NEWSLETTER NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF NSW INC

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SOUTHERN SYDNEY BRANCH

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In This Issue:

BUSINESS MEETINGS All are welcome to attend, have your say and hear what's happening in the NPA. Contact Brian on 0419260236 or Gary on 95701813 for details. These meetings are now held on either the 1st or 2nd Monday of the month.

BRANCH MEETINGS:
The next meeting will be held on via Zoom.

Join Zoom Meeting
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87351478819

The guest speaker is Anthony Sharwood, journalist and author of 'From Snow to Ash'. He will be speaking on Our Fragile High Country on 24 February at 7:15 for 7:30pm start. Anthony Sharwood is a Walkley Award-winning journalist specialising in sports, the outdoors, weather and climate. He has spent the last 10 years as a writer and editor on leading Australian news websites, and has also presented television shows, radio programs and a podcast. A skier, hiker and lifelong lover of Australia's High Country, Ant's brain was pretty much fried after a decade of digital journalism. The Australian Alps Walking Track was a chance to escape, to cleanse, to reset. From Snow to Ash documents that trek.

Free event.

While the Billy Boils
Getting Out with Map and Compass

In the 1980s I used to teach a basic course in bushwalking skills. The course covered many of the themes already mentioned in this column and included some good basic field trips. There, the participants could attempt to apply the skills in the field. I remember the first time well. We used Euroka Clearing in the Lower Blue Mountains and I chose a well-defined loop track for pairs to practise their map reading and compass work. I knew there was a simple error on the map, as regards where a track was marked, and alerted all to ensure that they did use their compass as well and, most importantly, read the landscape. It was just after lunch. Off the groups went, in pairs, to complete the loop.

Three pairs did not make it. They were still out, overnight! So was I. I walked that loop several times; calling out, using whistles, flashing lights, to no avail. They walked in the next morning, having huddled in a rock cave just off the main track, oblivious to my efforts to find them. I never used the afternoon time slot again!

Part of the loop I explored at night trying to find the three pairs staying out overnight

So be aware; but note that prior planning prevents poor performance.

The map is the most important aid to your navigation before you arrive in the bush. Spread it out and look at it carefully. Look at the route over which you intend to go and notice the contours, the shape of the land, the number of creeks, the spurs, cliff lines and any other feature you now

can recognise at an instant. Visualise the lie of the land. If you wish, you can even compare the map to air photographs.

When planning your route from point a to point b do consider the grain of the country. OK, if you are searching for a challenge, draw a straight line. You might need a long length of climbing rope to follow it! But for mere mortals, whose desire is to enjoy a walk through interesting countryside, consider the most appropriate route. Remember that ridges are often less heavily vegetated than gullies and less steep. Remember, however, that there is no water to be had on ridge lines so a campsite requires different considerations.

If in an area where I am unfamiliar, except by way of reading the maps sheets, I draw up a navigation sheet. I divide my journey into legs. I note the Grid references from each point to the next point and I record the bearing and the distance. I also include remarks about the countryside through which I intend to travel, as interpreted from the map. I might be surprised when I get there but at least I will be surprised in predictable ways – thickness of vegetation, etc. Occasionally, I do find an error in the map but if I do, I try to see if I made an error first.

Once out in the field, map and compass at the ready and in a waterproof case, I constantly check. If the walk is taking me through dense vegetation, I make for a prominent object on my bearing, take another bearing and set off again. I don't worry if I am not on a straight line between the points I aim for. But I do check! I note times taken too. That is a great guide to distance travelled. It's better than pacing. Unless you happen to have a counter, I challenge anyone to remember where they are up to while counting steps.

My rule of thumb for distance is that if I am walking over relatively flat, easy terrain I will walk at about 5km per hour. Or I used to prior to doing damage to my knee! If there is scrambling, it drops down to about 3km per hour. There are additional considerations for thickness of vegetation, steepness, size of party, etc. That comes with experience.

And it is experience that we must all get.

Next time we are going to lead a walk. Do you remember that time, a little over a year ago, when you first joined? No, I am sure, you are ready to take out your own friends; you might already be considering to lead a walk for the NPA. If you do, you will gain great pleasures from the simple task of doing so.

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Engage with the NPWS

There are many opportunities for you to make your voice heard. You can assume that the National Parks Association is acting on your behalf[1] and you can find many of our submissions on our own webpage but you can also act on your own behalf.[2]

Just to give you a feel for what is out there for your feedback, check out:

Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Strategy Public Exhibition Report
The demands and impacts of mountain biking on both legal and illegal trails on the escarpment are increasing. Many trails provide a good riding experience, but their condition and sustainability vary greatly. The adverse safety, environmental and cultural impacts of illegal use and ad-hoc trail development need to be addressed to ensure the activity is sustainable into the future.

That one is now closed but the documents are still available and you can see what's planned and respond.

Walking tracks and trails in national parks
These refer to some very big projects, including:

- Light to Light in Ben Boyd National Park
- The Macleay Coast from Trial Bay Gaol in Arakoon National Park
- Murramarang South Coast Walk
- Royal Coast Track
- The Snowies Iconic Walk
- The Sydney Harbour Scenic Walk
- Thredbo Valley Track
- Tomaree Coastal Walk
- Tweed-Byron Hinterland

The devil is often in the detail and if you know the areas it is your knowledge that it is important to ensure that tracks are built in appropriate places to protect the environment we all love.

Castlereagh, Agnes Banks and Windsor Downs Nature Reserves Draft Amendment to the Plan of Management: Return of threatened and declining species and improving ecosystem health: Public consultation

This amendment is about rewilding, requires fences and additional infrastructure. Public exhibition is from 22 January 2021 to 8 March 2021.

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[1] https://npansw.org.au/

[2] https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/park-management/community-engagement

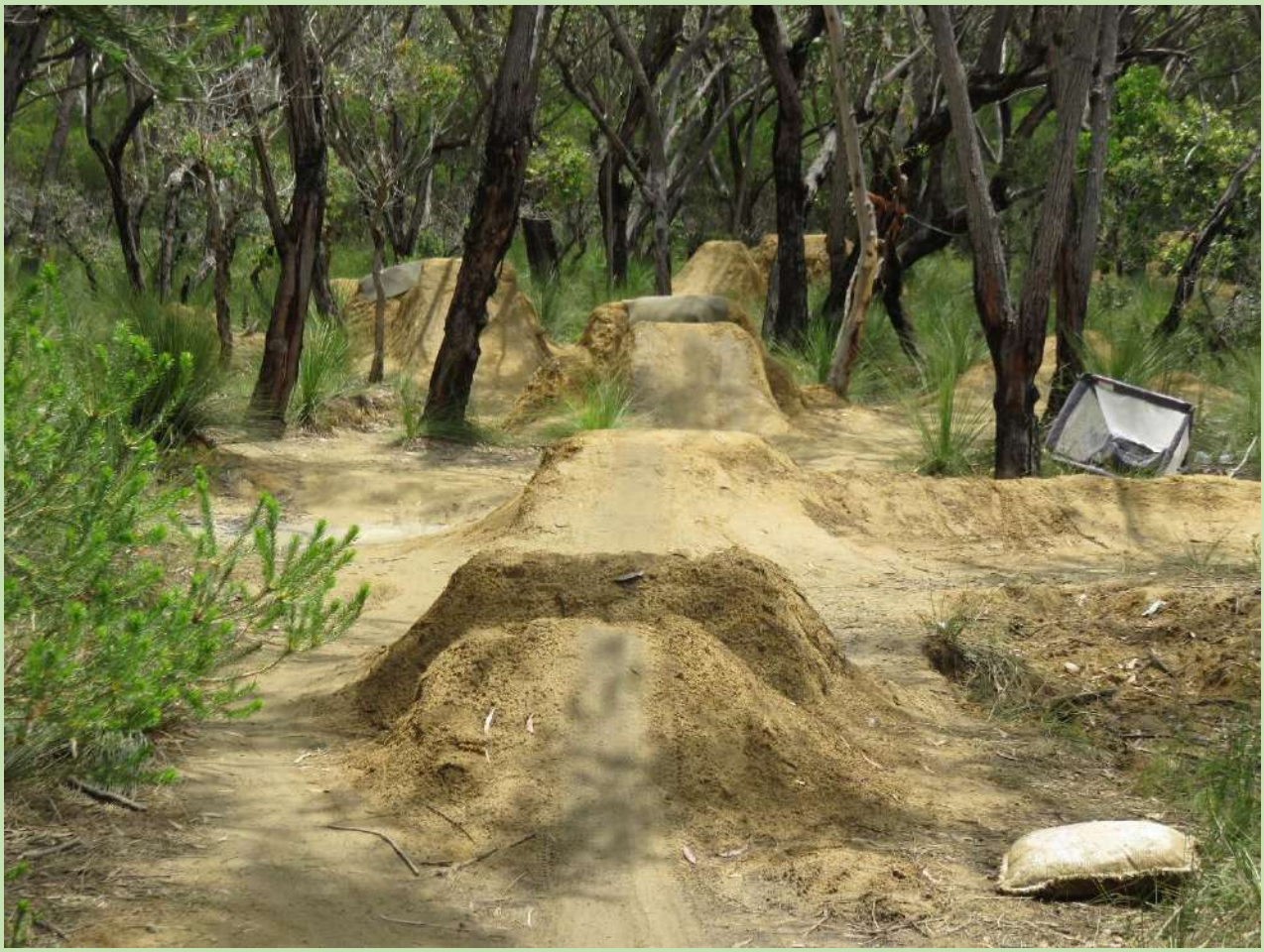
Bookmark this page. It is updated on a regular basis.

Draft Horse Riding Management Plan: South East Wollemi National Park: Public Consultation
Many of you walk in this area. The Draft Horse Riding Management Plan: South East Wollemi National Park is on public exhibition until 14 March 2021. The plan identifies proposed authorised horse riding routes in the park adjacent to the localities of Mountain Lagoon, Upper Colo, Wheeny Creek, Blaxlands Ridge Road and Kurrajong, and details conditions for horse riding.

Make sure you respond to this and keep an eye out for other proposals and remember that the key purpose of any national park estate land is to preserve its environment and associated ecosystems.

Royal/Heathcote/Garawarra DPOM

By the time this newsletter arrives the draft plan of management for the parks associated with Royal/Heathcote/Garawarra will have been released. The Branch has a team of experts preparing our submission but if we are to protect the values of these parks against pressure groups it will require all members making ourselves heard!



An illegal structure that has been in place, without action from the management, for at least two years. More and more of these proliferate within our park.

The Strange World of the Imperial Hairstreak

Over the Christmas period, in my isolation in the bush near Dungog, as was my want, braving the sounds of cicadas, I took an afternoon walk in the forest. Just near where the track should have emerged and as I was heading home, I saw a small butterfly hovering around an acacia shrub. Atheist that I am, I swear that I prayed for it to land. My somewhat dishonest prayers were answered and, in another miracle, I managed to get a series of photos of a female Imperial Hairstreak laying eggs while attendant ants moved in to do their duty. It is the first ever time I have witnessed that event even though I was aware of the behaviour. Of all the nature study events of 2020, and there were many, that might just be the highlight.

The Imperial Hairstreak (Jalmenus *evagoras*) prefers to lay her eggs on Black Wattle bush (*Acacia mearnsii*). Now if you look carefully at this photograph you can see ants attending to her. Some might be concerned that they are doing harm but these are *Iridomyrmex rufoniger*, the Black Tyrant ant and they have a symbiotic relationship with her, tending the larvae and pupae. Indeed, as reported by Orr and Kitching (2010), ants encourage the butterflies to lay eggs on their Acacia bush by "gently nibbling the tip of her abdomen as she probes the bark".[3]

"They ward off wasps that seek to parasitise the Jalmenus larvae and pupae with their own larvae. In return, the caterpillars provide a food source to the ants in the form of honeydew secreted from glands on their back."

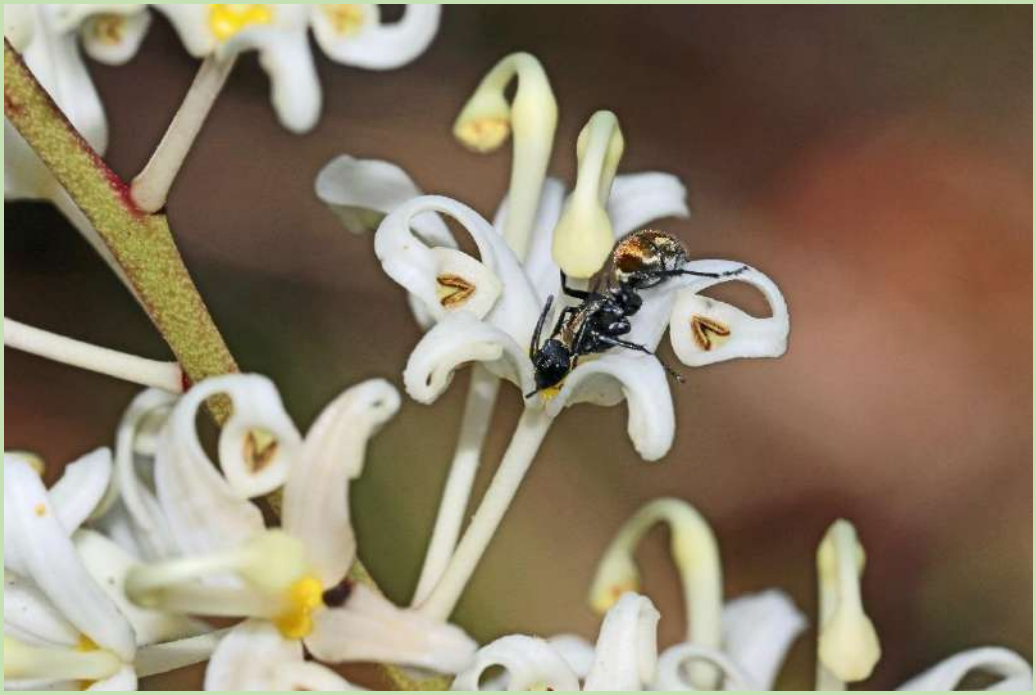
Peter Ewin, in a personal comment, also tells me that the sex life of an Imperial Hairstreak is more than a little suspect. The males hang around and pounce on the poor female even as she is emerging from her pupae and mate with her while her wings are drying. The act can take up to 30 minutes!

Brian Everingham

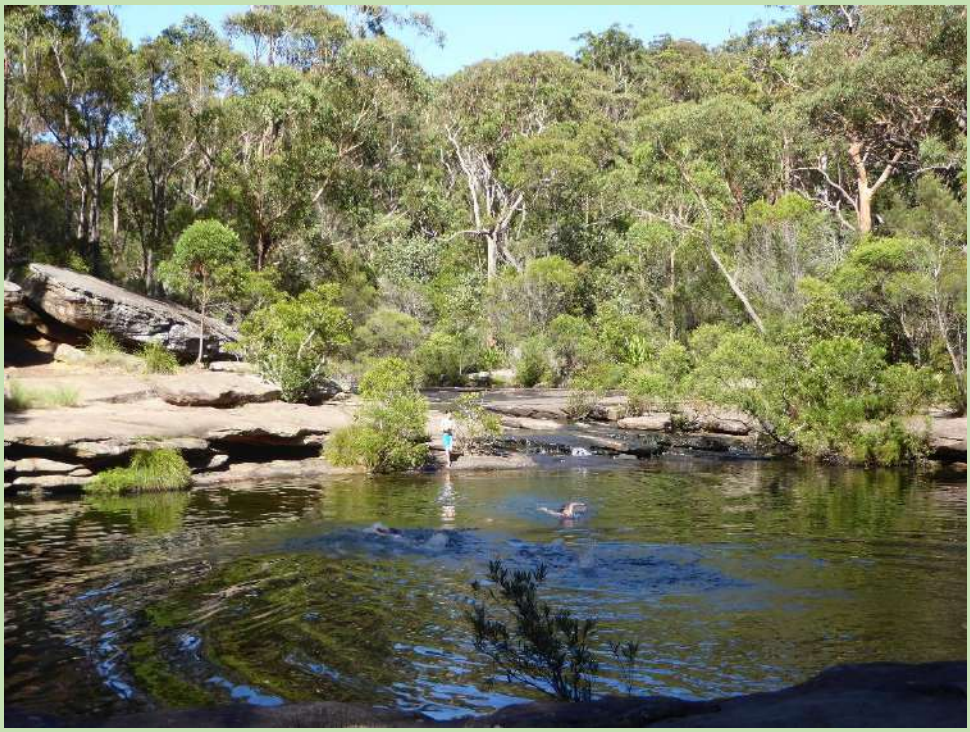
[3] https://southernforestlife.net/happenings/2017/6/26/the-life-of-the-imperial-hairstreak

The beauty of Kangaroo Creek

Branch members enjoyed a weekday walk from Heathcote station into Royal National Park one hot January day this year. A party of twelve met for a sensible summer starting time of 8.00am. Even at that time there were people out and about, enjoying the “bush”.

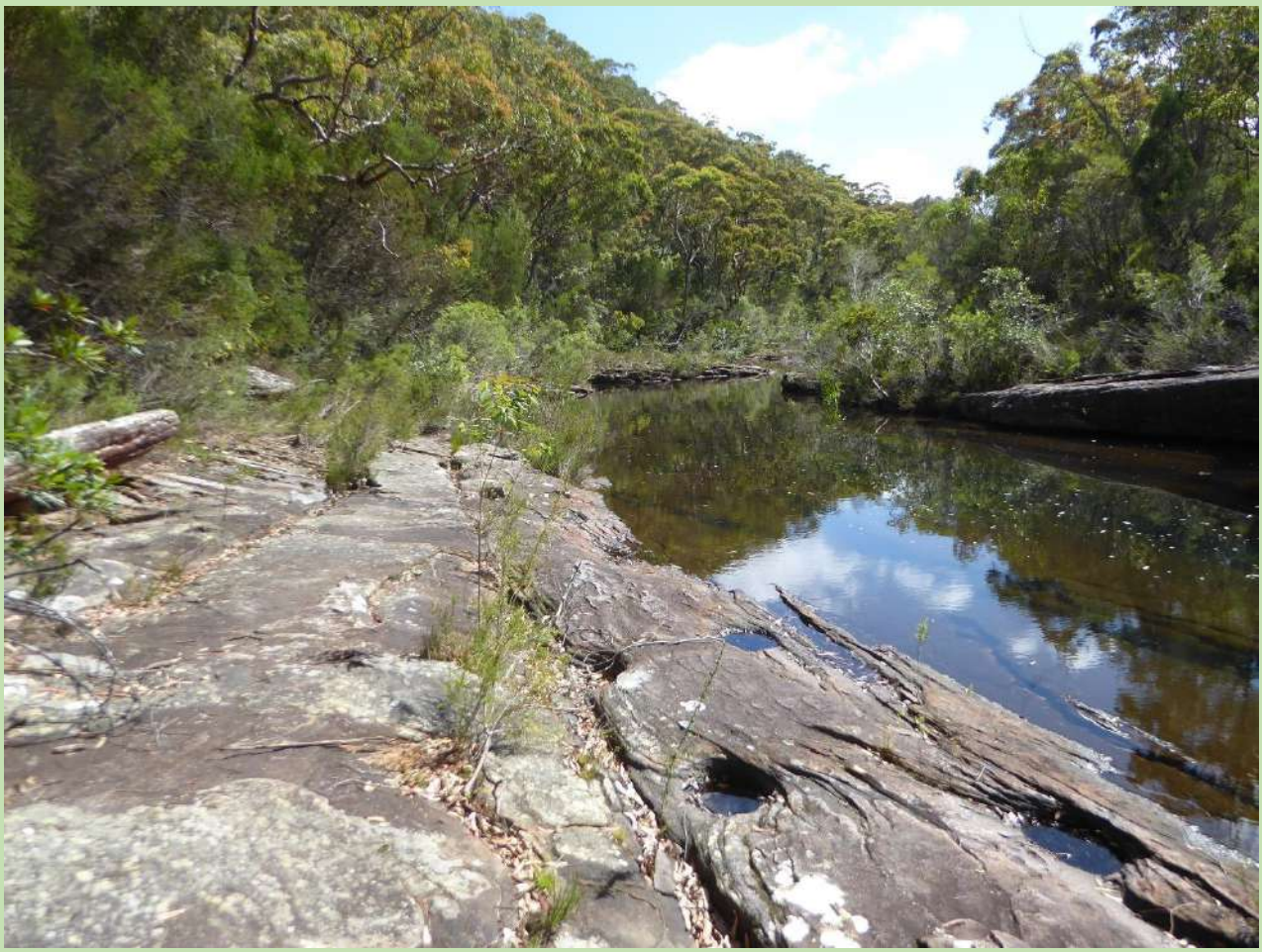


Lomatia silaifolia (Crinkle Bush) and ant



Children enjoying Karloo Pool

Lomatia myricoides - River Lomatia



Yes, there were many beautiful places to enjoy. If you have not yet joined an NPA walk do so!

Places and Moments in Time
Curracurrang in Royal National Park in 1958
Ted Booth, Author and photographer.

Hauling the trek-carts loaded with tents and gear down the muddy track to the coast from the Wattamolla road was quite a task for this skinny 12-year-old on his first overnight camp.

We crossed Curracurrang creek and set up camp just south on the southern bank. An afternoon swim in the upstream pool was my first 'natural swimming' and established a life-long tradition.

Storm clouds rolled in from the SE as we were finishing our evening meal and making some damper in the coals. Large splats of rain alerted Ted Lord our Scouter that we should dig some trenches around our 10*8 [foot] canvas tents.

Flashes of lighting out to sea were quite spectacular against the darkening sky over a grey sea. Then it came in buckets full. Our patrol huddled in the centre of the tent around a pile of sleeping bags and packs. The inner tent had become saturated and large drops of water dripped uncomfortably on our backs and gear.

A clutter of billies and tin plates alerted us to peak outside to find with our one working flashlight. The rushing water in the creek had inundated our kitchen area and doused the last embers of the fire.

"Time to go boys" was the somewhat urgent call from Skip Lord. "We going to cross the creek before it takes our camp! Leave your gear and wear your rain coat!"

“What rain coat?” My Dad said it “would be a fine weekend” as I packed to come. Mum didn’t argue, but she was always cautious and carried an umbrella whenever there was a black cloud.

We stumbled upstream along the bank in the dark to where a rope guide rope had been strung between trees. One by one Skip assisted us across where the creek was just above our knees. I was shit scared as the one of the other first campers almost lost his grip. He would have been washed over the rocks into the lagoon.

All I can remember after that was being handled a cup of strong black tea with lashings of sugar by this old bearded fisherman. We were cramped into the shelter of the fishing shack on the northern edge of the inlet. The rain was deafening on the tin roof. I felt cold in my drenched clothes even though it was early summer and we’d enjoyed the swim in the pool the previous afternoon.

Morning came, the flash flooded creek we’d crossed the previous evening had abated. An inspection of the camp site revealed that I’d lost my new mess kit, the tents had collapsed as the pegs had come out of the guy ropes and everything was sodden.

A group of fathers arrived mid-morning to rescue boys and gear.

Every time a walk through Curracurrang on the Coast Walk I get a strong sense of nostalgia. The fisherman’s huts are long gone, the pool has a few too many logs in it and there’s no ‘hot sweet tea’ coffee cart. Only a vivid memory of a ‘place and a moment in time’.

Editor’s note: We would love this article to inspire many more tales of bygone days in our national parks. Please contribute. Send your copy to brian.everingham@gmail.com

The Native Peach

Grace Karskens (*People of the River*) writes of the early colonial settlers spreading peach seeds along their routes as they explored the countryside, searching for new pastures for their flocks and new lands for their crops. She also speaks of the original inhabitants, those whose Country it truly was, learning quickly to adapt to this new fruit. That, of course, is the peach of the Old World, a native of China (*Prunus persica*), a shrub grown far and wide, beloved for its edible fruit and its ease of cultivation.

I can but assume that the longing for such a plant, a hankering for the "Old Country", led early settlers to find many local plants that ended up being called a "native peach". Such examples include the *Santalum acuminatum*, the desert quandong, whose fruit can be stewed to make pie filling for quandong pies or made into a fruit juice drink.

Closer to home there is another "native peach". That plant, the *Trema tomentosa*, is also known as Peach Poison Bush, Peach-leaf Poison Bush, Peach-leaved Poison Tree, Poison Peach, Rough Fig and Small Poison Peach. If ever that was a warning, those names should be that! Field evidence indicates that this species is a very important cause of sickness and death in livestock and its toxicity has been confirmed in feeding tests.[4]

It's widespread in regrowth and margins of rainforest, in moist sclerophyll forest and in open rocky areas. This one was on the southern edge of Heathcote East in Royal NP.

[4] http://www.canbr.gov.au/cpbr/cd-keys/RFK7/key/RFK7/Media/Html/entities/Trema_tomentosa_var._aspera.htm

Rewilding
Gary Schoer

The NSW Government's innovative Reintroduction of Locally Extinct Mammals Project to reintroduce at least 13 mammal species currently extinct in New South Wales is now underway. This project is part of the Government's flagship Saving our Species program.

The link below outlines the features of the program.
https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/threatened-species/saving-our-species-program/threatened-species-conservation/featured-projects/reintroducing-locally-extinct-mammals

Some of the main features of the program are:

13 mammal species locally extinct in NSW have been selected for the program
The NSW Government has contracted Australian Wildlife Conservancy and the University of New South Wales to deliver an innovative project to reintroduce locally extinct mammal species into NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service reserves.
The Bilby and Bridle Nail-tailed wallabies have been introduced to fox and cat free enclosures within some western National Parks since the program commenced in 2014
Scientific research has shown these locally extinct mammals play a significant role in maintaining the health of ecosystems. Reintroducing them to exclosures in parks where foxes, feral cats and other pest animals have been removed will not only reduce their risk of extinction but is expected to deliver significant benefits to many other threatened species.
These enclosures are established in Mallee Cliffs National Park just north of Mildura, Sturt National Park and the Pilliga State Conservation Area

With this background of a conservative and pragmatic government response to the potential for mammal reintroductions, can this approach be applied to reserves like Royal National Park? I suggested to some fellow NPA executive that I would like to see the Red-necked pademelon reintroduced to the rainforests and tall open forests of Royal National Park where it used to occur. But how practical is that? I would hazard a guess that this small macropod would have been particularly vulnerable to foxes and dogs that would have increased in numbers from the 19th to 20th Century as urbanisation and roads encroached on the region. Fox baiting may have reduced this threat in recent years, but how practical would it be to create fox-free enclosures in an environment where many other animals need open corridors to disperse in the event of fires or need to seek out suitable food, water and shelter resources? The Pademelon is known to live on forest fringes (for protection from predators) but to seek open grassed and shrubby areas in the evening for food. Using well established forest pathways for access is part of their normal behaviour.

Maybe the challenge is to continue to call for integrity of wildlife corridors, construction of wildlife friendly passages over or under roads and railways and addition of unprotected lands to the national park estate…just as NPA does now, and realise that we will never recover ecological landscapes to what we had pre-settlement. What do you think? What are your ideas for keeping what have…as much as what we can bring back?

Book Reviews

Eager: The Surprising Secret life of Beavers and why they matter by Ben Goldfarb

When I was a young child, growing up on the mid-north coast of NSW, there was a small set of nature booklets in the two-roomed primary school of my earliest explorations into nature. I can't remember the names of those books but I was mesmerized by them and my two favourite booklets were on sea otters and beavers. Neither species live here in Australia nor did I think I would ever see either in my life but they had me transfixed.

I have now seen sea otters. They rolled on their backs while eating crabs, right before my eyes while I was once in Monterey, in southern California. Sadly, I have yet to see beavers. The closest I have ever got was in seeing a beaver dam in the lower slopes of Mount Olympus. One day, when travel resumes, I will rectify that but, in the meantime, having heard Ben Goldfarb interviewed on *Science Talk*[5], the podcast program from *Scientific American*, I rushed out to buy this book.

Goldfarb is an independent environmental journalist with a clear passion for wildlife and for beavers in particular and his passion shines through in this readable and highly relevant book. Part biology, part ecology, part history and part advocacy for rewilding these creatures, both in North America and in Europe (the two beavers are different species), this book will carry you on with its enthusiasm and erudition.

But perhaps most pertinently to Australian readers this book is also about landscape restoration after years of abuse and about the role of rewilding within that landscape. Given the interest of our Minister for the Environment, Matt Kean, in rewilding, and in the NPWS in Saving Our Species, it is a topic well worth understanding and if you, like me, are transfixed by the amazing life of beavers, even at a theoretical level, this is a book which will have you transfixed.

Brian Everingham

Books for Noting

Burning Bush: A Fire History of Australia by Stephen J Pyne, 1998

Pyne traces the impact of fire in Australia, from its influence on vegetation to its use by Aborigines and European settlers. "Mr Pyne, showing what a historian deeply schooled in environmental science can contribute to our awareness of nature and culture, has produced a provocative work that is a major contribution to the literature of environmental studies."—*New York Times Book Review.*

Written some time ago but of relevance still and before the fires of last summer fade once again into the background it is still a book worth reading. To what extent is our continent truly made by fire, both natural and cultural? And when we speak of our bush and the bush we wish to preserve, what is that bush? They are cultural artefacts, after all? It's a long book, sometimes repetitious, but with many ideas that are worth considering today.

[5] https://www.scientificamerican.com/podcast/episode/a-breakdown-of-beavers/