



NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF NSW  
*protecting nature through community action*

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NEWSLETTER NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF NSW INC  
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**SOUTHERN SYDNEY BRANCH**

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ISSUE: 124

### **Connectivity and corridors**

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- Branch activities
- News
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- Koala Crossings
- Burratorang Valley

**BUSINESS MEETINGS** All are welcome to attend, have your say and hear what's happening in the NPA. Contact Peter on 95287341 or Gary on 95701813 for details. These meetings are now held on either the 1st or 2nd Wednesdays of the month, except when this coincides with school holidays

**BRANCH MEETINGS:** Come and meet other members from your local area, new members and friends are most welcome. These meetings are organised for you, are informal, informative and relaxing. An interesting evening is guaranteed and supper is provided. The venue for Branch meetings is the Multi-Purpose Centre, 123 Flora St Sutherland (near Belmont St) 3 minutes' walk from the railway station and with plenty of parking. All meetings commence at 8.00pm. Now held on the 4th Wednesday night every second month.

**The next meeting is February 27<sup>th</sup> on Arnhem Land, a special slide presentation by Gary Schoer**

**There will also be a special screening of "Give a Dam" on 20<sup>th</sup> March. This is all about the proposed raising of the dam wall for Warragamba and the problems of flooding our World Heritage Blue Mountains. See it before the elections!**

## Walks/Activities

27 Feb, Wed 1:00PM Kamay-Botany Bay National Park

Grade:2/6 Length 5km 100m Southern Sydney Branch

Brian Everingham: 0419 260 236, 9520 9341, [brian.everingham@gmail.com](mailto:brian.everingham@gmail.com)

A trip that has a strong focus on encouraging people to capture photographs. Bird-watching and photography around the southern section of Kamay-Botany Bay National Park. Various locations visited.

7 Mar, Thu 9:00AM Nielsen Park to South Head

Grade:2/6 Length 10km 100m Southern Sydney Branch

Brian Everingham: 0419 260 236, 9520 9341, [brian.everingham@gmail.com](mailto:brian.everingham@gmail.com)

10 Mar, Sun 9:00AM Barren Grounds

Grade:3/6 Length 20km 250m Southern Sydney Branch

Brian Everingham: 0419 260 236, 9520 9341, [brian.everingham@gmail.com](mailto:brian.everingham@gmail.com)

Location: Barren Grounds Nature Reserve Limit: 12.

11-15<sup>th</sup> March Byron Bay and Surrounds

Fancy a few days getaway to Byron Bay way? Book your own accommodation and make your own way there. We'll be doing a beach day, a day walk to Mount Warning: the Summit Walk, and a day walk in Nightcap NP: Platypus walk Djanbung Gurahr, Minyon Falls and Protestor Falls. Relaxed pace. Leader will stay at Murwillumbah on 11 and 12 March to do the walks. After the walks, stay at Byron Bay on 13 and 14 March to do the beach activities. Depart on 15 March. Slippery sections, surf. Contact Esther Chow

15 Mar, Fri 9:00AM Curra Moors

Grade: 3/6 Length 12km 200m Southern Sydney Branch

Brian Everingham: 0419 260 236, 9520 9341, [brian.everingham@gmail.com](mailto:brian.everingham@gmail.com)

27 Mar, Wed 8:30AM Middle Head

Grade: 2/6 Length 10km 200m Southern Sydney Branch

Brian Everingham: 0419 260 236, 9520 9341, [brian.everingham@gmail.com](mailto:brian.everingham@gmail.com)

A day exploring the section of Sydney Harbour National Park from Taronga Wharf to Middle Head. Lots of delightful scenery and historic buildings. Bring a camera

Location: Sydney Harbour NP Limit: 12.

3 Apr, Wed 9:00AM Oatley Park

Grade:2/6 Length 10km 200m Southern Sydney Branch

Brian Everingham: 0419 260 236, 9520 9341, [brian.everingham@gmail.com](mailto:brian.everingham@gmail.com)

Slow photographic walk around this gem in suburbia

Location: Oatley Park Limit:12.

Contact Esther Chow ([eeesee@gmail.com](mailto:eeesee@gmail.com)) or Brian Everingham ([brian.everingham@gmail.com](mailto:brian.everingham@gmail.com))

## News from NPWS

### **Kamay 2020 Project**

On 28 April 2018, the Commonwealth and State Governments announced \$50 million funding to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the first meeting between Aboriginal Australians and Lieutenant James Cook and the crew of the Endeavour at Kamay Botany Bay National Park. The Kamay 2020 Project includes significant visitor infrastructure improvements and the new commemorative monument which is to be completed and installed by 29 April 2020. The Meeting Place precinct at Kurnell will play a major role in events to recognise the 250th anniversary of the Endeavour's arrival. Significant new infrastructure, interpretation and visitor services are to be developed in the precinct over the coming years.

### **Closure of Bonnie Vale campground for assessment and management of old asbestos**

Bonnie Vale has long been a popular holiday destination for families and outdoor recreation. From the 1930s to the 1950s the area contained more than 500 campsites and 170 cabins. These cabins were owner-built with wood, steel, and fibro sheeting made from asbestos.

Over time, most of these cabins were demolished, resulting in a legacy of asbestos containing materials in the form of asbestos cement ('fibro') buried in the soil across the Bonnie Vale visitor precinct. Recent drought conditions have reduced ground cover and increased soil erosion, leading to an increase in asbestos cement fragments coming to the surface in high traffic areas including the campground.

NPWS is working with relevant authorities, including the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and NSW Health on this issue. Specialist contractors have been engaged by NPWS to monitor and assist in the management of asbestos containing material as fragments emerge from the soil across the site. NPWS is investigating remediation options that will allow the reopening of site for camping.

### **Yeramba Lagoon**

Yeramba Lagoon, in Georges River National Park, has lost significant function due to previous roadworks which included the installation of a tidal levee that resulted in restructured water movement. NPWS project focuses on the removal of the weeds in the lagoon and facilitating a tidal salt water influence back into the lagoon. This work will assist natural processes in re-establishing a saltwater estuary. The Australian Government has committed \$550,000 to the restoration of Yeramba Lagoon through the Improving Your Local Parks and Environment Program.

## **Good news for biodiversity conservation in western Sydney**

The NSW Environment Trust has awarded \$350,000 to a Saving Our Species Cumberland Plain restoration project that will improve the extent, condition and connectivity of remnant threatened ecological communities in western Sydney. With matching contributions from project partners National Parks and Wildlife Service, Greater Sydney Landcare, Hawkesbury Landcare, Hawkesbury City Council, Liverpool Council, and Conservation Volunteers Australia the \$700,000 project will deliver biodiversity conservation outcomes to address threats to plants, animals and ecological communities including:

- Ecological mosaic burns and Aboriginal community cultural burns to restore diversity of species, vegetation structure and age classes.
- The reintroduction of coarse woody debris and logs as habitat for ground dwelling fauna, including the endangered Cumberland Plain land snail and nest boxes and artificial hollows for birds and arboreal mammals like the vulnerable eastern freetail-bat, little lorikeet and masked owl.
- Weed control and thinning of eucalypt saplings to promote diversity of groundcover plants and allow mature eucalypts to increase canopy cover and develop hollows for habitat.

The project also provides opportunity for community engagement in western Sydney including volunteering, citizen science, educational campaigns and Aboriginal connection to country.

## **The NSW Guided-Tours Program**

### **School Programs**

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service Schools Program have updated the programs offered to better align to the National Curriculum. Ensuring that the 15,000 students welcomed on to a National Park as part of their school students, not only have an enjoyable experience, but that what they learn and take from their day adds-value to their education, fostering a lifelong appreciation for National Parks and the outdoors.

### **Leisure Program**

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service has a myriad of experiences for our visitors. Whether you are a local, interstate or an international visitor – an experience to take your interest can be easily found. Whether it is a tour of Barrenjoey Lighthouse, or Goat Island's convict past. Perhaps the West Head Gun Emplacements or unveiling Middle Heat Forts peak your interest. For the adventurous type, set yourself a Challenge to complete the Great North Walk, or Hawkesbury to Harbour trails with likeminded people. Our parks supply the location, and our experienced guides take you on the journey.

[www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/things-to-do/guided-tours](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/things-to-do/guided-tours)

## A Special Feature Article

### Merries Reef by Gary Dunnett

Merries Reef was one of the key marine sites described in the NPA's submission on the proposed Sydney Marine Park. Rather than recap all the arguments about why it warrants a higher level of protection than currently afforded, this piece is a personal reflection on a 20-year fascination with the bunch of wet rocks known as Merries Reef.

First a quick recap of the site. Merries Reef is located in the south-western corner of the Kurnell Peninsula where it joins the easternmost extent of the Cronulla beaches. The reef is an exposed ridge of sandstone that emerges from the base of the coastal foredunes and stretches out to sea as a broad, low lying platform. The appearance of the rock platform varies markedly from week to week, with a core section of 200 by 400 metres consistently exposed above the sand. The sandstone ridge continues seawards for more than a kilometre, presenting as a discontinuous set of exposed reefs that mostly disappear from view at high tide. The reef is an effective barrier to waves, which by the end of the beach are barely ankle high. One result is that the beach profile is very shallow with hard packed sands.

Merries Reef is part of the Boat Harbour Aquatic Reserve, which extends from Potter Point to a point on the beach a few hundred metres west of Merries Reef. The reserve continues out to sea for a hundred metres. Aquatic Reserve sounds great but 4WD access, fishing and spearfishing are all permitted, with the only significant restriction being on the collection of intertidal invertebrates. Perhaps the most surprising feature of the Aquatic Reserve is that the boundary starts at the low tide mark. This anomaly relates to the title of the adjacent private land which continues all the way to the low tide mark. The private status of the inter-tidal zone enables the owner to operate a recreational vehicle park along the beach.

So why the fascination with the site? One reason is that it is incredibly reliable when it comes to photographing rare and unusual wildlife around Sydney. I know of very few places with such a concentration of habitats and ecotones. The intertidal flats of the beach, the large and complex rockplatform, the sheltered and high energy marine habitats, the long sight lines for approaching threats and the availability of secure roosting on the offshore reefs all contribute to attracting a diverse faunal assemblage.

The reef is a 15 minute walk from Potter Point or 45 from Wanda. I often use the path from the Kurnell skate park which brings you out on the beach about a kilometre west of the reef. The walk along the beach can be a bit of a slog in the soft sand so I usually aim for the bottom half of the tide. The pod of Bottlenose Dolphins that makes Bate Bay home are frequently seen in the calm waters in the lee of Merries Reef. They often slip through the gaps in the reef as they head around the Kurnell Peninsula.



***Bottlenose Dolphin***

Another common sight is Little Terns hunting in the wave washed shallows. Over the summer dozens of Little Terns roost on Merries Reef, the majority non-breeders spending their off season in Australia. In contrast, the birds foraging along the beach are usually adults in breeding plumage. I suspect that the Botany Bay Little Terns have been nesting around the edge of the sand mine ponds over the last few years. Three years ago the colony nested near the entrance to the sand mine, where they were visible from the skate park track. Over the last couple of years once they catch a fish they fly over the dunes and into the part of the mine where they can't be observed. Their preferred nesting sites are recently disturbed sandy substrates without vegetation, something in abundance around a sand mine. Judging from the number of young that appear at Merries from January onwards they're been reasonably successful.

The sheltered waters near the reef are a great place to view Little Penguins. They are probably not more common here than on the open coast, but are certainly easier to spot when you hear that distinctive yapping out amongst the waves.



***Little Penguin***

The beach and reef are good places to see a surprising variety of raptors. Black shouldered Kites, Nankeen Kestrel and Swamp Harriers all hunt along the edge of the dunes while White bellied Sea Eagles and Eastern Osprey patrol the nearshore waters. Several times I've left the camera in the pack thinking I was watching an approaching sea eagle only to realise too late that it was a much rarer osprey.



***Eastern Osprey and Australian Raven***

The beach is part of a 4WD park and very busy on weekends and public holidays. I time my visits to the ends of the day or during weather that won't appeal to beachgoers. Dusk is a particularly productive time for photography along the beach. The reflections of the setting sun highlight the Red necked Stint and Sanderling as they scurry over the sand between waves. Later, as the last light fades, Pied Oystercatchers fly in to search for pipis.



*Red necked Stint*



*Sanderling*

The sandflats where the beach meets Merries Reef are a hot spot for migratory waders and endemic shorebirds. Apart from the Red-necked Stints and Sanderling these edges are a favoured foraging location for Double-banded, Red-capped and Lesser Sand Plovers. Merries is the most reliable location around Sydney for the Double-banded Plovers, a wader that arrives each autumn, avoiding the extremes of mid-winter on its southern New Zealand breeding sites. The Double-banded Plovers arrive when the summer migrants are getting ready to depart, making autumn the time with the best chance of catching the overlap.



***Double banded Plover***

The amble along the beach brings us to the main platform of Merries Reef. The following account concentrates on the migratory waders and shorebirds. It is nothing like a full picture of the biodiversity of the site (even for the birds), however the diversity of birds provides some indicator of the diverse health and values of the site.

The group which attract the most attention is the migratory waders. The most abundant members of the group are Red-necked Stints, the smallest of the species which crosses the equator twice each year. There are typically between 50 and 100 Red-necked Stint on the reef during summer, more if high seas drive them from the offshore roosts. The other relatively abundant migratory waders at Merries Reef are Pacific Golden Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones and Double-banded Plover. Ruddy Turnstones specialise in foraging for molluscs along the wave zone of rocky shores, showing a particular liking for limpets which they dislodge with a twist of the stocky bill. Golden Plovers spend most of the summer a mottled brown then transition into their striking breeding plumage in the weeks and days before departing in autumn.



***Pacific Golden Plover***

In addition to these relatively abundant sighted migratory waders there is a long list of less frequently encountered species. Some are regularly seen in small numbers, other appear some years and not others. They include Grey Plover, Wandering Tattler, Red Knot, Great Knot, Eastern Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Lesser Sand Plover, Curlew Sandpiper and Sharp-tail Sandpiper.



***Curlew Sandpiper and Red-necked Stint***

The migratory waders share the reef with endemic shorebirds and waterbirds. The most prominent are the Sooty Oystercatchers, which use the reef as a high tide roost, Little Black, Little Pied, Pied and Great Cormorants and Australian Pelicans. Pied Oystercatchers from the large population around Botany Bay regularly visit the site, often a young bird mixed in with flock of Sooty Oystercatchers. Eastern Reef Egret and White faced Heron stalk the shallow pools of the reef, the former favouring spots where water flowing off the platform is concentrated and delivers a stream of small fish past their bills.



***Sooty Oystercatcher***



***Eastern Reef Egret***



***Little Pied Cormorant***

A variety of seabirds frequent Merries Reef. They range from the world's largest tern, the Caspian Tern, all the way down to the Little Tern. Other regular sea birds include Crested Tern, Common Tern, White-Fronted Tern, Silver Gull, Black-backed Gull, Fluttering Shearwater, Short tail Shearwater, Common Diving Petrel, Fairy Prion, Australian Gannet, Black-browed Albatross, Yellow nosed Albatross and Giant Petrel. Irregularly sighted seabirds include Black Noddy, Fairy Tern and, as beach washed specimens, Goulds Petrel.



*Black Noddy*



*White fronted Tern*

I've stated that it is the diversity and abundance of fauna that keeps me coming back to Merries Reef. The other reason why I'm fascinated by the site is my sense of wonder at the resilience of the reef's inhabitants. From the long roll call of species it would be easy to assume that we're dealing with a pristine site where environment degradation and other threats to fauna are effectively controlled. The reality falls far short, and indeed the site suffers from extreme levels of disturbance from vehicles, dogs and visitors. 4WD park on the rock platform, while it is nothing unusual to see dogs putting the resting flocks to flight so many times that they abandon the site and head north towards the bay.



*Dog on Merries Reef, 210119*

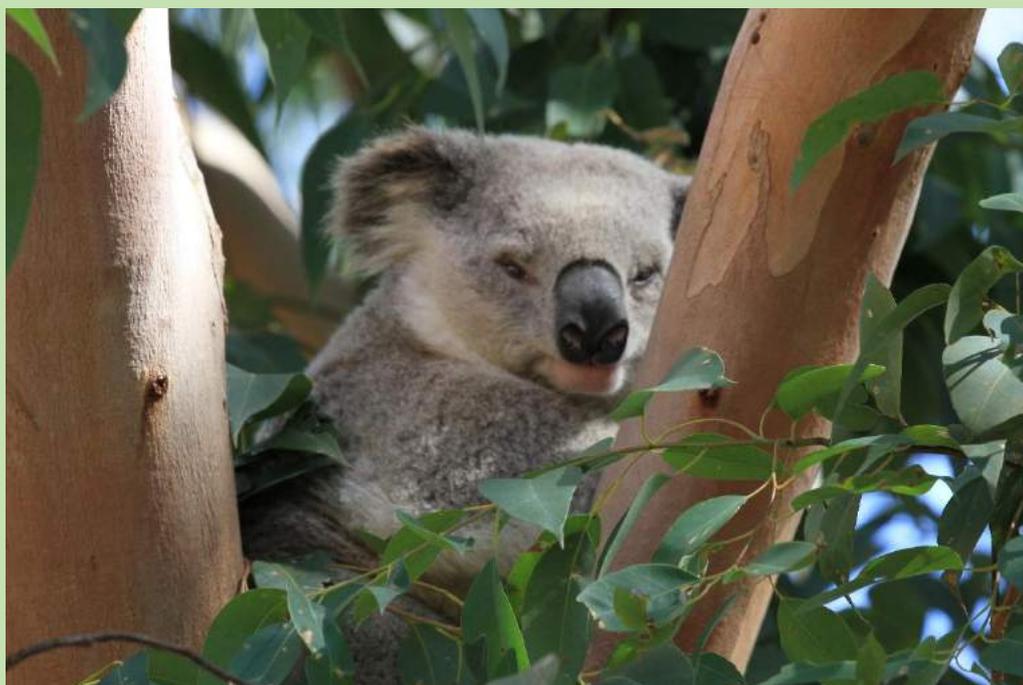
Perhaps the resilience of this avian inhabitants of the reef is less remarkable when you consider that they not only live in some of the world's harshest environments on earth but that many fly from end to end of the world, not once but twice each year. I still find it impossible to believe that such resilience is unlimited, if only because most of these species are diminishing in abundance across their range. Part of my frustration is that at least some aspects of the site's importance have been recognised through the reservation of the aquatic reserve. The problem is that the reserve type is woefully inadequate to address the challenges facing the site, especially the inter-tidal zone, which falls outside the reserve and where most of the impacts are concentrated. I'm convinced that the only genuine hope for the long-term protection of this urban biodiversity gem is as part of a marine park!

## Koala Future in South-Western Sydney not just a Campbelltown Issue

Gary Schoer, Branch Secretary

National Parks Association of NSW Southern Sydney Branch and Oatley Flora and Fauna Society call on Sutherland Shire and Wollongong Councils, Roads Service, Transport for NSW and the Australian Army to initiate actions under the Office of Environment and Heritage guidance to give the small and highly threatened Koala population of South-Western Sydney a viable future. NPA and OFFS are part of the Georges River Koala Network which is trying to seek holistic solutions to conserving the Koalas that regularly disperse from Campbelltown and Appin to suitable habitat in Southern Sydney and northern Illawarra.

Gary Schoer, NPA's Southern Sydney Branch Secretary believes that despite some recent initiatives by Campbelltown Council, Department of Planning and the Office of Environment and Heritage, action on Campbelltown's Koala survival remains uncoordinated as developers seek near maximum development at the Mt Gilead Estate that would seek to exclude koalas from an important habitat while endeavouring to decrease car strike deaths. Maintenance of east west wildlife corridors as well as north-south are needed not only to protect Koalas within the Campbelltown region but to give Koalas safe opportunities to expand into Sutherland Shire and Northern Illawarra habitats.



The Leader has already reported on several road kills at Heathcote Road. (October 2018) The Army needs to contribute to more effective funnelling of dispersing koalas that use Dead Man's creek as a passage between Army lands and West Menai. Train safety fences nullify mammal dispersal corridors, so adaptations are needed both in the fences and by providing dispersal and fire escape routes in under-track culverts.

Records kept by National Parks and Wildlife Service show that small populations of Koalas once occurred within Royal National Park and further south. There have been recent records from Audley, Otford and road kill on the F6. Cawley's bridge near Helensburgh is one site where an overpass could be developed providing safer dispersal for fauna across the F6 Freeway.



Koala in the Mill Creek area (photos Brian Everingham)

Roads and Maritime Services and Transport for NSW need to be part of discussions on creating effective, safe corridors for wildlife.

With the NSW elections coming up, has written to candidates where better safer road and rail crossings are needed to enhance existing wildlife corridors. NPA would like to think that successful political candidates will be champions for helping to ensure the long-term viability of native fauna, including Koalas.

Viable ecosystems depend on local and state governments and community groups working together effectively. For too long development, road expansions and decision making have been biased towards interests of developers and keeping humans safe while ignoring risks to native fauna. If that attitude continues beyond the next state elections, we can possibly say goodbye to our local Koalas and perhaps some other vulnerable animals. Loss of many other species is proof that inaction will lead to this scenario.

## **The Burratorang Valley – a hidden wildlife refuge in the Warragamba Catchment Area.**

The area known as the Burratorang Valley now lies within the Warragamba Catchment Area which supplies a large portion of Sydney's drinking water. The name is one derived from the local Aboriginal peoples' name for the region and included parts of the lower Cox's, Wollondilly, Nattai and Warragamba Rivers. Much of the area is now drowned under the waters of Lake Burratorang, the impoundment formed by Warragamba Dam which was constructed in the 1950's. The Burratorang is situated approximately 90 kilometres south-west of Sydney but due to the restricted public access into the water catchment few people know of it or have been lucky enough to visit this spectacularly beautiful area. The part of the Burratorang Valley that remains above the waters of Lake Burratorang, protected within the Nattai and Blue Mountains National Parks and Yerranderie State Conservation Area, protects high quality examples of threatened grassy box eucalypt woodlands and dry sclerophyll eucalypt forests and is a haven for native wildlife due to the removal of domestic stock in the 1950's and low occurrence of introduced pasture species and weeds.

The valleys' discovery by early European colonists came about by the search for some of the colony's cattle which had disappeared and made their way along river valleys to the naturally grassy woodlands of the Burratorang Valley. This paved the way for some of the first attempts by Europeans to cross the barrier of the Blue Mountains.



Today the grassy woodlands and dry eucalypt forests of the Burratorang protect some of the most intact examples of these ecosystems surviving in temperate south-eastern Australia. It harbours an array of threatened woodland birds including the Regent Honeyeater, Swift Parrot, Turquoise Parrot, Glossy Black-cockatoo, Gang Gang Cockatoo, Diamond Firetail, Speckled Warbler, Hooded Robin, Flame Robin, Dusky Woodswallow, Brown Treecreeper, Black-chinned Honeyeater, Painted Honeyeater, Barking Owl and Masked Owl to name some. The Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater, which may now have a total population of fewer than 500 individuals, has recently been recorded breeding in dry eucalypt forests the Burratorang.

Threatened woodland mammals include the Squirrel Glider, Koala, Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby, Eastern Freetail-bat and Large-eared Pied Bat. The Wollondilly River provides habitat for the threatened Large-footed Myotis bat, Platypus and Water Rat. Additionally there is diversity of other woodland fauna not currently listed as threatened but equally important to a functioning ecosystem such as the White-winged Chough, Jacky Winter, Restless Flycatcher, Common Bronzewing, Yellow-footed Antechinus, Common Dunnart and Tree-base Litter-skink. There is a population of Emu in the valley.

However one of the most unique features of the Burratorang is that within its grassy woodland ecosystems it still supports populations of native grazers, such as the Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Wallaroo, Swamp Wallaby, Red-necked Wallaby and Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby, in a natural equilibrium with native predators such as the Dingo, Wedge-tailed Eagle and Spotted-tailed Quoll. This is one of the few examples in south-eastern Australia where a functioning native predator-native prey dynamic survives in a temperate grassy woodland ecosystem. Most of the grassy woodlands of the western slopes and coastal valleys have been cleared and what remains are small and highly degraded remnants within a mosaic of agricultural lands. The Dingo has been exterminated from most of these grassy woodland ecosystems and the Wedge-tailed Eagle is still subject to persecution, seen by many as a pest.

Harboured within the protection of the denser wetter forests of the Blue Mountains and Nattai National Parks the Burratorang area survives as a unique opportunity to protect, observe and study a high quality, functioning temperate grassy box woodland ecosystem. It can provide a reference point for restoration efforts in highly degraded grassy box woodlands of the Wheat-Sheep Belt, west of the Great Dividing Range.

The proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall will result in the flooding and consequent loss of much of these remaining grassy woodlands of the Burratorang and the unique refuge they provide to the flora and fauna. The area should be officially recognised for its outstanding biodiversity values. Other flood protection options do exist for the communities of western Sydney and building more homes on flood prone lands is not one of them.

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Debbie Andrew

Zoologist