



**RHHFFPS**

# Wallumetta

Newsletter of the Ryde-Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna  
Preservation Society Inc.

Website: <http://rydehffps.org.au/>

Member of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC)  
and founding member of the Powerful Owl Coalition

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**2024**

*We acknowledge the Wallumedegal, original inhabitants of the Ryde – Hunters Hill area.*

## **PRESIDENT'S NOTE -**

In his book 'The Earth Transformed' Peter Frankopan describes how the geography and climate of the Earth has been transformed from 4,500 million years ago to the present times. Peter explains that up to the recent Ice Age which ended 11,500 years ago the geography and climate was changed dramatically because of major events such as massive volcanic eruptions, meteor strikes and extreme solar activity.

For the period from the last Ice Age the earth has experienced a 'Goldilocks' era where the temperature on the planet was not too hot and not too cold, just like the porridge in the Goldilocks and Three Bears children's story. During this period agriculture and human settlement has flourished owing to the suitable conditions.

Massive volcano eruptions and meteor strikes as occurred in prehistoric times could still occur and cause the end of the current Goldilocks period. Peter points out that when Lord Byron, Percy Shelley and Mary Shelley were holidaying at Lake Geneva in Switzerland in 1816 and where Shelley wrote the Frankenstein novel, the sky was darkened by particles from a massive volcanic eruption in Indonesia on 5 April 1815. The impacts were felt around the world such that 1816 became known as the year without summer. This had a drastic impact on agriculture and human survival but eventually the sky cleared.

Peter looks at the rise and fall of civilisations across all continents since the evolution of agriculture and large human settlements that the Goldilocks period has allowed. The evidence is that human exploitation of the soils and water during this period has been associated with environmental disasters and the collapse of civilisations.

Since the Industrial Revolution the success of new technologies in agriculture, industry and science more widely has led to the rise of prosperous societies and an increase in the human population from 795 million at that time to over 8,100 million today.

Unlike the period before the last Ice Age the planet's geography and climate is now being changed by human activity. What can we do about this? Influencing decision makers at every level to recognise, take into account and address the causes of the impact on our natural environment is essential. Local Government elections are on Saturday 14 September this year and the Society is organising an election forum where members, supporters and the local community can query local candidates and urge action. It will be held at the Field of Mars Environmental Education Centre on Saturday 31 August, starting at 2pm.

*Frank Breen, President*

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## COMING EVENTS:

### BIRD WALKS – Sunday 25 August, departing from the Visitor Centre at 8.30am & 10.30am.

Our resident expert Cathy Goswell will lead these walks, which are always popular. Prior booking is essential – email [alfred.vincent@bigpond.com](mailto:alfred.vincent@bigpond.com) or phone Alfred on 98796067. For safety reasons and to provide the best experience we limit numbers attending these walks. Please wear appropriate clothing with good walking shoes and, if you have them, a good pair of binoculars.

### VISIT BY JEROME LAXALE, MP FOR BENNELONG – rescheduled!...

Thanks and apologies to members who came for the previously scheduled visit, which was postponed at short notice when Jerome fell ill. His visit will now be **Saturday 31 August, 10am at the Visitor Centre**. Morning tea will be available.



### PRE-ELECTION FORUM – Saturday 31 August, 2pm in the Environmental Education Centre

With local government (Council) elections being held on Saturday 14 September, we plan to hold one of our traditional forums for candidates to expound their ambitions to achieve and support positive environmental outcomes.

### MUSIC ON MARS – Sunday 22 September, 2pm

Members will receive early notification with further details.

## PAST EVENTS:

### RYDE DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY (RDHS) MEETING – 10am Saturday 8 June 2024

#### “History of the Field of Mars Reserve” – talk by Kelvin Ward, early Secretary of RHHFFPS

Our Society hosted the RDHS monthly meeting in the Field of Mars Environmental Education Centre. Kelvin and his wife Julie are still Society members, and they travelled from the Central Coast for this occasion. Kelvin spoke about early moves to start our Society in 1965, and the campaign in 1966 to save the Field of Mars bushland from becoming a major garbage tip. The meeting was well attended by RDHS members, and it was good to see some RHHFFPS members also present. A transcript of the talk is available to read at the Visitor Centre.

### WILDFLOWER WALKS – Sunday 21 July, departing from the Visitor Centre 10am & 2pm.



Morning group on their way  
Photo by Lindsay Mar

Wildflowers in the Reserve were disappointing after our particularly wet winter. And we had high winds on the day before our walks! Nevertheless, we were treated to some interesting plants, with a highlight being a colourful eggs-and-bacon bush (*Dillwynia retorta*) on the Sand Track just past Cemetery Creek 2. Among the variety of plants we saw flowering were a mountain devil (*Lambertia formosa*), wattles (*Acacia spp.*), snow heath (*Woolfsia pungens*), grevilleas (*Grevillea buxifolia* and *G. sericea*), dwarf flannel flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*), rice flowers (*Pimelea linifolia*), *Hakea sericea*, and *Boronia ledifolia*.



Eggs-and-bacon in the afternoon

## NEWS FROM THE FIELD OF MARS

### Track Works

As previously noted, this work will not apply to any bush tracks. Instead, it is restricted to improved access for wheelchairs in the areas from Pittwater Road to the Visitor Centre, and parts of the Boardwalk. It has been suggested that the "Nature Trail Project" sign erected near the bridge should instead be "Concrete Path Project"! We anticipated works would begin in July, but so far they have not yet started.

### Wildlife

Dry weather in the first decade of this century was not good for wet sclerophyll forest and riparian vegetation. Plants and trees were dying, to be replaced by dry forest species. Now, wet conditions over the past ten years have resulted in the death of dry forest species which cannot cope with having roots in permanently wet soil. In the upper areas, conditions were exacerbated by cemetery works creating drainage changes. Ultimately, trees fall. Tracks are damaged with muddy conditions and washaways, resulting in walkers sidestepping so adjacent plants are trampled.

But the news is not all bad. Following the winter solstice, warmer weather has returned and there have been more animals out and about. Along the Sand Track, walkers enjoy the colourful sight of spring wildflowers, and along the creek, the Little Pied Cormorant seems to be well fed:

Roast seems to have moved away, and a new young male brush turkey has been roaming around the Visitor Centre; a suggestion was made that we name him "Shoo"!

### Bushcare

Work at volunteer sites has been affected by the wet weather, but cancellations have been less frequent recently. There is plenty to do, and we have been focusing on areas where conditions for work are more favourable.

### Visitor Centre

It is a happy experience for our volunteers whenever we welcome newcomers to the Reserve. Unfavourable weather has seen a decrease in the overall numbers of visitors, but there have been several bushwalking groups coming through. Our maps and track notes remain popular, especially with visitors reconnoitering to plan future walks.

We recently changed arrangements for visitors to register for our event notifications. These are sent by email but, despite the request to print clearly in the book, several members of the public do not, and our best efforts often fail when we enter their email addresses into our mailing list. So now we ask visitors to take a slip of paper with our Society's email address on it, for them to send us an email. This way we can be assured that we will receive their correct email address.

**JOIN OUR VISITOR CENTRE TEAM!** to keep the Visitor Centre open 9am-5pm on weekends and public holidays. Our roster of 4-hour shifts is negotiated according to members' availability. No specialised skills are required, and Alfred happily provides the training needed. Most visitors' questions are answered in the maps and range of free leaflets we have available.



*Little pied cormorant near Buffalo Creek  
– photo by Linda Veloskey*



## SPANISH MOSS: DESCRIBED COMMERCIALY AS A WONDER OF NATURE BUT ...

Article and photos by courtesy of Lyn Langtry

Described commercially as a wonder of nature that grows on air, Spanish Moss, also known as Old Man's Beard or Whiskers (*Tillandsia usneoides*), is a threat to vegetation on which it is placed. It is an epiphyte that just hangs out, literally, on a tree or shrub gathering nutrients from the air, moisture, dust and debris around it.

If you live in East Ryde, on one side of the Field of Mars Reserve (FoM), or in Gladesville, on the other, you will have noticed a proliferation of the plant on privately owned vegetation and on Council's street trees. You may have seen it in other areas of the City of Ryde. It is now three years since the Society first expressed its concerns to Ryde City Council and in that time the plant has been carried by wind and birds around the area and even into the FoM. Society members have removed it where low enough to be physically possible in the FoM.

While not parasitic the plant has the potential to smother its host. The photos show how much. Unfortunately, it is not a declared noxious weed so taking action is not required by Council. However, it is apparent that more pieces of it are being plucked off trees and shrubs to be left on the nature strip or hung 'attractively' on privately owned trees. It continues to spread on street trees and on those in the Heatly Reserve in Sager Place. Birds like it for lining their nests and people believe it to be harmless and attractive. This combination contributed to the spread in residential streets and bushland areas.



The Society's latest request to Council in March 2024 asked for an education campaign to be commenced in the most affected areas to inform ratepayers and residents. I reinforced this request, as the Society's representative for natural (termed 'landscape' in the NSW Heritage Act) heritage on the Ryde Council Heritage Working Group when it met for the first time this year on 12 June 2024. To date no response has been forthcoming.

**By contrast...** Hunter's Hill Council has commenced a program to remove Spanish Moss from affected trees in reserves, park and street trees. So far this has dealt with half the recorded trees and Council will monitor them for re-infestation. The next round of treatment is delayed while further funds are sought and until more is understood about the regrowth and spreading potential of the plant. Meanwhile, Council is looking at designing a flyer outlining why it's a problem and this can be distributed to areas where it has been reported and/or recently removed.

### City of Ryde residents are urged to support our efforts:

- Write to Council;
- Ask councillors why there has been no response to the issue following the Heritage Working Group meeting;
- When candidates ask for your vote at the September elections, ask them what they propose to do about this issue and other environmental concerns.



## THINGS WE CAN DO AS INDIVIDUALS...

### 1. WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Mike Pulsford, from PARENTS FOR CLIMATE, suggests Letters to the editor of newspapers are a great way to make more people think and talk about issues. And sharing our experiences and concerns can encourage editors to cover these issues more. Councillors, along with state and federal politicians, also take notice of letters in newspapers. Here are some tips...

- **Keep it short.** Don't go over 200 words. Some great letters are just 20-50 words.
- **Be constructive.** Aim to get the audience on side. Funny or clever letters are more likely to be published and stick in people's minds.
- **Make just one or two key points.** People read fast, so use short sentences. Avoid jargon and acronyms. Ensure your letter makes sense to people who don't know much about it.
- **Make it timely.** Refer to articles or letters published yesterday or the day before.
- **Be relevant to the readers.** Refer to local stories to illustrate why your point matters.
- **Include a call to action.** Ask readers to do something, such as asking for local MPs' action.
- **Try to get your letter in before noon** for daily newspapers; it's more likely to get printed.
- **Include your full name, address and a daytime phone number** with your letter. Papers do not print all of this information but may use it for verification.

It's often competitive but even if you don't get published, it is valuable for the editor to hear what people in their community are concerned about. We recommend sending to our local media:

TWT - <https://www.weeklytimes.com.au/letters/>

The Village Observer: email [editor@thevillageobserver.com.au](mailto:editor@thevillageobserver.com.au) – the monthly news magazine in Lane Cove circulates through the Ryde area. It does not have a letters page, but you may submit an article. And you could contribute to their feature, "100 Words".

There's less competition in local print media than in the big national newspapers.

### 2. MAKE HABITAT GARDENING FEEL SIMPLE

*Advice from Dr Holly Parsons - Birdlife Australia*

#### Build on what you already have

You don't need to completely start from scratch to provide wildlife habitat - add to your garden before you take away. It's worth remembering that sometimes non-native plants, especially established trees, are an important component in your backyard. Keep an eye on things and see what gets used. If you do keep some non-native plants, ensure they are not environmental weeds in your area.

#### Create layers in your garden

Simplified habitat structure (like lawn with a few trees) doesn't provide the variety of food and shelter that small birds in particular need. Simplified habitats can also attract more aggressive species. Layers of ground covers, grasses, and shrubs of varying sizes provide lots of different foods and shelter sites for small birds. Choose shrubs that are local to your area, and plants that flower at different seasons.





## Go locally native if you can

If you choose locally native, or indigenous, plants for your garden will provide the best food and shelter for the birds that occur in your area. Local plants are more tolerant to your climate so they take less effort to look after. Get some at **The Habitat** at 251 Quarry Rd Ryde (in Santa Rosa Park) - open Wednesdays and Saturdays, 10am-3pm.

## Leave rocks, branches and leaf litter

These attract reptiles and creepy crawlies to your yard - things that many of our birds like to eat. Rocks and fallen branches provide great shelter; decaying logs and leaf litter are shelter and food.

## The best ways to get bang for your buck:

Landscaping doesn't need to be expensive. Save money as you establish a bird-friendly garden...

### Start small

Plant densely in a small patch of your garden rather than spreading a few plants over a large area.

### Tubestock

They may look small, but tubestock are considerably cheaper than larger plants, and will grow quickly and often establish better quality root systems than larger and more expensive plants.

### Go local

Plants that are locally native to your area will be more likely to thrive in your area, and so require less attention, fertilizers and chemicals - all saving you costs. These are available at The Habitat.

### Get it right the first time

Do your research before you buy – know the characteristics of your garden and find out about the types of plants suitable to the climate and soil you have. Volunteers at The Habitat can advise.

### Propagating Plants

Raising cuttings and seeds is free (and addictive). Native succulents are the easiest for beginners, then move on to cuttings from any local natives that are thriving in your garden (or your neighbours, with permission). If growing from seed, be aware that natives have a variety of germinating conditions; some need heat or smoked water, while others may be sown directly.

### Up-Cycle

Your garden can make wonderful use of scraps lying around your house and yard – an old plant saucer could be an instant bird bath; old timber can be used to make garden beds.

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## WHAT'S IN A NAME: MAGPIES AND THEIR RELATIVES

*(We thank Alfred Vincent for his research and contribution of these "What's in a Name" articles.)*

### When is a magpie not a magpie?

Answer (sort of): when it's Australian. European settlers named this bird after the magpie they remembered from home, a vaguely similar bird which is not found in Australia. However, the Australian magpie is not closely related to its Eurasian namesake.

Other names given by settlers to the Australian magpie, such as "piping shrike", "flute-bird" and "organ-bird", show how they were impressed by its song. The term "bell-magpie", still found in dictionaries, was intended to distinguish it from the European bird, but is practically obsolete; confusingly, it was also applied to the currawong.



In indigenous languages the Australian magpie has various names, such as *wilbung* in Dharug, the Sydney language, and *kurraka* in the Kurna language of South Australia – where it is the state emblem. Its scientific name is *Gymnorhina tibicen*, “barenosed piper”. Together with the currawongs and butcherbirds, it was (and sometimes still is) considered to form a separate family, the Cractidae. More recently it has been placed in the Artamidae family.

### Feathered thief?

The Eurasian magpie, with its longish tail and metallic sheen on its back, belongs to the crow family, the Corvidae. The ancient Romans knew it as *pica*; this term was adopted for the genus and for its characteristic species; hence the scientific name *Pica pica*.

Latin *pica* became *pie* in Medieval French. Adopted into English, this underwent the usual pronunciation changes of English words over the centuries. Because of the bird’s colouring English-speakers came to use the word “pied”, for “black and white”, as in “pied currawong”, “pied butcherbird”.

The “mag” in “magpie” is short for Maggie, i.e. Margaret. “Magpie” is one of many English bird or animal names that incorporate a human forename, like “jackdaw”, another European member of the crow family.

European magpies have a reputation for stealing bright objects such as jewels. Rossini built a whole opera, *The Thieving Magpie*, on the theme. However, despite anecdotal evidence, an experiment in 2014 failed to confirm this common belief.



Photo by Friends of Lane Cove National Park

### Afternoon-tea bird?

The pied currawong, *Strepera graculina*, is sometimes confused with the Australian magpie. It is mainly black, with white colour on some wing feathers, under its tail and on the tips of its tail-feathers.

Before fixing on “currawong”, Europeans gave it various names, including “pied crow-shrike” and, mysteriously, “afternoon-tea bird”. “Currawong” was probably borrowed from an indigenous language. Early settlers around Sydney heard the name as *gurawarung*. Similar forms were heard among the Illawarra’s Tharawal people, while around Brisbane it was *garrawang*. All are cases of onomatopoeia, imitation of the bird’s call.

The scientific genus name, *Strepera*, means “noisy”, while the species name, *graculina*, is said to have been derived from Latin *graculus*, “jackdaw”, which the currawong was thought to resemble. Other members of *Strepera* are the black currawong, *S. fuliginosa*, and the grey, *S. versicolor*, which actually, as its scientific name suggests, occurs in various colours, including brown.

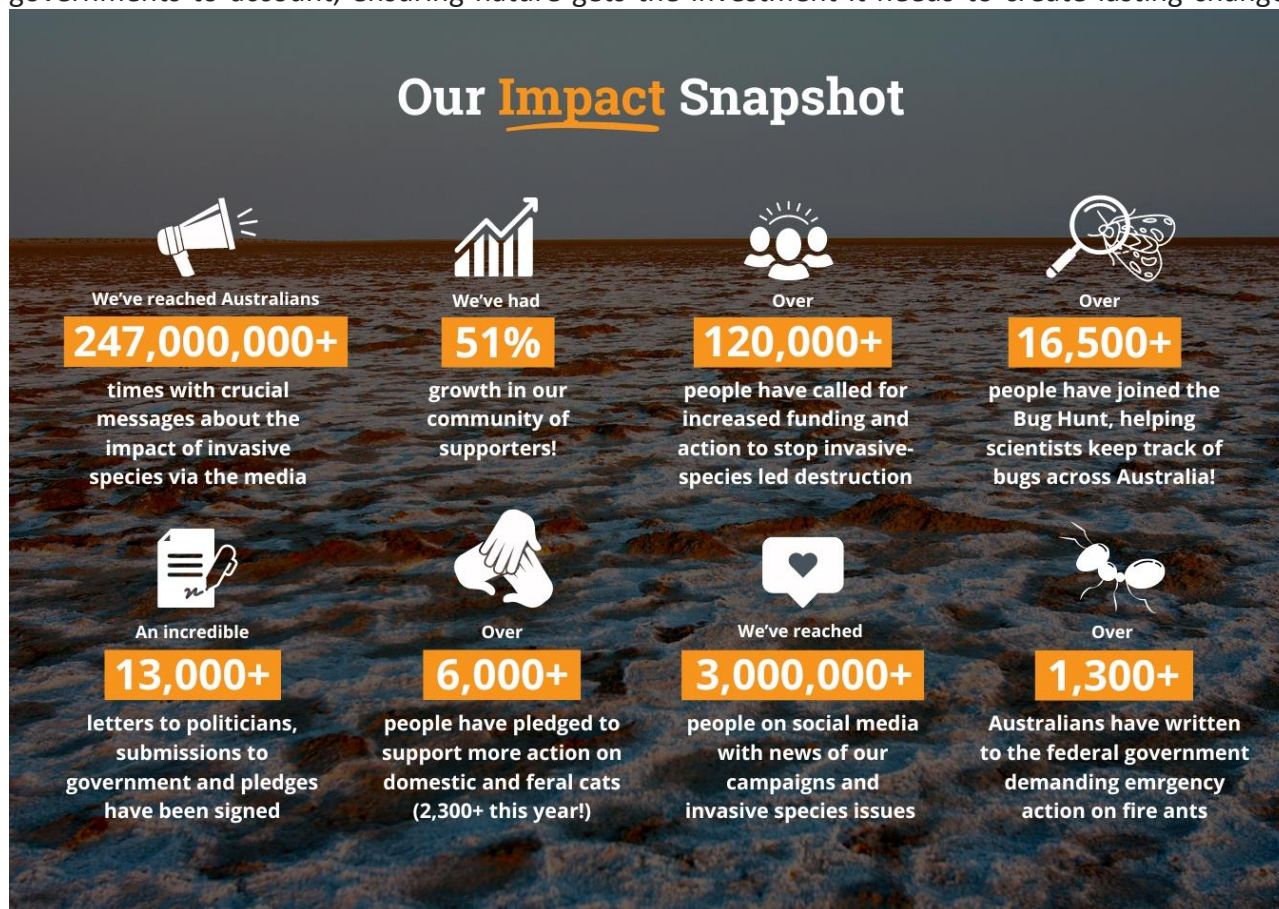
### The singing butcher

Butcherbirds owe their name to their habit of conserving their prey (small lizards, fledglings, etc.), if they don’t want to eat it at once, by hooking it on to a thorn or twig, like carcasses in an old-fashioned butcher’s store. They form the genus named *Cracticus*, “talkative”, which hardly conveys the beauty of their song. The grey butcherbird, found in the Field of Mars Reserve, is *Cracticus torquatus*, because of its semicircular white band, like a torque or torc, a neck-ring.

Another member of the genus is the pied butcherbird, seen regularly on the Central Coast and further north. Its species name is *nigrogularis*, “black-throated”. Its beautiful and creative song has been studied by musicologists and has inspired numerous musical works. Dr Hollis Taylor, formerly of Macquarie University, has published widely on the topic. See: <https://www.hollistaylor.com/>

## INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL – NEWS FROM ANDREW COX, CEO:

Whether stopping feral horses and deer from destroying our protected areas, galvanising action to prevent cats and fire ants from killing wildlife, or making senate inquiries really count for nature – lots of supporters are having a real-world impact for Australia's wildlife. Together we are holding governments to account, ensuring nature gets the investment it needs to create lasting change.



### Notable Wins for nature:

- **\$593 million in funding to combat fire ants**
- **Successfully eradicated yellow crazy ants** from two sites in Cairns, totalling 48 hectares.
- **Significant progress to protect the Alps** with effective measures like aerial shooting
- **Feral deer control plans** now underway in various regions including Tasmania's Wilderness World Heritage Area.

**BUT...**

### NEWS FROM THE NATURE CONSERVATION COUNCIL (NCC)

**The NSW budget** document was released on 18 June. It sets out the priorities, aspirations and ambitions of the NSW Government.

**The news for nature is dire.** For the second year in a row, spending on the environment is down, with just 1.61% of the budget allocated to the environment.

Premier Chris Minns loves talking about how special nature in NSW is. But when it comes to delivering on his election promise of turning the tide for nature, they are manifestly failing.

It simply isn't good enough for a government to respond to an extinction crisis this way. 1043 plants and animals in NSW are currently listed as at risk of extinction, a 50% increase in 10 years. Our state can only support 29% of the plants, animals and biodiversity it did before colonisation.

**Without significant public investment to grow protected areas, restore degraded ecosystems and support endangered species, many places that make this state so special will cease to exist.**



## ENVIRONMENT LAWS AND THE FEDERAL EPA – NEWS FROM THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

Recent changes to Australia's nature laws passed through the lower house of parliament, including a bill that establishes a federal environmental protection agency (EPA).

An EPA is desperately needed, but the version the government is trying to push through parliament is simply not up to the job of protecting nature. Its plans would let those who profit from environmental destruction control who is consulted when development projects are proposed. **So, the bill fails to uphold the public's right to a fair say in environmental decisions.**

To make matters worse, the plans would establish an EPA that can only **enforce the current, broken national nature laws with loopholes that allow rampant deforestation.**

The Senate is the last chance for rescuing and strengthening the government's proposed changes.

We need to show the government that Australians want laws that actually:

- Stop deforestation
- End the extinction crisis and
- Provide a fair say for communities, not just corporations

Aiming to rescuing the proposed new laws, independent federal MPs introduced amendments that would have empowered the EPA to stop deforestation and ensure the community is properly consulted. But the government refused to vote for any of the proposed amendments.

The Senate resumes sitting in August.



## THE NUCLEAR DISTRACTION – comments from The Australia Institute



the Coalition's nuclear power strategy, an uncosted 'plan' offers very little detail and commits Australia to the most expensive form of new energy - eschewing cheap and abundant renewables.

**The Coalition's nuclear announcement is not about nuclear. It's not even about energy.**

It's a deliberate political strategy designed to create chaos and uncertainty ahead of an election. This distraction means our major political parties are fighting about renewables versus nuclear; **meanwhile, no one is talking about the bipartisan support for the gas and coal industry.**

## \$14.5 billion tax-payer funding for the fossil fuel industry

In 2023-24, Australian governments subsidised the fossil fuel industry to the tune of **\$14.5 billion**. And while media attention has been on the nuclear 'debate', the NT government has given the go ahead to the Tamboran fracking project without a full environmental management plan, and the Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek has just approved a new gas pipeline in Queensland.

**Gas prices have tripled** since Australia started exporting liquified natural gas (LNG). At the same time, six of our 10 facilities that export LNG paid no royalties on the gas.

All of this ensures that the planet keeps heating, perpetuating what our Writer-in-Residence for 2024, Dr Joëlle Gergis, calls an "intergeneration crime against humanity".

## VALE EDIE ROSENBERG

Late in June we had the sad news that Edie Rosenberg died. Edie was a Society member over the past 40 years. She was active in bushcare, as one of the members of what became known as the "Roving Bushcare Group", long before Ryde Council began its bushcare programmes (which were inspired by this group, and originally financed with a grant obtained by our Society).

Edie left a positive and lasting legacy through her dedication and hard work over many years, to preserve natural environments in the Field of Mars Reserve and other local bushland areas. Her funeral was held in Crookwell NSW, and some of us who knew her well recently gathered for morning tea at the Visitor Centre to share our memories of Edie.

**Do you know** anyone who may be interested in the activities of our Society? Or someone who has skills that may be helpful in taking on roles in our special events? Invite them to join us!

### NEW MEMBERS ALWAYS WELCOME:

Please pay membership fee by direct transfer to our Bendigo Bank account: RYDE HUNTERS HILL FLORA AND FAUNA PRESERVATION SOCIETY INC, BSB 633-000, Account number 190716589.

Include your name in the transaction description; and email your name, address and phone number to [rhffps@gmail.com](mailto:rhffps@gmail.com)

Or you may pay by cash: Complete and hand in this form with payment in a sealed envelope at the Field of Mars Visitor Centre, or post to:

RHHFFPS, PO Box 552, Gladesville 1675.

NAME:

Address:

Phone:

Annual Membership (add \$10 for newsletter to be sent via Australia Post):

\$

Individual \$ 15 ( + \$ 10 )

Family \$ 35 ( + \$ 10 )

Concession \$ 10 ( + \$ 10 )

(Students/Pensioners) Donation

**Total Payment:**

**Email address to receive your newsletter – please print clearly:**

### YARNKNIT RUG RAFFLE PRIZE

Donated once again by Holy Spirit Yarn Group, you could be the lucky winner when the raffle is drawn at the AGM in early 2025. The handmade article is suitable for both winter and summer use. Keep it yourself, give it to a family member or friend or donate to a worthy organisation. Funds raised support the Society and the organisations we support.

You may buy tickets at the Visitors Centre or online by transfer to our Bendigo Bank account: RYDE HUNTERS HILL FLORA AND FAUNA PRESERVATION SOCIETY INC, BSB 633-000, Account number 190716589. Include your name and "raffle" in the transaction description, and email contact details to [rhffps@gmail.com](mailto:rhffps@gmail.com)

One ticket for \$2, Three tickets for \$5



### RHHFFPS

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**Website:** <http://rydehffps.org.au/> + **LIKE US ON FACEBOOK:**

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