



Newsletter of Menai Wildflower Group September 2023

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At our September meeting, you may have noticed new signs which incorporate a QR code. This allows visitors to quickly and easily access information about MWG. Thanks to Annie and Martin for their fantastic job developing the QR code. The code isn't yet linked to the web but that should happen over the next month.

Members have enjoyed some pleasant walks, as reported later in this newsletter, and more are planned to soak up the beautiful spring weather and flowers. Hopefully we will enjoy the waratahs again this year. Walks are usually at fairly short notice, so keep your eyes open for email invitations, Facebook and Instagram posts. And if you have any ideas on other activities, or even better, would like to organise one, we'd love to hear from you.

P Forbes

Where are we heading?

The emergency meeting saw a fairly small turn up but generated some interesting discussion. Lloyd is negotiating with various parties to ensure we can keep the Tip Nursery going and we have hosted various interested visitors over the last few weeks. So that area is looking fairly positive. Elsewhere things are still up in the air so if you have any great ideas to keep us going, please bring them up at the next meeting or talk to any of the committee. A couple of members have expressed interest in taking on jobs – many thanks but more help is needed.



New team at the Tip Nursery, P Forbes.



Boronia ledifolia, P Forbes.

Excursion to National Park

On 21 July Greg and Pam led an excursion to the site of the old sawmill in the Royal National Park. Members of the Menai Wildflower Group enjoyed the walk with members of the National Park Association.

We met at Loftus Oval car park and carpooled down to McKell Avenue below Waterfall where a sawmill was operated by James Foster of Waterfall, from around 1903. It was powered by a Robey 18hp semi portable engine and the boiler from this engine still lies in the bush beside the upper reaches of the Hacking River. Nearby are the remains of a timber-lined pit for the circular saw blade and, no doubt, other related structures.



Some of the excursionists at the engine, J Prats

James Foster owned both a bullock team and eight heavy draught horses and these would have been used to install the sawmill and move logs to the mill and sawn timber to market. This area still abounds in durable hardwoods, turpentines (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) and blackbutts (*Eucalyptus pilularis*) but the surrounding woodland contain evidence of extensive logging of these quality hardwoods. A small community of loggers and their families would have lived at this location. A sawmill was still operating at this site in 1922 providing sawn lumber and pit props for the Metropolitan Coal Company before it was closed by public pressure.

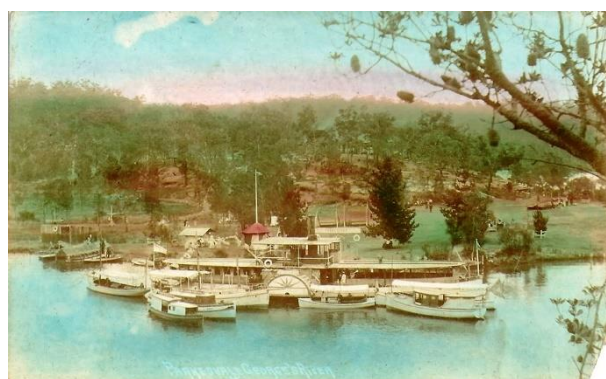
G Jackson

Excursion to Parkesvale

The large pleasure ground of Parkesvale was named after Sir Henry Parkes and operated from the late 1890s till approximately 1914 with the paddlewheel steam ship *Telephone* ferrying patrons from the train station at Como. Parkesvale and the *Telephone* were owned by three enterprising brothers Henry, Ebenezer and Fredrick

Sandbrook from Camperdown. Parkesvale is now in the Georges River National Park a short walk from Sandy Point.

On 18 September Greg and Pam again put on their archaeologists' hats to led an excursion to Parkesvale. Thirteen members of the MWG and the NPA participated in great weather. On the way, we saw some spring flowers and detoured to an Aboriginal shelter to observe the many hand stencils on the roof. Much of the archaeology has been recently lost to trail bikes and 4x4 vehicles' use of the area but, with the aid of historic photos and some imagination, the scene from early last century with boats, dance halls and crowds of up to 800 people enjoying the evening could be envisioned.



The paddle steam ferry Telephone at Parkesvale c.1904, Picture Sutherland.

G Jackson

Native plants in the city

Jan Riley organised and led an excursion to the Barangaroo native plant reserve last Friday. Lloyd and I have been planning to visit this reserve for years, so we seized the opportunity to go with Jan. Cameron, Ruth and Ross Jeffrees joined us.

The 6 hectare site used to be a concrete container terminal. It was planted with species which were growing in the area prior to European colonisation. The 84 different species are planted in a manufactured soil with a base of crushed sandstone. The plants were grown in pots of a similar mixture and when planted on site they had a 99% survival rate – it's usually 10 to 15% fail. The plantings included mature trees. All in all, it was a brilliant operation. The only plants not indigenous to the site were "iconic plants of the Sydney basin" including spotted gum, Sydney blue gum, water gum, gymea lily and *Callistemon citrinus Anzac*. The first plants were planted on site in 2014 and the area opened to the public not much over a year later in 2015.



We took the train to Wynyard, a short walk from Barangaroo. On the way we admired the eleven 2.8 metre eagle ray sculptures hanging above us, made from fishing nets and other marine debris washed up on beaches by the "Ghost Net Collective".



There are lots of places to eat and drink in the area and lots to see, but the reserve itself is fabulous. It is unbelievable that it is so new with lots of mature trees, vines and understorey plants all flourishing. You can walk along the water front or higher up where there are lots of picnic places and beautiful spring flowers. We wandered through the reserve for maybe an hour and a half and then continued to Circular Quay station and the train back. But it is a place I want to revisit. Thank you Jan.

Mary Hedges



Boronia, Coastal Track, RNP, P Forbes.

Birds in your backyard!?

It's one thing to convince people to make their gardens bird friendly, but try telling the birds that they have to be friendly and cooperative in return. After spending much time and energy in beautifying our mostly empty yard when we first bought it 29 years ago, we have now been adopted by a Superb Lyrebird intent on scratching the living daylight out of the ground cover.



Alan and Pauline Ferguson.

Note that the [Spring Birds in your Backyard bird count](#) is coming up in October, with fun to be had and prizes to win. However, you can add bird data to Birdlife Australia at any time [here](#). Alan has the opportunity of an interesting entry. You can find out more about Birdlife Australia's citizen science programs [here](#).



Superb Lyrebird, by Fir0002 - Own work, GFDL 1.2, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7319898>

Editor

Coming events

Please keep an eye out for last minute **variations**. Meetings are on the **second Saturday** of the month at **2pm**.

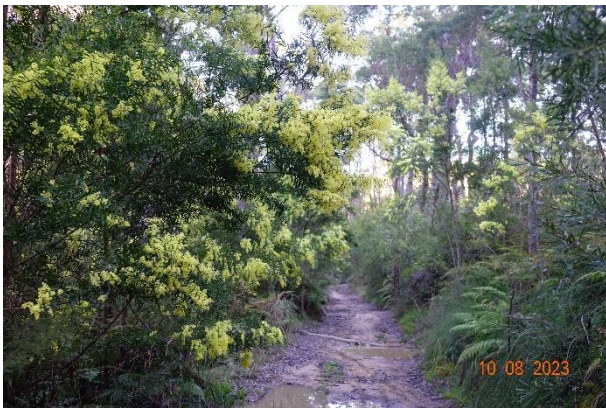
14 Oct Still firming up details. It may be **Lloyd** discussing what we should be growing in this weather.

11 Nov **AGM** Come along to support our group's future. After the AGM, Helen will be gives us tips on **festive decorating** with native flowers.

9 Dec **Christmas Social**. Enjoy the BBQ and bring a plate to Illawong Fire Station for our usual end of year function. More details to follow.

Acacia prominens - local or not?

For about a kilometre along a Menai Creek there is a quite stunning wattle in flower, which I have identified as *Acacia prominens*, commonly known as the Gosford wattle. This is mainly in the Hunter Valley-Gosford area but is found in other places. There is a disjunct population in the Hurstville-Kogarah area which has been declared an endangered community.



The creek where I found it has no official name but is known as LH1 because it drains the original Lucas Heights tip site that is now sporting fields and a golf course. While it is not relevant, I used to be involved with the microinvertebrate testing of this creek and it received remarkably good results, A-usually.

As far as I know this is an isolated population so is it endemic or was it introduced? This is important because if it is introduced it can be considered a weed and of no value. But if it is considered endemic it would become a new Sutherland Shire species at the very least.



And if was considered an extension of the endangered Hurstville population then vegetation along this creek could become classified as endangered itself and steps would need to be taken to ensure its survival. The argument for its being an extension of the Hurstville population is that it is only about six kilometres from Oatley Park, where it has been identified, to this creek. Not far as the powerful owl flies. An argument for it being introduced is the fact that a track was bulldozed along the creek line, probably in the 1970s, when the sewerage was put in, and earth moving equipment is notorious for moving seed around the country.



Distinctive gland on leaf identifies *Acacia prominens*, L Hedges.

Which is it? I will leave that for someone else to decide.

Lloyd Hedges

Seed bombs

A seed bomb is a ball, somewhere between a marble and a golf ball in size, made up of compost, clay and seeds. Some recipes include some crushed fertiliser. The compost provides nutrients for the seeds and holds water and the clay binds the seed bomb. The benefit of bombs is that it protects seeds from heat and mechanical damage and stops their being blown away by the wind or carried away by hungry animals. Seed bombs are useful therefore in mass regeneration planting but also in your garden.



To make a batch, you mix the compost, clay and seed mixture with just enough water to hold together. The ratio of clay to compost preferred varies; Gardening Australia suggests 4 parts clay to 1 of fine compost down to equal parts, plus a sprinkle of crushed fertiliser. I used Bentonite clay from a bulk food shop because, while it is listed as stocked by Bunnings, no store seemed to have any. Potter's ball clay is another possibility. Another recipe I saw suggested $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of seeds mixed with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup fine seed raising mix and 2 cups of powdered clay from a pottery supplier or air-drying modelling clay (this seemed implausible to me) or clay from the garden which was dried, ground, and free of weed seeds. To this they gradually added $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water.

Whichever recipe you use, mix with water till you can form it into balls but don't make it so wet that the seeds will germinate straight away. Don't push the mixture together too firmly into balls either, because you want them to crack apart when they are eventually sown. Once you form the balls, dry them on a rack or cardboard for a day or two in a cool place. You can store them for up to six months as long as they remain dry. They are fun to make and provide the thrill of waiting for germination; a great project to share with the kids or grandkids. They would make lovely Christmas presents too!

Seeds remain dormant till their environmental needs are met – the correct water, temperature, and for some, like paper daisies, some sunlight. Place

the seed bombs on the surface in a suitable place in your garden and water or wait for the rain. Keep them moist once germination begins and remember that as the bomb breaks down, seeds may continue to germinate. You can put a mixture of seeds into one bomb as long as they require similar conditions. Seed bombs are a relatively hands-off and uncontrolled method of sowing, so it's best to use seeds that are naturally easy germinators. Avoid seeds that are so large that they can be damaged while rolling the clay balls. Possibilities include native wildflowers such as everlasting daisies or brachyscome, as well as foreigners like a meadow mix of cosmos, zinnia, alyssum, linaria, California poppies and nigella or the edible options of leafy herbs and salad greens; basil, dill, rocket, mustard and radish, or you can just use seed bombs as a great way to sow a mix of leftover seeds that would otherwise be left languishing in their packets.



Seed bombs are an ancient idea from Japan where they are called Tsuchi Dango, or 'Earth Dumpling', but they were reintroduced in 1938 by the Japanese microbiologist/ farmer and philosopher Masanobu, as part of his quest for sustainable agriculture. He has inspired their use around the world to regenerate overdeveloped environments including in [Arnisia, Greece](#) where, in 1998, hundreds of locals, launched tons of seed bombs over 10,000 hectares of desolate land damaged by human activity. For more information, see [Gardening Australia](#) (or its great [video](#)) or more US oriented information in Josie Jeffery's coverage online [here](#) or [Utopia guide to seed bombs](#). You can also buy them ready made from some botanic gardens and markets or online. Why not give it a go for filling some empty spaces in your garden.

P Forbes

Keep in contact

As well as keeping up to date with MWG activities at [our Facebook page](#), you can now interact with MWG via Instagram. Thanks very much to Cameron who has organised this.

Editor

Report from Lucas Heights committee

The new Cleanaway management is now in place and regular meetings are scheduled. The committee will inspect the tip, including the creek area, before Christmas.

The area west of the car dumping has been filled and levelled in preparation for the clay capping along with soil back fill before final top soil is spread. The preparations for the surface landscaping are being made within the 2035 and 2040 completion dates.

Green waste is still transported back to their western handling centre. Local complaints have been reduced with help from dry weather.

Doug Patterson

Pam's timber vases

Hand crafted wooden specimen vase suitable for single specimen or small posy are being made by East Hills Men's Shed to raise funds. They cost \$25 each, and are available in light or dark woods.



More information is available from Pam Pitkeathly, phone 0414 646 569.

Pam Pitkeathly

News from the nurseries

We are still tubing up Allocasuarina for the Glossy Black Cockatoos (that project may be ending) as well as a range of plants for the revegetation projects run by Probus. This second project, and our own members Adrian and Janine, were recently featured on Simon Marney's weekend radio program on ABC Sydney.



Adrian looking very proud of a prickly wattle for the Southern Highlands planting project. Happy frog helping in greenhouse, P Forbes.

We are finally getting some success with Pink Flannel Flowers as well as the usual White Flannel Flowers. The greenhouses are full of happy looking plants, enjoying the spring weather. The frogs are pretty happy too!

Lloyd sold over \$1000 at the Grevillea Park open days. Although we did not have many Pink Flannel Flowers this year, we still had a nice range of plants, thanks to the cuttings grown by the Tuesday Fire Station crew.

The nursery has secured lots of orders for plants to go to interesting revegetation programs including a big new order from Greater Sydney Landcare (thanks Adrian). We have started trialling the supplied seeds to check their viability before ramping up production for next year's plantings, Lloyd is upskilling existing helpers as well as introducing newcomers to the propagating processes and procedures. If you are interested in trying out propagation, this is a great time to join the Tip nursery team. Contact Lloyd for more information.



Lloyd checking seed, P Forbes.

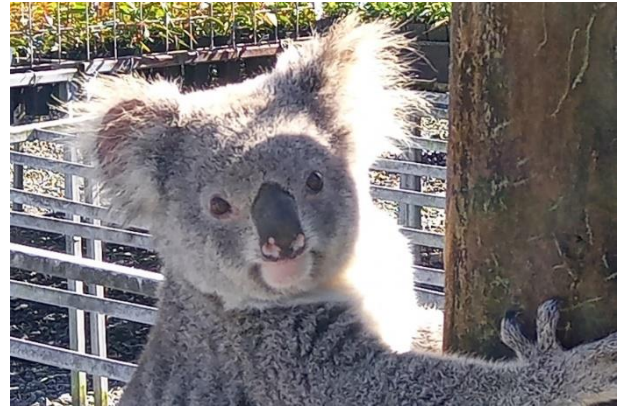
This year we will have again produced thousands of plants which deserves a very big “well done” for the nursery teams. They are all looking forward to a well-deserved Christmas party before the summer break.



Philotheca, RNP, P Forbes.

Leaf thief

Stay on the lookout for this koala!



Our propagation team is growing trees for various regen projects but are we in danger of Claude the leaf thief? Who knows when and where Claude may strike again?

Full details at -

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-09-05/koala-eats-nursery-seedlings-intended-for-wildlife-corridor/102814920>

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