

BLUE MOUNTAINS PERMACULTURE NETWORK

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2003

Introductions

I'm Pat Rayner and I have taken over putting out the Blue Mountains Permaculture Network newsletter as Sandra has gone travelling north. A little about me - I did the Permaculture Design Certificate with Rosemary Morrow in 2000. I have been interested in Permaculture for a long time but this was the opportunity to learn and I had recently moved to Springwood. Since then I have been trying to put these principles into my life. As a Tasmanian by birth and upbringing I was aware of Bill Mollison and remember being on a bushwalk he led before the days of Permaculture.

I hope I can follow on the excellent work done by Sandra and wish her well on her travels.

This newsletter is a little late due to the changeover and the crashing of Sandra's computer. However I aim to distribute 4 newsletters a year with the next one in Spring.

The email address is bimpermac@telpacific.com.au I tried to keep the name but the server only seemed to be able to cope with 8 letters.

WHAT'S ON?

10 August

On Sunday 10 August, Ecopella, the Sydney environmental choir, is holding a concert and CD launch in the Carrington Hotel ballroom, Katoomba, from 2.30 - 5.00pm. Special guests are Oscar and Marigold, wonderful singers of sacred and mediaeval music, including Jewish music of the middle east and Spain, and Tony Eardley, a local folk singer and song writer. Entry is \$10 but free for young children. (see attachment)

20 September

Blackheath Community Garden Spring Open Day 10am -2pm.

6 September

Presentation - **Community living in Eco-Villages**. From 1.30 -5.30 at the Uniting Church Hall, Katoomba, \$15/\$10 per person, afterwards dinner at Niagara Café. Bookings for both are required. RSVP 1 September to Belinda Bennett 4725 2124 (bus hr) 4782 9917 (ah) Email mtnmacs@hermes.net.au (see attachment)

13 September (tentative)

A follow-up forum to the talk by David Holmgren, on the differences and similarities in permaculture and conservation, with speakers from both perspectives, and something in between.

The tentative date is 7 pm, 13 September at the Uniting Church.

WHAT'S NOT ON!

Permaculture on radio -The Green Thumbs

The program on BLU FM 89.1 with Rowe and Sue Girard is no longer on.

WHERE'S ROWE?

Rosemary Morrow is currently in Afghanistan doing some voluntary work for a fledgling organization called aMahboba's Promise. Rowe is using her vast experience in establishing Non Government Organisations overseas and is setting up an orphanage for kids affected by the war. She tells us it is hot and dusty work.

[Sounds like an understatement to me Editor]

REPORT ON THE COMMUNITY FORUM

by Liz Connor

On May 10 we held a forum on Permaculture, as defined and practiced by David Holmgren, and based on the ideas in his new self-published book *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways beyond Sustainability*.

The evening was organised by Richard Griffiths, and we had a wonderful roll-up at the Uniting Church Hall in Katoomba St, Katoomba - at least 100 people.

David had some inspiring and controversial things to say about the energy crisis, and what his priorities for action are. I particularly liked his re-assurance that we're in for 500 years of exciting progressive change as we go down the hill towards a low-energy life-style - and so we don't have to worry about life becoming boring.

One of his topics that raised eyebrows was the issue of fighting weeds and replanting indigenous native plants. David suggested that growing food was a higher priority for a suburban garden, arguing that weeds only thrive in a period of transition, and this is inevitable as we move from a pre-European Australian landscape. In the long run a relatively stable eco-system will emerge, probably including exotics and natives working together in new ways. In the meantime, like Tim Flannery, he sees the greatest danger to non-human habitat coming from agriculture and horticulture. And

that's why we should use any land we have to grow as much of our own food as possible.

As a result of the controversy we are organising a follow-up forum on the differences and similarities in permaculture and conservation, with speakers from both perspectives, and something in between.

The tentative date is 7 pm, 13 September at the Uniting Church, but we will send you information to confirm. It should be a lively discussion - just what we'll need to warm us up.

BLUE MOUNTAINS ORGANIC COMMUNITY GARDEN

Presents 'Bushcare without chemicals'

Bush Care gathering on first Tuesday of the month from 10.00 - 12.00.

The idea is 'Bushcare without chemicals'. Exploring tools old and new to look after the bush without petrol or poisons.

Further details: Richard Griffiths, phone 4784 2046

Email: heymanandgriffiths@hotmail.com

BLACKHEATH COMMUNITY GARDEN

by Suzanne Reaney

Blackheath's Community Garden is slowly but surely progressing at the new Whitley Park site, cnr GWH and Prince George Street.

With all council approvals finally in place, the perimeter fence was raised on Saturday, May 17, in cool misty drizzle which made the delicious hot lunch taste all the better. Many thanks to all helpers.

This was followed on June 22 by installation of our donated site shed, then building of our much admired compost bays, bringing in trailer loads of magnificent manure and moving most of the materials from our old temporary site.

On Sunday, July 27, National Tree Day, we celebrated by inviting any and everyone to plant a shrub. Thanks to everyone who made it a great day. We'll put up pix in Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre's town noticeboard and at the Co-op in Katoomba.

Next we'll start building plots and our biggest challenge, paving the entryway, complete with the bagged strawbale low-walling and seating.

Saturday, September 20 is Spring Open Day, 10am - 2pm, with lots of activities and fun. All welcome.

Contacts: Sue Nicol 4787 8887 or Suzanne Reaney 4787 5229.

SUSTAINABLE WORK AND HOUSING

CHEC update by Alex Baumann

Hi Everyone,

The Community Housing & Employment Co-op or CHEC is a group of people working together to achieve a simple yet high quality lifestyle - a sustainable lifestyle. We intend to show how anyone could achieve this through community housing and cooperative employment.

2003 is shaping up to be a very exciting year for CHEC!

'BMCC COME TO THE PARTY'

The Blue Mountains City Council have put a lot of energy behind CHEC assigning a member of staff to support our submission and putting a strategy in place to secure land for CHEC.

'CO-OP TRAINING & FUNDING'

CHEC has almost completed its co-op training with the Association Resourcing Community Housing. The Office of Community Housing has said that our submission will be welcomed in September and has a good chance of succeeding with BMCC providing land.

'NEW MEMBERS'

A bunch of people are volunteering their time to the 'Groundwork' stage of CHEC. The CHEC waiting list welcomes new people.

'SUSTAINABLE VILLAGE'

The chance to realise our dream of a sustainable work and housing project in the Mountains is making significant progress. We are shaping up to be able to offer those on the waiting list an eco-village lifestyle by early 2004.

To find out more, get involved or just say g'day give us a call.

20 Ridge St Woodford NSW 2778 Australia (02) 4758 8411

Website - www.caretakers.org.au/CHEC.htm email - caretakers@earthling.net

PEST REPORT

by Sue Girard

The wind is howling around the eaves of our house. We have recently removed 18 pine trees from our western fence line, and replaced them with natives. They will one day be a fine windbreak but not this year. So the wind howls & as I write the clouds look heavy with snow. I am seeking shelter inside the house, so too will be any of the rodent pest species who feel they can try.

There are three introduced species of rodents as I have mentioned in previous newsletters. All originated in Asia & have become world travelers. The Norway rat lives fairly independently of human habitation, where as the Roof rat, as the name implies likes to live around houses. So if you hear the pitter-patter of little feet above your ceiling then it's probably a Roof rat. The House mouse on the other hand needs little to no water & very little space, so you may not even know it's there until you have a whole family in residence..

So why are rodents considered pests? Well they carry a whole lot of diseases (murine typhus, trichinosis, rickettsial pox, rat bite fever, dysentery...), they also carry fleas that spread bubonic plague.

Then there is the problem of their teeth. Rodents are classified as mammals with constantly growing teeth that need to gnaw on things to keep their teeth size even enough for them to feed. So in the broad term we are talking any thing from North American beavers to tiny native hopping mice. A Norway rat is capable of applying 24,000 pounds per square inch pressure in just one bite. So if this is your electrical wiring or even your gas pipe he's biting into..whoops!. It has also been documented that they can start fires in insulation by gnawing on match heads, or in the case of mice they urinate constantly, so having chewed off the covering around you electrical cord they then short out the appliance when they wee on it.

In short we don't want them in our houses & prevention is easier than cure. The structure of your house is the obvious place to start. Fill in any gaps around doors, windows, service pipes in to the bathroom, kitchen or laundry. If you can slip your finger under the door a mouse can squeeze in: "sand snakes" are good here, as they keep the warmth in & mice out as well.

A high level of hygiene & sanitation is another important aspect in controlling rodents. In the house you may need to keep food in sealed containers (works for cockroaches & other pests as well). Fruit bowls can be put in the fridge overnight, if you need to convince a rodent visitor that the food supply has dried up & it would be better fed else where. Outside you may need to consider that compost bins need lids,

pet animals should be feed from specially designed feeders or better still- on a daily basis, after all rats love gnawing dog bones, too! Access to water should be restricted too- not an option for me, with ducks, & grey water filtration ponds, but I think you can get the picture.

Biological control can be brought in. However it's illegal to keep a carpet snake in your roof, & as we know cats are often a bigger hindrance to the environment than they are of use as "mousers". As permaculturists the chemical controls are out, so we must rely on physical means. There are glue boards that personally I don't think work very well, you get fur stuck in the glue, but less often the rodent you are after. There are the old fashioned snap traps that snap at you as much as any rodent but are readily available from most grocery stores. There is even a new wiz-bang, zapper trap that will electrocute your rodent when it walks on the 2 wired plates inside. Or for most of us there is the live catch trap that is a smaller version of a possum trap & sold at most produce stores. An advantage with this type of trap is that you can make sure you haven't accidentally caught an antechinus by mistake. On the other hand you need to kill you rodent at a later date & as rodents are sentient animals this has to be as humanely as possible.

What ever you decide to choose- the trick is where & how to place your trap/s. Identify areas where they run & in which direction they travel & place the traps accordingly. Mice are curious about new things whereas rats are neophobic & are wary of new thing so don't expect an instant result. Rodents have a more refined taste for the good life other than just cheese. Almonds, macadamia nuts & even marzipan paste spring to my mind, but if you have noticed an obvious preference of just one type of fruit from your fruit bowl being eaten then use that...

With all the wonderful bush around us, here in the Mountains we are bound to get the occasional visitors, recognized pest or other wise, but either way it is better to keep them out of your home.

RARE AND UNUSUAL PLANTS

by Brian Coates

Brian Coates and Wayne Levi are extending their gardening business into :

1. Propagating rare and unusual plants---as well as other popular ones. Brian has been searching for rare and endangered native species around the Lithgow escarpment—esp. winter flowering keystone species.
2. Identifying old delicious fruit trees and grafting the variety onto new stock ----ie saving threatened fruit. Mind you this has not been an overnight sensation----- the project will take years.

But I can tell you where we are up to. A few of you will remember last year at the co-op when a large juicy apricot was selling---well it is from an 80 year old tree and the land it is on is about to be cleared---so this special variety needs to be saved. I also plan to graft some old plum and quince varieties.

Also I just want to say that as permaculture people we need to avoid 'Permaculture Fundamentalism'. I have just finished reading David Holmgren's latest book which I think has come under some quite unfair criticism up here since released. Some of his ideas are revisionist i.e. his approach to weeds in the bush. Rather than adopting a fundamentalist approach to bush regen. i.e. the mantra 'all weeds must go'—he is saying each case be approached individually and gradually. Gung ho approaches to bush regen. can do more damage than good-----i.e. use the permaculture principle " Use Small and Slow Solutions".

ECOPELLA

by Tony Eardley

On Sunday 10 August, Ecopella, the Sydney environmental choir, is holding a concert and CD launch in the Carrington Hotel ballroom, Katoomba, from 2.30 - 5.00pm. Special guests are Oscar and Marigold, wonderful singers of sacred and mediaeval music, including Jewish music of the middle east and Spain, and Tony Eardley, a local folk singer and song writer. Entry is \$10 but free for young children.

Ecopella started in 1998 and was the first Australian choir to focus its repertoire on the environment, its beauty and fragility, the threats it faces and how we can all help to preserve it. We sing at environmental campaign launches and protests, community gatherings and folk festivals, with the aim of increasing public awareness of environmental issues and building the cultural strength of green politics. In 2001 Ecopella opened the *Global Greens Conference* in Canberra.

Ecopella's debut CD 'An Organism Called Earth' presents a diverse musical landscape with a range of moods from the sombre to the hilarious, but unified by an approach that is passionate, chorally sophisticated and a beautiful shade of green!

I'm also attaching a flyer about the event. I'd be really grateful if you could spread the word.

Tony Eardley

for Ecopella

ph. 4787 7344

Community living in Eco-Villages

by Belinda Bennett

Sarah West will be giving a colourful presentation of Community living in Eco-Villages across Northern Europe, USA and New Zealand.

The presentation is on Saturday, 6 September from 1.30 to 5.30 at the Uniting Church Hall in Katoomba and is \$15/\$10 per person. We will also be going to dinner after the discussion at the Niagara Café to continue the conversation.

Sarah West has worked in environmental education, health and hospitality and has a Masters in Environmental Management. In 2000 Sarah went on a 10 month study tour of eco-villages and innovative on-site and decentralized sewage systems in Europe and the USA. In 2001 Sarah went on a similar dual study tour in New Zealand and participated in the 2 week Eco-village Design Course at Crystal Waters in Queensland.

This eco-village presentation distills information from all these experiences and highlights what others have found to make community living easier and more satisfying.

Key aspects presented are:

- community vision and purpose
- community 'glue'
- community organizational structure
- communication and decision making processes
- community sewage systems
- economic basis
- entry and exit procedures
- innovative building styles.

Sarah will also have on display a range of literature and eco-village guide books.

Please rsvp for both the presentation and dinner to Belinda Bennett on 4725 2124 (w) or 4782 9917(ah), or email mtnmacs@hermes.net.au

ODDS & SODS

Do you know:

- One of the new faces on ABC TV Gardening Australia, Josh Byrne, while working on his PhD in Environmental Science, worked on Permaculture projects in Perth, arid regional WA, Africa and the Middle East.
- There is an article 'Eco-friendly home nearly a bill-free zone' in Sydney Morning Herald 7 August, about a house being built in Newcastle. Video tour of Stephen Hocking's house on www.smh.com.au

SPRING NEWSLETTER

Contributions for the Spring Newsletter by 20 September PLEASE.

Wanted

Ideas, articles, tips and hints on water - saving water, using gray water, etc., for the Spring newsletter. Sue Girard wrote about water in the Summer Newsletter, however it could be timely to revisit this topic. Do you have any tips that worked for you?

Please send articles, comments, ideas, and notification of events by 20 September so that the newsletter will be out to advertise what's on and where by the end of September.