RHHFFPS

Wallumetta

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

Website: https://rydehhffps.org.au/

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

AUGUST 2026

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

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PRESIDENT'S NOTE

Members may be aware that the proposal for the extension of the Woodside Browse Gas Project in North West Australia has been reopened for public comment. The project is to create 50 new gas wells off Broome in the Browse Basin, the home of the Scott Reef.

The Scott Reef is Australia's most diverse coral reef system and the third largest coral reef in Australia and is under threat. There remain serious concerns about damage to rock art in the Murujuga National Park region nearby.

The project was approved in 2019 (EPBC No. 2018/8319) and Woodside later sought a variation to extend the life of the project to 2070. This was approved by the Minister on 12 September 2025 subject to environmental and heritage conditions.

Subsequent to this decision an independent expert reported on 'End-to-End Attribution of the Browse to North West Shelf Project and Impacts on Coral Loss in the Great Barrier Reef'.

On 18 February 2026 the Environmental Justice Australia on behalf of the Australian Conservation Foundation requested the Minister to reconsider the project due to this substantial new scientific evidence linking the project's emissions to catastrophic coral devastation on the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Listed site.

The Minister officially accepted the request and opened the project to public comment.

Under the EPBC Act, an environmental assessment must consider both the direct and indirect impacts of an action. The downstream emissions generated by transporting and burning the gas extracted from the Browse basin constitute a significant indirect impact of the project. It is no longer scientifically or legally tenable to assess the local impacts of an offshore facility while ignoring the catastrophic global and local damage caused by the project's total lifecycle emissions.

The new scientific evidence demonstrates the link between the burning of the gas by overseas buyers and the impact on the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area. Scott Reef is listed as a State Heritage Area and Australian Heritage Area but the impact on the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area is the key consideration.

Submissions closed on 21 July 26 and the Society will be monitoring the decision by the Minister.

Frank Breen, President

PAST EVENTS:

"WHERE HAVE ALL THE TREES GONE?"

Professor Peter Davies gave a well-researched talk about the relationships between suburban development and the need for green spaces and tree canopy. There were some clever insights for maximizing the benefits of nature as the suburbs are more densely developed.

WILDFLOWER WALKS

The usual great displays of wildflowers in the Reserve did not appear this year; however, some flowers did start to appear later in July. Our guided walks were postponed owing to illness but, at the time of writing, they are rescheduled to be held on the first Saturday in August. Members, and all who originally registered, were notified.

COMING EVENTS:

MUSIC ON MARS – Sunday 20 September, 2pm

Some interestingly different performances are planned for this popular event, not to be missed!

SPIDERS: a talk/presentation by HELEN SMITH – Sunday 25 October

END-OF-YEAR CELEBRATION – Sunday 8 November

As our 60th anniversary year draws to a close and we celebrate the work of our members, we will hold another open day with displays by City of Ryde Bushcare, The Habitat, Field of Mars Environmental Education Centre and, of course, our own Society. Included in the planning are family activities and our traditional barbecue lunch. Final details, including how to RSVP for lunch, will be published in October.

BIRD WALKS led by Cathy Goswell – Sunday 29 November - departures 8.30am and 10.30am

NEWS FROM THE FIELD OF MARS

Bushcare

The Rod Wallace Garden adjacent to the Visitor Centre was tidied and amalgamated into the Kennedy Street bushcare site by relocating some logs and using leftover mulch to link across to the water garden area (where we planted the "Edie Tree"). We appreciate the work of the Roving Bushcare volunteers who managed this transformation, supported by City of Ryde Council.

Wildlife in the Field of Mars Reserve

An article published in the NRMA magazine, the "Open Road", listed the Field of Mars Reserve as one of the top five places around Sydney for bird watching. This is probably why we saw lots of walkers with binoculars during the June long weekend. And they were not disappointed. Those who called in to the Visitor Centre reported they saw up to 19 different bird species.

Meanwhile, we a grateful that Esther, a new member and regular bushwalker, drew our attention to an intriguing

growth on one of the large Casuarina trees near the Visitor Centre veranda. It has been identified as Sheoak mistletoe (*Amyema cambagei*), a species reported to be good food for birds, mammals and insects, and responsible for the survival of native butterfly species. This mistletoe takes water and minerals from the host tree, but not sugars – so they normally do not harm the tree.

Visitor Centre

Our 60th anniversary displays inside the centre continue to attract interest and comment, so we are keeping the photos and other items of interest where all may see and enjoy them. Leaflets, maps and all the usual items remain readily available.

Members are encouraged to volunteer to keep the Visitor Centre open on weekends… can YOU?

Our volunteers open the Field of Mars Visitor Centre on weekends and public holidays to welcome visitors to the Reserve and provide maps, information, opportunities to look at birds and other animals outside, and see our displays inside the building. Some visitors simply appreciate a friendly chat.

Our roster is arranged with 4-hour shifts for each volunteer to do once or twice a month, and organised to fit in with your availability. We enjoy spending time in the pleasant environment there. Contact Alfred on 0403749181. We'll help you get started.

Do you know anyone who would be interested in joining our Visitor Centre roster or committee? See page 8 for contact details. **We now offer one year's free membership to new volunteers**.

DATA CENTRE UPDATE

For some time now, we have been expressing concern and made submissions about local data centre developments – see editions of Wallumetta dating back to last October. Widespread public concern is growing in our local area and was featured in national news media in late July. The NSW government is declaring each of these to be "State Significant Development" (SSD), thus overriding local government controls.

Internationally, there are many and various concerns about data centres and the demand for them in conjunction with the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

At a local level, our immediate concern is the development proposals for several centres in Macquarie Park and one in West Lane Cove. Electricity and water supplies are limiting factors, so these centres may inhibit housing and related developments. Some propose that the cooling water will be recycled and sourced from stormwater. Ultimately, this water will be discharged into waterways draining into the Lane Cove River, so there is a danger that its saltmarshes and the surrounding bushland areas will be affected by thermal and other pollution.

GLADESVILLE AND NORTH RYDE DEVELOPMENTS

The Gladesville Village Centre masterplan and development proposal led by Thirdi Group involves a $1 billion mixed-use renewal project featuring two 19-storey residential towers, over 4,500 square metres of public open space, and a new full-line supermarket. With Mayor Zac Miles' casting vote, Hunter's Hill Council narrowly approved the planning proposal for the site between Flagstaff Street, Cowell Street, Massey Street and Victoria Road. According to a report in the TWT newspaper, key development features are:

- **Housing:** Around 500 to 522 studio, 1, 2, and 3-bedroom apartments across high-density towers reaching up to 19 levels (though this could increase up to 23 or more storeys if a late chance adds provision of "affordable housing")
- **Retail & Commercial:** At least 5,000 square metres of non-residential floor space, anchored by a 3,500-square-metre major supermarket alongside speciality shops and dining.
- **Public Open Space:** over 4,500 square metres of (public) open space, but much of it private and only available as 'walk-through',
- **Connectivity:** New landscaped pedestrian links and an 18-metre-wide gateway connecting Victoria Road, Massey Street, and Cowell Street. That's the walkway mentioned above.

Construction is planned to commence this year.

Sydney Anglicans in their website, recently reported plans for redevelopment of Christ Church, Gladesville and St Chad's Putney. Redevelopment of the Christ Church site on the corner of Victoria Road and Jordan Street will involve:

- Retention and update of original Church Building for ministry and preschool
- Construction of new spaces for ministry
- Residential apartments for retirement living and/or social and affordable housing.

A development proposal has been submitted for multi-storey housing at the Christ Church site.

Woolworths submitted a development proposal for a store with a 14 storey mixed use development including 171 dwellings, basement parking and landscaping. It is further west along Victoria Road, at the corner of Westminster Road. Being another State Significant Development (SSD), it is being managed by the NSW Government and beyond City of Ryde Council's control. See https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/woolworths-gladesville-mixed-use-proposal

North Ryde Coxs Road Shopping Mall complex has plans submitted for redevelopment of the site. It involves demolition of existing structures and construction of a 7 and 9 storey mixed-use development comprising basement carparking, ground floor retail space, townhouses and two residential towers accommodating 165 dwellings. Also classified as SSD, the proposal is at early stages and yet to go on public exhibition. See https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/mixed-use-development-203-215-coxs-road-north-ryde

MORE ABOUT OUR HISTORY

In February we celebrated the 60th anniversary of our Society's inauguration. But there are three reasons why September is also a significant month in our history. This overview of our history was published recently by the Ryde District Historical Society in their newsletter, the Ryde Recorder…

Earlier this year, a celebration was held at the Field of Mars Reserve to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society (RHHFFPS). Its official inaugural meeting was held in the hall of St Thomas' Church of England in Orient Street Gladesville, two days after the introduction of decimal currency in Australia.

In those post World War Two times of rebuilding Australia and encouraging financial prosperity, official encouragement was given to urban expansion and development with little concern about the impacts on our natural environments. But residents were becoming concerned about the removal of trees and resumption of natural bushland areas to be subdivided and sold as housing or commercial allotments.

Around what is now the Field of Mars Reserve, Ryde Municipal Council was seeking to put the bushland to various uses. When the Field of Mars Common was broken up by the NSW Government, this land had been granted to Ryde Council for use as its main park. But, because access was poor, Council bought Salter's Paddock at Ryde and developed it instead, to become

Ryde Park. The Field of Mars bushland was officially forgotten until the 1950s when the Buffalo Creek estuary was used as the council garbage tip.

A Long Name

Then there were various proposals for the Field of Mars bushland to be used including a golf course and even a small-bore rifle range. And the Field of Mars Cemetery was expanding into the bushland. So, a few residents met in September 1965 and decided to form the Society, with a mission to preserve the natural bushland along Buffalo Creek and the Field of Mars Park, and other natural areas in the Ryde – Hunters Hill Area… hence the long name of the Society!

Garbage, and a minefield

When Ryde Council was approached with this proposal, they revealed their plans to develop the entire bushland area, including the Buffalo Creek and Strangers Creek valleys, into a long-term garbage tip for the Municipality of Ryde. A campaign ensued and lasted over several months.

During this time, on a Saturday at the start of the school holidays in May 1966, the army turned up and began to set up a practice minefield on the old tip area between Buffalo and Strangers Creeks. Locals were worried that children who come to the park to play may accidentally stumble upon one of the land mines which, according to one officer, “wouldn’t do anything more than blow off an arm or a leg”. A protest crowd gathered and news media were called, so the army discreetly packed up their gear and retreated.

The affair was well publicised on the TV news that night and in the Sunday newspapers next day. And this was all during the days of conscription when young men were being sent as soldiers to battle in the Vietnam War. An embarrassed Ryde Council quietly withdrew its permission for the army to use the area.

Permission to Manage

In September 1966, Council handed responsibility to RHHFFPS to manage the Field of Mars Park and develop it as a wildlife sanctuary. An enthusiastic team of members immediately began holding working bees every weekend to clear weeds, develop walking trails, clear the old tip flats and bring in topsoil and native trees to turn these into pleasant grassy areas. A second-hand Howard Rotavator garden tractor was bought and used to do light bulldozing and mowing. Members visited other wildlife sanctuaries for ideas, and sought advice and guidance from known experts in Australian flora and fauna. Among these was Vincent Serventy, who lived in Hunters Hill and visited the area when filming for his Walkabout TV documentaries. Using these ideas and information gathered, RHHFFPS members drew up an initial development map. It was damaged from long-term storage but was recently rediscovered and is now preserved and on display in the Field of Mars Visitor Centre.

Strange Politics and Council Elections

A difficulty to overcome in those early years was the number of aldermen (now called councillors) who did not live near or care for the local area. In those days, the Liberal Party did not involve itself in local government but some independent aldermen were, in fact, members of the Liberal Party. Meanwhile, some sitting aldermen were representing the Australian Labor Party. At first they seemed to be onside, but in subsequent meetings they voted as a bloc to oppose preservation of the Field of Mars bushland. Luckily, there were enough independent aldermen voting the other way to successfully counter this vote.

In the December 1968 elections, Society member Leighton Boyd joined a team of independent candidates who successfully won election to represent East Ward. Society members and other local residents enthusiastically supported Leighton and two other local independent candidates, Alf Hamill and Olwyn Mackenzie… but there wasn’t a fourth person deemed to be eligible to run on this ticket so voting preferences were given to Bert Braun, who was the Labor Party’s second

candidate. A vigorous election campaign followed, all managed and done with volunteer effort. Support was so strong that all three were elected and the Labor Party's no.2 candidate gained election while their no.1 candidate did not. There must have been some soul-searching afterwards!

In subsequent elections, Leighton Boyd was joined by Society member Leah Warton for two further terms, both being replaced by Rod Wallace for a further two terms. During these years, much was achieved with Council support.

Local Achievements include:

- Declaration of Wildlife Refuge status for the Field of Mars Reserve
- Building and opening of the Field of Mars Visitor Centre (*on 20 September 1972*) – now known as the Rod Wallace Memorial Visitors' Centre
- Maintaining a roster of volunteers to open the Visitor Centre every weekend and on public holidays, to provide maps and other information for visitors to the Reserve
- establishment of the Field of Mars Field Studies Centre announced in September 1986 (now called the Environmental Education Centre), operated by the NSW Department of Education and recognised as the leading Environmental Education Centre in the state
- Establishment of the City of Ryde Bushcare Program, with a grant gained by RHHFFPS.

Achievements beyond the Field of Mars

RHHFFPS supported other organisations and campaigns, resulting in much being done to preserve our natural heritage and more:

- The battle to save Kelly's Bush involved some RHHFFPS members who realised that, if the Field of Mars could be saved, so could Kelly's Bush. This campaign led to the Green Bans of the late 1960s, which resulted in the protection of much of Sydney's heritage at a time when the NSW Askin Government supported developers wishing to knock down old buildings in areas like The Rocks in Sydney.
- Other areas of natural bushland around Ryde were protected. Notable among these is the Twin Road Forest, now known as Wallumetta Nature Reserve and managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.
- "Rockend" (Banjo Paterson's Cottage) preservation initially involved some working bees by RHHFFPS members until, with Alderman Rod Wallace's urging, Ryde Council bought the Halmeg site so the grounds have become parkland and the cottage itself still stands.
- The Habitat community garden and native plant nursery was established and is managed by RHHFFPS members who twice weekly visit local bushland areas and propagate seedings for replanting into bush regeneration areas or sale to the public.
- Reaching further afield, RHHFFPS supports other environmental groups at state, national and international levels. An early example of this was a bus trip organised in the late 1960s to visit a mid-north coast area and our then local member Peter Coleman was invited to accompany interested members, to see the effects of rutile mining along the coast. This contributed to the area being dedicated as Myall Lakes National Park.

It is with a justifiable sense of accomplishment that RHHFFPS celebrated its anniversary. It remains a strong local organisation, with 70+ financial members and ties to related environment groups in Willoughby, Lane Cove and Turramurra… plus over 400 registered "interested in events" contacts.

All are welcome to call in at the Field of Mars Visitor Centre, open in daylight hours on weekends and public holidays, to chat with RHHFFPS volunteers, view the displays and gather leaflets which provide further information about the Field of Mars, the Society, and related topics. On the website https://rydehhffps.org you may access further information and find links to Rod Wallaces's 1987 book, "100 Years of Field of Mars" available in pdf format. Upon request we may also provide a pdf copy of "The History of the Battle to Save Kelly's Bush", published in 1996 by (*now deceased*) RHHFFPS member Margaret Shaw.

DEATH TRAP: EVERYDAY ITEMS CATCHING AND KILLING AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE

Précis of an article by Petra Stock, published in The Guardian, 11 July 2026

Thousands of native animals get caught in back yard fruit nets, fences and fishing line every year: events that frequently result in injury or death. **Entanglements affect hundreds of different species, mostly mammals and birds, including kangaroos, platypus, raptors and gliders.**

Grey-headed flying foxes make up two-thirds of 3,500 annual entanglement cases in NSW. Being tangled in back yard nets and caught on barbed wire in regional areas, they die of exposure, heat, dehydration, blood loss and predation. Raptors come down and eat them from the fences.

Lisa Palma, the chief executive of Wildlife Victoria, says these are some of the more preventable wildlife emergencies. "They are the result of everyday human activity – not deliberate harm – but they can cause devastating injuries and unnecessary suffering to wildlife… simple actions like disposing of rubbish appropriately [and] using wildlife-friendly netting and fencing can reduce the number of native animals injured or killed by entanglement."

Choose wildlife-friendly fruit tree netting

Back yard netting is a popular way of protecting homegrown fruit and vegetables from native animals or pests, and even to prevent damage from sunburn, wind and hail.

But hungry animals are attracted to flowers and fruits, and are easily caught in "large-aperture" nets where the mesh size is greater than 5mm. If you can poke a finger through it, it's not safe.

Nets should be taut, so they can't sink and fold around animals. Safer alternatives have a smaller mesh, and cross-weave design. Wildlife Victoria also encourages the use of fruit tree protection bags, which protect some branches, while leaving others free for wildlife.

White or light-coloured materials are also recommended by most state environment departments, as these are easier for birds and mammals to see and avoid at night. Nets should ideally be taut, so they can't sink and fold around animals, and be checked regularly.

Safely dispose of fishing gear … and hair ties

Aquatic debris makes up about 10% of entanglement cases, according to NSW wildlife rescue data.

For platypus, it's a serious threat, especially in urban waterways. Litter, especially anything with a ring or a loop, is a big problem. Dr Geoff Williams at the Australian Platypus Conservancy says "Fishing line is probably the most difficult type of litter for platypus… causes horrendous injuries – it basically just cuts through the skin… Platypus are amazing in their ability to get their heads and shoulders through small loops."

Hair ties, the kind used for ponytails, are a growing concern, he says. **"**Particularly in places where people go swimming in the summer, what happens is they shake their hair out and drop the thing… Elasticated hair ties are a really significant problem because no matter where they get dropped, they tend to get swept along in the rain, go down in the drains, [and] end up in creeks."

Most people are responsible, he says. But it's important to retrieve fishing line and dispose of it properly. For rubbish, especially anything with loops, his recommendation is to "snip it and bin it".

What should you do if you find trapped wildlife?

If you encounter trapped or entangled wildlife, do not approach or touch the animal as that may cause stress. Contact your local wildlife rescue.

With the arrival of H5 bird flu in Australia, members of the public are urged to avoid contact with any dead or sick birds or animals showing signs of the virus. Report those sightings to the emergency animal disease hotline 1800 675 888 or birdflu.gov.au.

NEW MEMBERS ALWAYS WELCOM

Please pay membershipfee by direct transfer to our Bendigo Bank account:
RYDE HUNTERSHILL FLORA AND FAUNA PRESERVATION SOCIETY INC,
BSB 633-000, Account number 19071658
Include your name in the transaction description; and **email your name, ad and phone number** to **rhhffps@gmail.c**

Or pay by cash: Complete and hand i form with payment in an envelope at Field of Mars Visitor Centre.

NAME:		
Address:		
Phone:		
Annual Membership (add $10 for newsletter to be sent via Australia Post):		$
Individual	$ 15	(+ $10)
Family	$ 35	(+ $10)
Concession	$ 10	(+ $10)
	Donation	
	Total Payment:	

Email address to receive your newsletter – please print clearly:

YARNKNIT RUG RAFFLE PRIZE

Win a Yarnknit rug, in shades of green from aqua to emerald. Donated once again by Holy Spirit Yarn Group, you could be the lucky winner when the raffle is drawn at our AGM in early 2027.

Proceeds support the work of the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society.

Give to a family member or friend, keep it for yourself or donate it to a worthy organisation.

Tickets are $5 each - buy 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 your contact details** to rhhffps@gmail.com