyrebird is relatively easy to capture on camera, the Marbled Frogmouth is much more difficult. A close relative to the Tawny Frogmouth but more restricted in range, the Marbled is limited to a small area in Northern NSW and South East Qld. The species experiences the same threats as Albert's Lyrebird and inhabits similar vegetation types. Their breeding seasons are close together, which is why they make a great duo to focus on.

"With consecutive breeding seasons it was a perfect opportunity to keep the gear out for a longer period of time and capture the whereabouts of two threatened species. However, we did end up resorting to old fashioned bird survey techniques to find the Marbled Frogmouth," says Jane.

Conducted by ecologist, Dave Milledge, three properties were surveyed in the valley, including two on Huonbrook Rd and one at Wanganui. The two Huonbrook locations found seven Marbled Frogmouths in total with 5 at one property and 2 at the other, whilst Wanganui had one. All three properties have Albert's Lyrebird as well.

It's really great, says Jane, we're only a year out from the devastating bushfires that impacted rainforests locally, so to see that both species are surviving often adjacent to these areas is positive. It also shows that the careful restoration of burnt rainforest in these areas is of the utmost importance.

As Marbled Frogmouth breeding season has come to an end, the T4T team is now bringing in all the equipment to service before Lyrebird monitoring starts again in May. They're calling on all landholders in Byron Shire and beyond who think or know they have either species on their property to get in touch. Head to their website (www.t4tproject.info) or email Ashley Warby (ashley@kingfisherco.com.au) for more information.



Project officer, Ashley Warby and local landholder, Dr Graham Watson setting up the Wildlife Acoustics SM4 song meter (2021 Wildlife Acoustics Photo Competition runner up)

Death and rebirth, fifteen months after the fire

Mary Fox

Lightning hit the dry forest near Mt Nardi October 2019. Fire began, too remote to access. It began to spread in November. A water bombing helicopter was 7 minutes from dousing it but was called away to a house fire.

3am November 9th the sky was red, embers big as watermelons were raining from the sky. Our fuel shed set alight. We were calm and evacuated without incident, along with most of the valley's inhabitants.



This was the view from our house at 3am on November 9th 2019. The lifesavers of the RFS came and backburnt around the house and put out spot fires. Six hours later we returned to find treasured seedlings burnt, mulch and humous layers that were nurseries for regeneration gone – but house and most infrastructure and all us humans, intact.

Great sadness as one of our large blue quandongs gave her life to put out the fire from our fuel shed. Such appreciation of so many plants, green lantana, palms and vines, that gave their stored water and their lives.

Rainforest never used to burn! Terania Creek which is wetter than us also burnt. Climate change hit us in the face. We were engrossed watching the fires all down the coast, giving such thanks for our relatively moist area. Our idea of our safety will never be the same. We don't know what biology this area can now support.

Our community reeled. Some sold houses and moved after decades and some want all plant life gone so there is no fuel. Some are scared of trees because they burn and some want frequent burning which may or may not be as the first nations people did. I want green moisture holding plants which put out fires, and humous below as a nursery for more growth. I want the myriad of creatures that water brings.





We were in shock and grief for months. Firstly, till the smoke stopped rising from the hills around us. Then till the first rain and mist occurred. Next till the smell of fire didn't scorch the nostrils, which took quite a few rain events. Moments of joy as plants resprouted from the base. Even though we lost a tree we had a seedling.

The amount of seedling growth since then has been unprecedented. It seems to me that the smoke has helped the germination even of rainforest plants. Our first volunteer was a native slender grape vine *Cayratia clematidea*. I spent a lot of time removing it which may not have been necessary. We then had masses of inkweed, *Phytolacca octandra*, which I left to do its own thing as a previous paddock of it had turned by itself into a paddock of tobacco bush *Solanum mauritianum*. We had masses of understory seedlings of bleeding hearts, *Homalanthus populifolius*, sally wattle *Acacia melanoxylon*, brown kurrajong *Commersonia bartramia*, red cedars *Toona ciliata*, white cedars *Melia azedarach* and others I still haven't got the names of.

Now fifteen months after the fires we have native regrowth sometimes taller than me. We have spots of plants I haven't seen before on our property, such as soft kamala *Mallotus mollissimus* and lollybush *Clerodendrum floribundum*. Tobacco bush has taken hold in some areas, and vines are frequent which will slow the trees.

If we hadn't had such a good La Nina year, we could still be in a dry time with little regeneration. We don't know if the seasons will continue to support rainforest regeneration.

Soil is fragile, especially on our steep slopes. How awesome are our trees that they can grow at all in what is basically subsoil after the big scrub being cleared, torrential rain and landslides?

Nature is so generous; she just wants to repair herself. At first after the fires, I wouldn't weed any plant, every green leaf was precious.



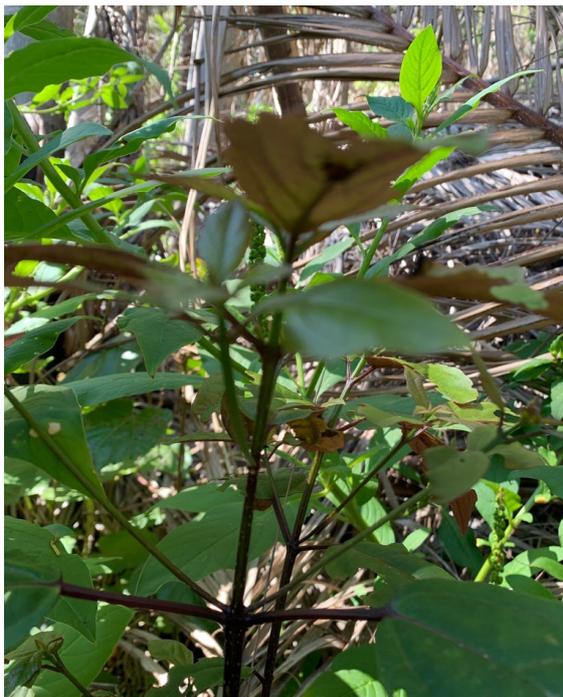
Our first volunteer was a native slender grape vine *Cayratia clematidea*. This is the burnt slope pictured earlier.



I used a ladder to work on the slope with inkweed dominant and many seedling trees.



Burnt bamboo – thank you fire! With fire damage above.



Regen a year on at my height and above



Hard quandong six months after fire.

Myrtle Rust National Symposium 2021

Graham Watson

Myrtle Rust, as potentially representing a catastrophic problem for Australian plants in the family Myrtaceae, only became apparent after it arrived in this country just over ten years ago. Since then, researchers and land management authorities have been mapping and studying the advances and impact of this fungus such that we now have a pretty good idea of the extent of the threat that it poses and the prospects are quite diabolical. The fungus has rapidly expanded along the whole of the east coast and researchers are extremely concerned that it is only a matter of time before it reaches the myrtle-rich states of South and Western Australia.

In March this year, a National Symposium on Myrtle Rust was convened to discuss current research progress on control options and also to come up with a Statement of Concern for the attention of all governments around Australia. The following is a brief synopsis of the data presented to the symposium.

The ravages of Myrtle Rust are now being described in the most catastrophic terms: that it is the vector for an unprecedented floral extinction event for this country. Currently, researchers have listed sixteen of our rainforest myrtle tree species expected to go extinct in the wild over the next five years while perhaps another thirty species are threatened with such severe decline that they are probably heading to extinction in the medium term. The historical context is that over the last 250 years so far only twelve plant species are thought to have become extinct. Of the sixteen imminently doomed trees, six grow in our area.

Across Wilsons Creek and Huonbrook, the once common Scrub Turpentine (*Rhodamnia rubescens*) is now known from only a handful of individuals – numerous dead ones can be found – and the Native Guava (*Rhodomyrtus psidioides*) is now already extinct in our valleys. The others that will soon disappear include Scaly Myrtle (*Gossia hillii*), Dotted Myrtle (*G. punctata*), Smooth Scrub Turpentine (*Rhodamnia maideniana*) and Southern Velvet Myrtle (*Lenwebbia prominens*).

Across Australia, the Myrtaceae contains upwards of 3000 species and so far, only about 100 have been found to be apparently resistant to the fungus. The rest, if not already hurtling to extinction, are either managing to deal with the growth setbacks caused by the rust or else are on a slow path of deterioration which may lead to extinction over a longer period. The latter group includes Flooded Gum (*Eucalyptus grandis*) and Blackbutt (*E. pilularis*), two of the most common eucalypts in our valleys. The loss of these two tree species on our ridgelines can hardly be imagined. A number of leptospermums, melaleucas, bottlebrushes and eucalypts are already functionally extinct. That is, the trees are surviving but the Myrtle Rust attacks their flowers and fruits so that there is no recruitment of juveniles happening in the wild populations.

The loss of the extinction-bound species and the decline in fitness of so many other myrtles will be a tragedy in itself but those losses will also lead to serious ecosystem impacts. There will be changes in diversity and structure within rainforests that will likely include openings for invasive species leading to negative flow-on effects for other plant species. In our local coachwood rainforest communities, for example, any losses of the susceptible Peach Myrtle (*Uromyrtus australis*), the fourth most abundant species in that community, already critically endangered due to its low

genetic diversity, will leave numerous forest gaps. There will also be a decline in abundance of other myrtle shrubs such as Rose Myrtle (*Archirhodomyrtus beckleri*) because the fungus thrives in the cool, moist microclimate of the forest shrub layer to which the rust spores will have increasing access as the forest opens up. The loss and decline of species performance and reproductive output will have a negative flow-on effect to the fauna dependent on them. This will lead to a simplification of the diversity of rainforest communities in general.

The action we can take locally is to first get rid of any exotic myrtle species in our gardens which are almost certainly acting as hosts and vectors for the rust. A typical example is Rose Apple (*Syzygium jambos*). On Lord Howe Island, the entire community came together to undertake that garden clean-up step which led to the eradication of the rust from LHI by 2016. A second action is to care for any of our native plants that are infected. Early infections can be dealt with by pruning and destroying the pruned material by baking it in black plastic. Fungicides may be useful but possibly of limited value for tall plants.

The infection is most commonly observed as yellow pustules on leaves, but, depending on the species, its growth stage and the time of year, the fungus can also attack small stems, flowers and fruits where it can appear as black or brown lesions. The rust takes only six days from the time of arrival of the spore onto the plant to the time of new spore production, so we need to be incredibly diligent in monitoring any surviving plants that we have. The observance of any uninfected plant may need to be reported because the future for some species may rely on the development of breeding programs based on resistant plant sources.

There are already numerous esoteric genetic research projects being pursued by CSIRO and universities both here and in New Zealand and the USA which all hold hope for future control of the fungus. At the same time, nurseries and botanic gardens up and down the east coast are setting up seed storage facilities and sterile glasshouses where many of the threatened species are being kept in safety. The long lead time from research success to saving plants in the wild, however, means that we landowners must do everything we can to hold the line in this current dire situation.

The Statement of Concern emanating from the Symposium can be found at <http://www.apbsf.org.au/statement-of-concern/> There is also a petition there that you can sign which urges the Federal Government to give much higher priority to supporting action against Myrtle Rust.



Smooth Scrub Turpentine showing the destructive impact of Myrtle Rust. All the new growth has died off, the adult leaves are much smaller than normal and there is no flowering anymore. This once fine tree is beyond saving.



One of the last few specimens of scrub turpentine on our property.

This sapling has already lost half its foliage and is unlikely to survive the next year.

A large Huonbrook Scrub Turpentine, after several years of fighting Myrtle Rust, is putting out epicormic shoots from the lower trunk. This grand tree is in its final stage of life.



Young Rose Myrtle already showing the tell-tale signs of Myrtle Rust attack

Setting up a Conservation Agreement

Margaret and Peter Hall

Before arriving in Wilsons Creek, we'd have thought it a folly to lock away acres on your land if only from a perspective of property value. However, after toiling away for three years on a mind-boggling variety (and amount) of weeds, we have had a mind shift. We are looking to protect our current and ongoing bush regeneration work and given our proximity (and shared boundary) with Goonengary National Park, we now believe it a folly **not** to place a conservation covenant or agreement on a significant part of the property.

We joined 'Land for Wildlife' shortly after arriving in the valley, keen on developing and improving the habitat values. We then started the conservation agreement process in September 2018 and now in May 2021 we have the agreement in place over some two thirds of the property. Does this 'lock away' the land? Well, yes and no. Yes, where the bush/rainforest areas are situated, creating better wildlife habitat and encouraging plant diversity but no, with the bulk of our cleared land still able to be utilised by us or subsequent owners for a secondary dwelling, grazing livestock, gardens etc. Under the agreement we are required to maintain a level of weed and pest control which would have been part of any land management plan we'd have come up with anyway. In fact, our advice has now been that a conservation agreement represents a significant investment in the property that would be reflected in its value upon sale!



Bush section adjacent to Goonengary National Park



Blackbutt old growth tree on the escarpment adjoining the property

The process is coordinated by the Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT) and in the first instance involves a site inspection assessing general suitability for a conservation agreement and the meeting of size requirements as well as biodiversity values. Following the initial site inspection, a site values report is undertaken by industry professionals analysing flora and fauna and the establishment of monitoring stations to measure the effectiveness of subsequent bush regeneration work. A legal document is drawn up and attached to the title thereby establishing the conservation agreement.

I used the word 'process' earlier and it does take some time however in our case, that actually assisted us with better determination of conservation area boundaries and plans for future bush regeneration work, the latter assisted by BCT through a grant application process. We're protecting 30 odd acres of bush for future generations and that's a great feeling!

Conservation Agreement Landholders get together

This week a group of Valley landholders who have, or who are just about to enter into a Conservation Agreement met at one of the properties to undertake an evening spotlighting tour with expert David Milledge. He had set out a couple of wildlife cameras the week prior showing snapshots of feeding macropods as expected but also a fox gazing into the camera!

As the sun set and the autumn chill enveloped our group, we were entertained by David's list of 'possible' sightings (and hearings). Torches were checked, beanies donned and we set off firstly through open areas near the house and then further into the bush. David played a number of bird calls such as the Sooty Owl, Masked Owl, the Boobook and even the Powerful Owl to elicit an answering call. Not much was initially heard until a Boobook Owl relatively close by was heard responding.

From tiny Green tree frogs to flying foxes to cuddling Kookaburras to short-eared brushtail or mountain brushtail possums, we were part of their habitat for a short while. Very informative and with such a great group of like-minded Valley folk, the tour was enjoyed by all with plenty of 'let's do it again soon'! Thanks to Georgia Beyer from The Biodiversity Conservation Foundation (BCT) for coordinating the evening.



Torch pointing up or pointing down? That is the question!

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust manages the partner agreements with landowners and provides ongoing annual or lump sum (triennium) financial support and practical knowledge to assist landowners with best practice ecological and habitat conservation. More information can be found at www.bct.nsw.gov.au/private-land-conservation-nsw

Fox Control

John Wynberg

Glenda thought she saw a fox about 3 months after we moved into Wilsons Creek however it was some 4 years on before I had my first sighting. It was just on dusk and we both saw it prowling off into the bushes on Cedar Road, Wilsons Creek. Two weeks later I saw my second fox on Myocum Road just before the turnoff to the Byron Resource Centre. This one had been run over! Over the past 6 months I've also had several reports of foxes being sighted in the Valley including this haunting email. "We found a disemboweled pademelon on our grass three weeks ago. And a pair of foxes were just outside our bedroom window at 6am a fortnight ago!"

We certainly have foxes here in our Valley. Foxes are a deadly concern for our native habitat. Quoting from the NSW Department of Primary Industries "Fox predation is recognised as having a serious impact on many native animals and is considered to be a major contributor to the extinction of some species. Species impacted include brush tailed and yellow footed rock wallabies, bettongs, numbats, mallee fowl, pied oyster catcher, little tern, plains wanderer, bush stone curlew and the Murray river turtle."

So, what to do about foxes? One of the resources to answer that question is the NSW Local Land Services and coincidentally, about a month ago, I received a small brochure complete with a picture of a fox on the front with my rates notice (which are still being waived.) I followed up with LLS and ended up doing an online vertebrate pesticide induction course. Any thoughts of an easy fix using pesticide, mainly 1080, were soon buried, if you excuse the pun (baits are buried a certain depth to keep other wildlife from eating them and rely on the keen sense of smell that a fox and a wild dog, and sadly a domestic dog, has to find the bait and ingest it).

I found the course fascinating and I can understand that baiting does have a lot of success out west on large properties and most possibly in part has saved the sheep industry, however we are semi urban and baiting understandably is not really a viable option.

The best/only option then that is available, to my understanding, is trapping and shooting. I spoke to Jim, who has been trapping locally for 20 years. He gets various contracts from private landholders and Council. There are some periods where Council subsidises Jim's set up and trapping costs and then as a landholder, I would pay \$200 per trapped animal. Otherwise, out of these periods, Jim charges \$40 per hour to set up and trap.

For the fox I saw on Cedar Road, I would really need to coordinate with all of my neighbours (the fox wasn't on our property at the time, so Jim would need to access other properties) and I would realistically need to ask them to chip in as \$200 per trapped animal would blow the budget if he ended up trapping five; there's a quick thousand dollars.

Jim is very booked out right now so I will have time to research further. As one step in the interim I have downloaded onto my phone, an App called Feral Scan where you can log sightings of foxes and in fact most pest animals. If anyone has ideas or other research please email them to Landcare at wilsonscreeklancare@yahoo.com.au

Tree of the Month

Graham Watson

ONION CEDAR (*Owenia cepiodora*)

At Wilsons Creek and Huonbrook, we are smack in the middle of the original distribution of this rainforest tree. It was historically found in The Big Scrub lowland subtropical rainforest from Bangalow to Mt Tamborine and west to the dry rainforests of the Richmond Range. Named back in 1880, the genus honours British zoologist Richard Owen, a Charles Darwin opponent, and the specific epithet is a composite of the Latin for onion, 'cepa', and odour, 'odor'.

In the early days of colonisation, Red Cedar (*Toona ciliata*), was discovered to be a fine cabinet timber and, as a consequence, was harvested absolutely indiscriminately. Every accessible tree was cut down. If you come across a large Red Cedar today, you can be confident it is less than 150 years old. With the eventual decline in the commercial availability of Red Cedar, substitute species were sought. Cedar cutters quickly found that, despite the onion smell of its bark and timber, Onionwood, as Onion Cedar was called, was large enough to be marketed as Red Cedar. Not surprisingly, because of its very limited distribution, it, too, was soon logged to its commercial extinction. By 1984, only 30 trees were known to be left in the wild. Unlike Red Cedar however, Onion Cedar did not bounce back from the logging experience and it remains a very rare tree in our region to this day. Rainforest nurseries are doing a wonderful job in making seedlings of this species available to the public.

In recent years a couple of clumps of this species have been discovered at Huonbrook and although still small, at less than 15 metres high, there is hope that it will one day return to populate our regenerating rainforests.

The foliage of the Onion Cedar is quite distinct. The large compound leaves can include up to 30 leaflets but notably without a terminal leaflet. The leaflets can vary from being a dull, dark green like Rosewood (*Dysoxylum fraserianum*) although they lack the hollow domatia of that species or else they can be glossy and sometimes quite unequal-sided which might be confused with Black Teak (*Pentaceras australis*) but the leaves of that tree have a terminal leaflet and lots of conspicuous oil dots. The grey-brown trunk is straight and cylindrical. Trunk buttressing is usually absent or minimal. Young stems display old leaf scars but these give way to shallow, vertical, wrinkled fissures that develop with age. The fruits that you might find on the forest floor are red and globular, about 20 mm diameter, with only one or two seeds inside the hard endocarp.

Onion Cedar grows quite quickly at a rewarding rate of at least half a metre per year and as it is rare, but once locally common, it warrants inclusion in most rainforest regeneration projects.



Typical leaves of Onion Cedar



The stem of an Onion Cedar 15m high showing old leaf scars and the beginnings of the tell-tale vertical fissures in the bark.

Book Reviews

Julie Gardner

1. ***Entangled Life: how fungi make our worlds, change our minds, and shape our future.***

by Merlin Sheldrake. The Bodley Head, 2020

2. ***The Hidden Life of Trees: what they feel, how they communicate.***

By Peter Wohlleben Black Inc. 2015

Sometimes it is great to stop thinking about, or feeling overwhelmed by, weeds and the task before you, and to stop and consider instead what is growing unseen and silently under the ground.

Fungi and lichens are the subject of Merlin Sheldrake's book and he claims that "over 90% of plants depend on fungi which can link trees in shared networks, sometimes referred to as the "Wood Wide Web".

The mushrooms that we see are just the fruit of fungi. Underground the fungi forms networks called "hyphae" through which water and nutrients flow, providing plants with nutrients from the soil, in exchange for what the fungi needs. Soils are held together by this fungal mesh. These networks can extend over many kilometers, weigh many tons and be thousands of years old.

There is so much fascinating information in this book, such as the human uses of fungi –as medicine, or to break down pollutants such as oil spills, and for the mind-altering properties of some species .

The role of fungi in the forest is critical to the processing of fallen timber into soil to support and nourish the forest.

You will have witnessed fungi at work in the rainforest as it breaks down fallen trees and branches, often indicated by impressive, colourful, or unbelievably fragile mushrooms.

"The Hidden Life of Trees" charts the journey of the author from forester who saw the trees in his care as potential "lumber", a resource to be managed and harvested, - to someone who developed a fascination for trees as social beings who cared for each other in forest settings by means of fungal networks that allowed "the sharing of an enormous amount of information and goods." He describes how tree families communicate, support each other, share nutrients and warn of imminent danger.

I recall seeing an interview with a famous person (whose name I have forgotten) on ABC's Gardening Australia who always made sure the plants in his garden could touch the neighbouring plant – and I thought this demonstrated a willingness to see the possibility of plants having social connections. It was an arresting perspective.

Both books are available through the Public Library.



Fungi
(photo by Alice Cotter-Gardner)

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

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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.