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

JUNE 2026

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

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PRESIDENT'S NOTE

Our Society's 60th anniversary celebrations provide opportunities for us to celebrate our achievements in our local area and our influence which resulted in wider preservation of natural and built environments.

In the 1960s, many believed that Australia should "populate or perish". Local progress associations were common, promoting housing and commercial projects. There was little concern for natural areas and their importance was not understood. Mangrove estuaries and hillside forests were seen as spaces to exploit.

But some residents were concerned about the loss of our local natural areas. So the Ryde – Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society was born.

Initial focus was on the Field of Mars Park, where we saw an opportunity for a wildlife sanctuary but, as reflected by the name, we were looking further afield.

We did not know at the time that Ryde Council was planning to pipe Buffalo and Strangers Creeks and use the entire bushland area of the valleys as a garbage tip.

Many in our local community were involved in the epic battle which saved the area. Our new Society was then given responsibility for early management of what is now the Field of Mars Reserve.

Following this success, a group of Hunters Hill residents (including several RHHFFPS members) were horrified to learn of plans to destroy another valuable bushland area: Kelly's Bush.

The resultant campaign was the genesis of the now-famous "Green Bans" and ultimately ensured the preservation of much of Sydney's natural and built heritage which was threatened by the plans of developers whose wealth gave them inordinate power to influence government decisions.

As we look to the future, our work continues.

We have greater scientific understanding of our natural world, but scientific knowledge and understanding is challenged by those who wish to exploit natural resources for their own profit.

Phillip Ward, Vice-President / Newsletter Editor

PAST EVENTS:

TALK BY JOHN MARTYN

Over 40 attended this informative presentation on 18 April, about how the Sydney Basin bushland has coped with bushfires, storms and floods over recent years. Afterwards, John answered many questions from the audience and later with individuals over afternoon tea.

BIRD WALKS

On Saturday 9 May, Cathy Goswell of the Cumberland Bird Observers Club led these popular walks in the Field of Mars Reserve.

COMING EVENTS:

"WHERE HAVE ALL THE TREES GONE?" – 2pm Sunday 21 June

Sydney's suburbs are undergoing a gradual transformation, largely unnoticed. knockdown-rebuild redevelopment is reshaping the landscape in ways that undermine liveability and environmental sustainability. Larger building footprints and expanded driveways are gradually displacing canopy trees and gardens, eroding the private green space that once underpinned Sydney's "garden city" ideal. This process is contributing to urban heat intensification, increased stormwater runoff and declining urban biodiversity. We are creating a greyer, less resilient urban form. So the question is:

How can redevelopment include nature?

Hosted by our Society, **Professor Peter Davies of Macquarie University** will give a talk at the Environmental Education Centre in the Field of Mars Reserve. The talk will be followed by afternoon tea at the Visitor Centre. For further information contact rhhffps@gmail.com or phone 0403 749 181.

WILDFLOWER WALKS – 10am and 1pm Saturday 18 July

The usual great displays of wildflowers in the Reserve have not appeared this year; however, the flowers are usually at their best during July. Guided walks will be led by Society members, departing from the Visitor Centre and taking you to where you may see the best displays of flowers and other interesting features. Numbers are limited on these walks so prior booking is essential; phone Alfred on 0403749181. Wear appropriate clothing with good walking shoes.

SAVE THE DATE: MUSIC ON MARS this year will be **Sunday 20 September**

NEWS FROM THE FIELD OF MARS

Bushcare

Recent rains disrupted some regular schedules, but they have made it easier for us to remove runners of couch, kikuyu and morning glory. At the Cemetery Creek 2 site, rabbits are taking advantage of the long grass on the embankment. One morning we were visited by their natural predator. It was too close to fully frame in the photo! When the noisy miners raised the alarm, local magpies (with whom we are on friendly terms) came along and kept swooping the fox until it departed. Weeds are now mostly removed on the natural bushland side of the Fire Trail, so we are now working along the cemetery embankment in the hope that natural groundcover plants, including Microlaena, Oplismenus, Dichondra and Commelina, may recolonise to maintain the bank's stability.

Wildlife in the Field of Mars Reserve

Walkers in the early morning are accustomed to gossamer encounters along the tracks, but fewer leaf-curl spiders appeared this year, possibly because of the changing weather conditions. And they have not yet begun to make their egg pouches, which they normally do in May. Beside the creek near the Visitor Centre, a new family of ducklings appeared recently. We hope they survive the cooler months. In and near the cemetery, rabbits abound – see above.

Walkers often report seeing swamp wallabies, and there were reports of an eastern grey kangaroo crossing Pittwater Road. Was it is the one already at the Reserve, or could it be another?

At the Visitor Centre, our resident kookaburra Kevin had been around less often, but now he appears to have a mate:

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 at the Visitor Centre… can YOU?

Society volunteers keep the Field of Mars Visitor Centre open on weekends and public holidays to welcome visitors to the Reserve and provide them maps, information, opportuniies to look at the birds and other animals outside, and see our displays. 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. Those of us who are already on the roster 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

Some believe Australia, with boundless clean energy resources, should encourage data bank developments. These may be declared "in the national interest" so normal planning regulations are not enforced. Others are concerned that the data industry is becoming a global privacy issue.

Mars Road, Lane Cove West

The Goodman Group recently proposed a $400 million, 90-megawatt data centre. Classified as a State Significant Development and located at 12 Mars Road in the Lane Cove West Business Park, this project aims to leverage local infrastructure for digital growth, though it faces local scrutiny regarding proximity to residential areas, bushland, and potential noise and environmental impacts. The site is in the Stringybark Creek catchment area, so heated water will be draining into the Lane Cove River through wetlands opposite Magdala Park. Other potential impacts include:

- removal of approximately 90 mature trees.
- three years of construction
- continuously generating persistent low-frequency noise, artificial light, and air pollution
- extremely high energy and water demands.

Lane Cove Council has already acted to make a submission concerning the above impacts.

And within the City of Ryde, there are proposals for a data centre at 23-25 Waterloo Road, and expansion of the Next Data Centre at 269 Lane Cove Road, both in Macquarie Park.

Julius Avenue Data Centre Amended Development Application (SSD -80018208)

This proposal was reported in page 6 of the October 2025 edition of Wallumetta. The exhibition period has ended and submissions now closed. These are being collated by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment, who have requested the proponent responds to submissions.

We remain concerned about the removal of over 500 trees and the ongoing impacts of this development on wildlife corridor and the heated aquatic environment.

Deadline for submissions was 18 March 2026. By the deadline date, 18 submissions were received, including one from our Society and one from the Willoughby Environmental Protection Association (WEPA). Apart from one submission asking for further information, all objected to the proposal.

No responses were received from

- Ausgrid
- NSW Rural Fire Service
- NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.
- City of Ryde
- Sydney Water
- NSW National Park and Wildlife Service

The NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure is in the process of following up with these agencies, with any advice received to be provided upon receipt. On 19 March the Department wrote to property fund managers ISPT Pty Ltd, requesting a Submissions Report. Any input from the above authorities will be added to the final report.

Greenpeace Australia Pacific Report

The development of data centres powering the artificial intelligence boom threatens Australia's transition to renewable energy. Data centres could demand more new electricity over the coming 15 years than Australia's cars or homes. One major electricity network provider warns it already does not have enough capacity to power every data centre currently in the planning pipeline.

Government projections suggest that data centres' demand for energy will increase more than sixfold from 2024–25 to 2040, surging from 2 to 13 per cent of the country's total energy use. They add to the challenge for climate policies of replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy.

ARTIFICIAL TURF UPDATE

The Turf Wars over whether to replace natural grass surfaces with synthetic turf, or vice versa, are raging on controversially. It seems that those supporting one side are just as passionate as those committed on the other side - and all are equally vociferous about their preference, particularly when it comes to sports playing fields.

The Society, as you will know, is actively in favour of natural grass as far as possible, for the many reasons being put forward. We believe it is far better for protecting our local environment, its native biodiversity and animals, as well as retaining healthy soil, and for mitigating current and future impacts from an increasingly warming climate.

It also provides benefits to the whole community as grass surfaces are cooler in summer, can be shared inclusively by the community for walking, recreation, picnics and public events. Natural grass can also handle a higher usage demand, unlike synthetic turf which is more limited in use and often used exclusively for sporting interests.

Some of the reasons against synthetic turf include:

- **Bushfire hazard:** It is highly flammable.

- **Toxic chemicals**: Fibres and rubber crumb used are laced with toxic chemicals which leach into rivers and affect high-value biodiverse land causing harm to soil, waterways and wildlife. Using these surfaces provides ongoing exposure to dangerous PFAS, Microplastics and Heavy Metals.
- **Temperature**: Playing surfaces can exceed 80^{o}C and contribute to elevated temperatures of surrounding areas; plus the risk of skin burn and heat stroke during hot weather.
- **Cost**: At end of life (7 to 10 years?) synthetic turf systems require costly removal and disposal, presumably to local landfill (?)

Local Councils are struggling to frame a policy around sporting fields. Blackman Park has been in the news with Lane Cove Council under pressure to retain the so called "all weather" synthetic turf at Blackman Park, in spite of clear evidence of microplastics pollution into the Lane Cove River and beyond. Community consultation is underway and Council is also seeking "best practice natural turf where possible" (TWT 20.5.26). With Sydney's ever-increasing population growth, sporting and recreation space is severely stretched across our suburbs. Balmain Council has opted for "all-weather" sporting fields at Callan Park on the contested basis that they provide all-year-round reliable access. A final decision is due in June.

It's hard to fathom whether much notice of the report on the topic from the NSW Chief Scientist has been taken. However, there was a big win for natural turf at Gladesville Reserve when a 2021 $2 million grant for synthetic turf from the local MP to Hunters Hill Council was eventually applied to improving the natural turf sportsfields, but only after several years of local concern and activism. This has proved to be a successful and satisfactory outcome.

Brigid Dowsett, RHHFFPS Committee Member

NEWS FROM THE NCC

The Gwydir Wetlands will receive fresh flows after the NSW Upper House put in a regulatory fix to allow WaterNSW to release water across private land.

One month ago, we saw the tragic outcome of delayed environmental water releases when turtles had to be rescued from a fast-drying water hole.

This threatened hundreds of turtles, birds and frogs relying on a healthy wetland.

[*Photo: Gwydir Wetlands bird hide: NSW National Parks*]

NCC thanks all who took quick action to call and email the Water Minister Rose Jackson, sign their open letter, and demonstrated strong support for our inland rivers and wetlands. Also, big thanks to the NSW Government and Minister Rose Jackson for acting to amend the law and to Greens MLC Cate Faehrmann's action and advocacy inside parliament.

It wasn't an isolated event. Last spring, environmental water was held back from wetlands across the whole state – including one of the most important semi-permanent wetlands in Australia: The Macquarie Marshes. They have internationally recognised Ramsar listed wetlands that need protection and adequate flows to survive and thrive.

And the Water Department routinely holds back water around late farm harvests. Nature needs reliable water, delivered on time, to trigger seasonal indicators like flowering of plants, birds nesting and fish breeding. We need to ensure the NSW Government fixes the law. The rivers and wetlands can't afford to have their water flows restricted again and again.

Our message is simple: The rivers and wetlands need their water. No more delays.

FEDERAL BUDGET AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The recent federal budget was a massive disappointment with no money for the preservation, rehabilitation and conservation of the environment.

Australia's gas tax system or the PRRT (Petroleum Resource Rent Tax) currently generates a paltry $2 billion a year from an industry earning over $100 billion annually. More tax is collected from beer than gas exports. Compare this to Norway which taxes gas at 78% and has built an almost $2 trillion sovereign wealth fund over 30 years.

Polling right up to budget night consistently showed that more that 60% of people over all age ranges and political persuasions supported a 25% tax on gas exports. It was estimated this would have raised more than $17 billion annually and could be used to accelerate our move to a 100% renewable country, fund science and environmental rehabilitation, support families, make public education free, boost funding to public health and fund programs for communities.

Let us not forget, too, that the Australian government gives $10.8 billion a year in diesel rebates to the fossil fuel industry for them to power their machinery to dig up more coal and gas.

Federal funding of science and research has been on the decline for the last decade so money in the budget is welcome but still grossly inadequate. However, the government will suspend money to the Economic Accelerator program which was established to support turning the development of research into economic and social benefits. This means that any research conducted by Australian universities, which could have been economically viable, will not be realised. This is an incredibly short-sighted decision and could very well see our scientists move overseas where research is well-funded and their discoveries earn income for that country.

Meanwhile, $2.2 billion was cut from the government's own climate and environment department, the biggest cut to that department since 2022. Australia will be less able to model changes in climate, forecast how threats such as sea-level rise will affect us, and plan how we adapt. But $1.9 billion was found to help expand a new gas precinct in Darwin.

Bilateral agreements with states will, disturbingly, be allocated $153.5 million over four years to progress and territories that would see decision-making under the newly-reformed *Environment Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act 1999* handed to states and territory governments, and enhance the use of AI in environmental approvals.

This is a major concern as environmental groups believe it will allow states to fast-track mining, energy, and land clearing projects. This responsibility must remain with the federal government to create strong, enforceable standards under national nature laws. Experience tells us that the states and territories have approved fossil fuel projects, unfettered logging of native forests and support of industries that are environmentally unsustainable.

In the last week perhaps, in anticipation of this change, the South Australian government announced plans to lift the fracking ban in the south-east of the state, despite previously promising the moratorium would remain in place; WA Premier Roger Cook said Western Australia could be “forced to frack” the Kimberley; NSW government will reverse a more than decade-long ban on gas exploration in Far West NSW and NSW Government will continue to allow mines to apply to extend or expand their operations for at least the next two decades.

Madeline King, the federal minister for Resources, announced that ongoing investment in the nation’s petroleum sector was vital and has opened a six -week period for the fossil fuel industry to nominate new areas for petroleum exploration in Victoria and Tasmania.

Money always seems to be found for AUKUS, subsidising native forest logging and the fossil fuel industry **but none for clean energy transition** and support of communities and organisations trying to save ecosystems and native flora and fauna.

We have a right to be disappointed and angry that the government still formulates policy and allocates money according to the desires of the fossil fuel industry which is heavily subsidised by the government and pays little or no tax. Surely the situation in Iran and the threat to global fuel supplies should have been the impetus for this government to reverse that trend, ban new fossil fuel projects and fund the billions needed to protect the environment and move rapidly to 100% renewables.

In a rare piece of good news, last week Australia joined 140 other countries in passing a major United Nations resolution to endorse last year's International Court of Justice (ICJ) unanimous ruling, which found countries can he held legally responsible for their greenhouse gas emissions and that that the production and consumption of fossil fuels as well as the granting of exploration licences and subsidies was a failure to take appropriate action on climate change. This means that Australia, being the third largest fossil fuel exporter, can no longer ignore the impact our coal and gas exports are having on climate change globally.

The government is now considering the ruling. We will see if the government takes the next step and rejects all new and expanded fossil fuel projects in Australia.

We encourage you to write to your federal Labor MP and express your concerns about the government's lack of action on funding the protection and rehabilitation of our environment. For the seat of Bennelong, it is Jerome Laxale jerome@jeromelaxale.com

Pamela Reeves, RHHFFPS Secretary

VALE LEAH WARTON

We were sad to learn of the passing of Leah Warton, one of the few remaining original members of our Society. With husband Roger (who was also an active member) Leah lived in Finch Avenue where their home adjoined the Reserve and she had intimate knowledge of our natural bushland.

Leah was actively involved in the Society's work during our early years, and in 1971 she joined Leighton Boyd as an alderman representing East Ward of the Municipality of Ryde. Both members had our Society's interests at heart and served local residents well. Leah was re-elected in 1974, but at the 1977 elections she did not seek re-election. With the Field of Mars Park having become a Wildlife Refuge, the Visitor Centre building completed and open, and other natural bushland areas in the municipality being appreciated by most other aldermen, Leah deemed it a good time to retire from Council duties. Former Society president Rod Wallace then became an alderman.

In addition to her community service, Leah made good use of her sign-language skills to be an interpreter for the Law Courts. In later life Leah and Roger moved to the "beach house" at Barrack Point (near Shellharbour) where they continued to encourage and protect wildlife and always welcomed visitors.

In their final year together, Leah and Roger moved into health care facilities and were well supported by the Boyd family… a lifelong family friendship which contributed so much to the work of our Society when it was most needed.

Leah died on 23 April 2026, at age 89,

< *Original Society members Silvana Newman, Roger and Leah Warton at their last visit to the Field of Mars Reserve on the occasion of our 50th anniversary celebration.*

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, ac 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