



*Supporting landholders  
with native vegetation*

## Winter Birds

The end of winter and beginning of spring bring exciting changes in the world of birds. Many birds which stay fairly quiet through winter are beginning to call again as they prepare for the warmer breeding season.



Fan-tailed Cuckoo

Birds are great indicators of changes in our native vegetation. They also help us understand why weed control is important for maintaining biodiversity.

Large flocks of currawongs are still visiting from the mountains, seeking out the soft fruits of plants such as firethorn, cotoneaster, privet and hawthorn. These exotic plants were often planted as hedges in urban areas and around rural properties and have tipped the natural balance in favour of the currawong by providing winter berries whose seeds are then excreted into native bushland. Currawongs then predate the eggs and nestlings of smaller birds breeding in spring. So control of exotic berry producing plants can assist smaller birds by helping maintain a more natural population of larger predator birds.



Scarlet Robin

Other species visiting from higher altitudes are the Scarlet Robin and Flame Robin. These birds live in open forests and woodlands and are negatively affected by the removal of understorey. During winter, they will visit more open habitats such as grasslands and will be seen in farmland and urban parks and gardens at this time.



Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo

The cuckoos are beginning to make their return from warmer northern climates and are starting to seek out early-breeding smaller birds such as thornbills and wrens in order to place their own egg in their nests. Keep an eye out for the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Shining Bronze-cuckoo and Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo.

The Olive-backed Orioles are beginning their distinctive calls now (visit [birdsinbackyards.net/images/audio/oriolus-sagittatus.mp3](http://birdsinbackyards.net/images/audio/oriolus-sagittatus.mp3) to listen to this call) and will soon start building their bulky hanging nests.

For more information about birds in our area visit the Far South Coast Birdwatchers' website at [www.thebegavalley.org.au/birdwatchers.html](http://www.thebegavalley.org.au/birdwatchers.html)

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# CMN Events

**Pest Animal and Weed Control  
Forum  
Saturday 28 August 2010  
9.30-12.30am  
Brogo Hall**

For those who missed this popular forum held in Wyndham last year, this is your chance to hear from the experts in pest animal and weed control. Five natural resource management agencies will be on hand to answer all those questions you've been dying to ask, like:

Which pest animals and weeds do I need to control?  
What control methods could I use?  
What support is there for me?  
How do I bait?  
How do I avoid non-target species?  
Do I need certification?  
How can I be part of a coordinated strategy for my area?

**RSVP:** A hearty morning tea will be provided so RSVP is essential to Alison Rodway (see details below)

## Contact the FSCCMN

Alison Rodway  
PO Box 118 Bega NSW 2550  
(02) 6491 8224 (w)  
0457 542 440 (m)  
info@fsccmn.com.au  
www.fsccmn.com.au



# Coordinator's column

Welcome to the Winter 2010 CMN newsletter. With a change in coordinators this is our first newsletter since December 2009. Over the last couple of months I've been busily learning the tricks of the CMN trade, having fun producing this newsletter and organising our first CMN forum for the year. I'd love to hear what you enjoyed reading about and suggestions for future issues. If you have thoughts about forums, workshops or local links you'd like the CMN to facilitate, please give me a call.

After three years of great work establishing and running the CMN, Dan and Vicki are still making a positive contribution to the environment/sustainability sector (see Dan tackling Prickly Pear on page 5 and read about Vicki's work as sustainability officer for the Business Treading Lightly program on [www.btl.net.au](http://www.btl.net.au)).

Although our drought status is still marginal we've had a couple of high rainfall events in autumn with erosion of bare ground, rivers and creeks breaking their banks and disturbing vegetation and soil. The resulting moist and exposed areas provide prime conditions for weed germination, especially with the weather starting to warm up as we head into spring. See page 4 for some weed monitoring information from local experts.

On the positive side, disturbed sites may also stimulate the germination of native species (see Jackie's article on page 3). Relatively moist soil conditions also make this spring a great time to plant so contact Karen Walker at the FSCLA Seedbank (see page 3) to purchase local provenance native seed or ask local nurseries for plants grown from local seed.

Happy reading, weeding and planting!

Ali

## What is the CMN?

The Far South Coast Conservation Management Network (CMN) supports landholders in the Bega Valley Shire to manage native vegetation on their property and caters to all land holders and vegetation types.

The CMN is funded and supported in various ways by the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority, Department of Environment and Climate Change and Bega Valley Shire Council.

These agencies are working with landholders to protect native vegetation on private as well as public land.

The CMN's role is to provide motivation, knowledge and skills support to landholders to ensure ongoing management and care is worthwhile for the landholder and the environment.



# Drought

by Jackie Miles

Although droughts are a bit hard to handle at the time, some interesting things can be brought to light by them (or more usually, when they end). On my place this has taken the form of a couple of plants that I had not seen here before, in my 20-odd years of pre-drought occupancy. One of these is



*Rorippa laciniata*

illustrated, the herb *Rorippa laciniata*, a close relative (but native) of water cress. The four-petalled white flowers reveal



*Rorippa laciniata*

it to be a member of the Brassica family, like radish, broccoli, and quite a few weeds. This plant is a post-disturbance coloniser, which pops up only after drought, fire or flood has cleared out the competition. It flowers and then disappears, and only its seed remains awaiting the next disturbance. This

one, and its larger relative, *Rorippa gigantea*, also appeared on Gulaga after the wildfire of last August. The other is a tiny native buttercup, *Ranunculus sessiliflorus*, which had not been recorded from the south coast before, although it seemed common enough in around 2006 after one of the short wetter interludes mid-drought.

Some plants with this sort of "now you see it now you don't" life cycle have been listed as endangered, because they are so infrequently encountered unless there is a suitable disturbance to get them up and about. One of these is *Monotaxis macrophylla*, a herb in the Euphorbia family that likes rocky areas. I doubt I'll ever see it on my place, but I was lucky enough to catch it in flower in the National Park nearby in 2003, after the most severe summer of the drought ended with a bit of rain. This was the first record for the district. This illustrates the chancy nature of rare plant detection - you need the right person in the right place at the right time.



*Monotaxis macrophylla*

Remember Jackie Miles' and Max Campbell's great online resource to help identify local plants - [www.thebegavalley.org.au/plants.html](http://www.thebegavalley.org.au/plants.html)

# Seedbank

Local FSCLA seedbank coordinator Karen Walker takes you for a winter walk on the wild side...

Even though its winter there are plenty of things happening in our flora.

Late afternoon sun lights up the remaining "fairy floss" heads of blady grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) like torches. Most grasses had a good productive season last autumn, with mostly remnants of flower spikes remaining into winter.

One of our first wattles to brighten the season is sunshine wattle (*Acacia terminalis*). Very occasionally one might find plants of Lightwood/Hickory (*A. implexa*) with

green, immature pods. If so, keep an eye on them for potential harvesting as FSCLA seedbank stocks are very low of this local species.



Hickory - *Acacia implexa*

Ripe fruits to look out for include many of the hakeas and tea-trees (*Melaleucas* & *Leptospermums*), bottlebrushes (*Callistemon citrinus* & *C. subulatus*) and she-oaks (*Casuarina cunninghamiana* & *Allocasuarina littoralis*). All of these have hard woody fruits which remain on the plant for long periods of time. Some open upon maturity while others don't open until removed from the plant.

Bushy needlewood (*Hakea sericea*) is just starting to flower and you may be lucky enough to observe pink, as well as cream flowering plants.

Our Eucalypts don't appear to be sticking to any rules when it comes to flowering and fruiting and this is presumably due to weather extremes.

If your "patch of bush" has harvestable quantities of seed that could be collected and added to the seedbank, please call Karen on 64918224.

# Weather & Weeds

The drought, autumn floods and winter rains have created the perfect conditions for weed germination. Ann Herbert, Weeds Officer from the Bega Valley Shire Council and Stuart Cameron, Project Officer for the Coastal Weeds Project suggest some steps to stop the spread of unwanted weeds this spring.



Sharp rush - *Juncus acutus*



Serrated tussock - *Nasella trichotoma*

Stuart and Ann recommend regular monitoring of areas of soil and vegetation disturbance caused by recent weather events. Control of weeds before they have a chance to set seed is the best way to minimise their spread across your property and into neighbouring areas.

Ann reports that Serrated tussock is moving onto farms around the Brogo - Verona - Quaama areas. It has made good use of the drought and the resulting bare ground and has been found on properties where it was previously not known. Winter/early spring are the best times to tackle it before it has a chance to set seed. For control information visit the CMN website.

Stuart said that whilst many of us concentrate weed control efforts within our own property boundaries or on our Landcare sites, roadside

verges are a hotspot for the spread of weeds due to slashing and vehicle movement. These can then spread seed into your property. Check your access roads and the banks of creeks flowing into your property to stay on top of the potential spread of new weeds. As well as Serrated tussock, look out for Whisky grass which is also spreading across the Valley.

For coastal areas, a new weed identified in saline, estuarine areas including salt marsh is *Juncus acutus*, sharp rush. This is a very unpleasant plant with very sharp rigid leaves. It is already a major problem in saline areas further north (Batemans Bay) and was recently found by Stuart at Bithry.

To report the spread of weeds or for control information, contact Ann on 6499 2405.



## Dry River Landcare

The Dry River/Quaama Landcare group has been operating since 1992 and has undertaken a great range of works including river and creek management, dung beetle release, tree propagation and planting, plant identification workshops, erosion

control work, willow removal, feral animal and weed control.

The Dry River Landcare catchment extends from Israels Road / Stevensons Lane in the south to Christophers Road in the north, and from Murrabrine

State Forest in the west to Murrabrine State Forest in the east.

If you are in this catchment and want to get involved, the group is keen to hear from you. The group has met twice this year to work out priorities and attract new members and will hold its first event this August. Contact Tony Redmond on 6493 8228 or Michelle Davison on 0468 912 230.

Being part of a landcare group brings lots of benefits to landholders including pooling resources, sharing information and ideas, solving problems across boundaries and access to technical advice and funding. Call Far South Coast Landcare on 64918204 to find a group near you or to establish one in your area.



# VCA Update

by Franz Peters, Manager, Bombala Area, NPWS

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Voluntary Conservation Agreement (VCA) Review Project has been in progress over the past 18 months.

In essence the Project is about continuing the on-ground monitoring and support for the owners of VCA's and provides an important commitment to our work across the landscape conservation network. At this time there are 84 VCA's scattered across in the NPWS Far South Coast Region.

The NPWS Project Officer (PO) is the key contact with private landholders, other public landholders, non-government organisations and key community groups in relation to private land conservation in south-east NSW. Some of you may remember Ray Turnbull as VCA Project Officer when he completed 17 VCA reviews during 2009 whilst recently, Ben Correy completed 12 VCA reviews over the past 4 months. Ben is now in Tasmania after being successful in securing the Ranger-in-charge position for Parks & Wildlife at Cradle Mountain National Park. We wish him the best in his new position.

Although the PO position is vacant, the VCA Review Project will continue, and the NPWS will endeavour to fill the position soon. If you have any questions about the VCA review project or VCA's in general please contact your local NPWS office.

We are all aware of the need to work to keep an eye out for emerging weeds. Whilst Ben



**Prickly Pear control on the "Windaree" VCA Rocky Hall. Rachel Butterworth (Ranger NPWS Bombala); James Cook, (contractor, Brighter Day Landscapes) Mark Adams ("Windaree" property owner); Derek Lewis (contractor D & F Lewis) Dan Williamson (contractor; Brighter Day Landscapes) and Greg Madden (Weeds Officer, BVSC).**

Correy was undertaking a VCA review on the 'Windaree' property in the Rocky Hall, Ben worked closely with the property owner Mark Adams to map a problematic Prickly Pear infestation. Prickly Pear is listed as a noxious weed and is a member of the cactus family and appears to have enjoyed the drought conditions prevalent in recent years. Ben found the weed not only on Mark's VCA, but also dispersing onto the adjacent South East Forests National Park. Ben then worked with NPWS Ranger Rachel Butterworth to map the infestation and prepare a funding

plan for control work. After securing funds from the Department's Conservation Programs Delivery Unit in Sydney, the NPWS have contracted the services of Brighter Day Landscapes based in Bega to implement the control works.

Prickly Pear is difficult to control because when handling, it is easy to be pricked with its spines and it does not respond readily to herbicides. The seeds are dispersed readily by birds and when the plant breaks, broken portions can also take root as a new plant. Be on the lookout for it and report sightings to the BVSC weeds office on 6499 2405.

For those of you who may have enquired about reading articles in the VCA newsletter, *Bush Matters*, it is published bi-annually and the next issue is due out around December 2010.



# 'Penuca'



**Before:** Eroded laneway on 'Penuca' prior to works



**After:** Laneway after upgrade with stabilised and vegetated gully at right (seeded with natives and cover crop)



**Before:** Approach to old crossing directly adjacent to Jellat Ck



**After:** New bridge and upgraded laneway, with fencing and spraylines for revegetation



**In Newsletter 14 we promised you a case study of one of the dairy farms involved in the Bega Cheese Environmental Management Systems (BEMS). Vin, Teresa and their son, John Taylor, are dairy farmers at 'Penuca' who have made changes on their farm that benefit both production and the environment.**

'Penuca' is located adjacent to one of the most significant freshwater wetlands on the Far South Coast (Penuca Swamp) and is the closest dairy to the Bega River estuary. The farm is 220ha supporting a herd size of 220 (130 milkers). Issues included unrestricted stock access to wetlands and Jellat Jellat Creek and significant sedimentation and nutrient inputs from eroding dairy laneways and crossings.

Through the BEMS program the Taylors have protected Penuca Swamp with fencing and revegetation, upgraded their dairy laneway and constructed a creek crossing to reduce nutrient inputs to Jellat Jellat creek (improving water quality). They are trialling the use of soil compost to help revegetate eroded hillsides and have fenced off a remnant Endangered Ecological Community (River Flat Eucalypt Forest on Coastal Floodplains).

Although revegetation works

along parts of Jellat Jellat creek were damaged in recent floods, they will be replanted soon to provide bank protection, improve biodiversity, and provide shade to enhance fish habitat. Woody debris was also placed in the creek, including fish "hotels" to improve fish habitat.

The BEMS works at 'Penuca' have also improved stock movement and contributed to the productive capacity of the Taylor's farm.

The improvements at 'Penuca' are part of a cluster of works organised by the SRCMA, Bega Cheese, DI&I (Fisheries) & Landcare to protect Penuca Swamp and the Bega River estuary.

Photos - above: Vin & John Taylor on new cattle bridge



# Koala Update

**Elly Stalenberg's research on koala feeding habits in the coastal forests between Tathra and Bermagui has revealed the koala as a shrewd food critic.**

**Her study showed that leaf chemistry (what particular leaves contain) is important for influencing which trees koalas use and their movements across a landscape.**

Elly: From 2007 to 2009, the NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) undertook a survey<sup>1</sup> of koala numbers and distribution in the coastal forests between Bermagui and Tathra (Bermagui-Mumbulla). This koala population is one of only a handful of very small and low-density populations between Narooma and Eden. The survey found that there are between 30 and 50 individual koalas that are distributed across the forest. The survey also raised some interesting questions about the dietary needs and habitat preferences of these koalas, and more broadly about the mystery of koala increase and decline across their natural range. These are some of the questions I set out to investigate in my Honours study.<sup>2</sup>

In spring 2009, I collected leaves from over 300 trees of 12 different eucalypt species and analysed their chemistry to determine various nutrient and toxin concentrations. The chemistry of leaves from trees that had been visited by koalas was compared to trees in the same area which had not been visited.

## Preferred Eucalypt Feed Trees

From the DECCW survey (available on the CMN website) in the Bermagui-Mumbulla forests, the species under which koala faecal pellets were most commonly found were: *Eucalyptus longifolia* (woollybutt), *E. globoidea* (white stringybark), and *E. muelleriana* (yellow stringybark). Although *E. cypellocarpa* (monkey gum), *E. bosistoana* (coastal greybox), *E. tricarpa* (red ironbark) and *E. sieberi* (silvertop ash) were less frequently encountered in the sites which had evidence of koala activity, a relatively high proportion of these species also had koala pellets underneath them.

<sup>1</sup> DECCW, 2010, *Koala surveys in the coastal forests of the Bermagui-Mumbulla area: 2007-09 – An interim report*

<sup>2</sup> Stalenberg, E 2010, *Spatial variation in habitat quality effects fine-scale resource use by a low-density koala population*, Honours thesis, Research School of Biology, Australian National University

My study showed that koalas do not just eat any Eucalyptus leaves, but are quite strategic and discerning and will choose one tree over a nearby tree of the same species if it has leaves with lower toxins or higher protein levels. The koalas visited a high diversity of eucalypts to maximise protein intake and manage the high and variable toxin levels in the leaves. This suggests that effective management of these low-density populations is not just about retaining one or two tree species, but preserving this diversity.

On a broad scale, areas which had not been visited by koalas had trees with a similar range of leaf nutrient and toxin levels to the areas that had been visited. This may mean that unvisited areas may be colonised in the future if the koala population increases.



Local celebrity: Bill

This study provides important information on the ecology of the Bermagui-Mumbulla koala population for local managers and helps us to understand more about the feeding ecology of low-density koala populations. To further our understanding of these enigmatic and sometimes mysterious animals, I am currently undertaking a pilot study of koala feeding behaviour at Potoroo Palace in Merimbula and exploring the use of new survey methods, such as GIS mapping.

Although this study was undertaken on public land, it may have implications for private landholders wanting to revegetate with suitable koala feed tree species and develop habitat corridors between populations.

For more detailed information about my study visit the CMN website.



*Eucalyptus longifolia* (woollybutt)