

NEWS FROM THE ALPS

NEWSLETTER

THE ALPS PROGRAM. WORKING TOGETHER BEYOND BORDERS.

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WHAT ABOUT THE WATER

After a time, anyone managing a natural landscape gets to know the ins and outs of their patch. Imagine then, having an opportunity to add more layers to the picture, to discover another door into your familiar house. This is exactly what happened in October at the Alps operations field staff workshop in the ACT, and for those who were there, the key to that notional door was *water*.

Building a greater understanding of water in the Australian Alps is key to filling in the greater ecological picture. Appreciating its behaviour and roles in various Alps landscapes can only lead to better management decisions. And so the Australian Alps Program's Water & Catchments Reference Group liaised with the University of Canberra to pull together a workshop that was meaty, relevant and fascinating – which isn't surprising if you consider the passion shared by these two camps.

Over a three day workshop, the assembled group explored water in the mountains. Landscapes were broken down into their physical attributes and functions to reveal how water moves through the space and how it interacts with the living landscape. A series of people shared their knowledge and expertise, one of which was Dr Sue Nichols, a Research Fellow at the University whose special area is biological assessment of streams, or in other words, how to find out how healthy a watery environment is.

In sharing her assessment methods the group were immersed (excuse the pun) in the aquatic worlds. Like happy school children on their first ponding expedition, participants considered the physical setting and then learned how to gather water and biological samples. Crowded around trays, deciphering the collected macroinvertebrates, a lesser known world was revealed to them. As Sue points out, these animals play an important ecological role in the food web, and the workshop helped to demonstrate how to interpret what's out there. Ultimately, with water-related information like this, it's possible to make better management decisions. "If you're going to assess the quality of a stream you need to consider the biota that are present", a point brought graphically home by the

groups sampling in two separate streams. In Kangaroo Creek they fished up native Mountain Galaxids. In a similar habitat within Gibraltar Creek they found no Galaxids but instead trout, an exotic species that's been introduced for sport but is known to have an adverse effect - of the terminal kind - on Galaxids.



Field exercises like these are invaluable in making the point about biodiversity. “Many participants declared that they hadn’t realised that there were so many animals in the streams; they didn’t realise they were there. If there was one message, it was to understand the interconnectedness of the land and waterways. That was what we were trying to do and I think we achieved it.”

Great workshops offer opportunities to share the expertise and views around the circle. They also provide the chance to put learning into a personally relevant context. This was one of the best. Everyone appeared to be learning from each other, and many of the exercises encouraged participants to put the process into the context of the patch they hailed from. (Below, Environment agency staff members, Travis Howson and Lisa Evans demonstrate electro-fishing.)



The next time an Alps Programme workshop is advertised, grab a spot and you'll come away with an unexpected view. In the meantime, a kit of resource material on this one is available for anyone who's keen, from Andrew Nixon, andrew.nixon@parks.vic.gov.au. Or feel free to get in touch with any of the passionate people* who put the workshop together, and who have a whole lot more to share.

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snippets

28 YRS OF MOUNTAIN PYGMY POSSUM MONITORING: The annual mountain pygmy possum (MPP) monitoring project coordinated by Dr Linda Broome is now in its 28th year. This year more than 20 volunteers assisting over the 11 day program, with 1760 night traps at five significant habitat areas. The good news is the MPP numbers at some sites were the highest ever recorded; numbers at other sites were higher than average or on the rebound after low numbers in 2009; and the health of the animals was very good. The good health and increase in numbers is likely to be attributed to good weather conditions and more intensive predator control programs over the past four years. From February this year alone, 28 cats and 13 foxes have been controlled in proximity to MPP habitat areas.

THREDBO VALLEY TRACK: The Thredbo Valley now has even more to offer park users after the completion of an ambitious project to create a shared use track from Thredbo Village to Bullocks Flat ski tube terminal. The shared use track allows walkers and bike riders to journey the 18km between via some amazing scenery along the Thredbo River and over five picturesque bridges. Plans are now being considered to further expand this track to link up with bike tracks from Jindabyne creating the potential for a world class, epic track.

GRAHAM TODKILL RETIRES: After more than 25 years of dedication to conservation in the north end of the Alps, Senior Field Supervisor Graeme Todkill (Toddy) has pulled up stumps. Toddy has worked for NSW NPWS in Queanbeyan for the past 13 years, and previous to that he was with ACT Forests. Toddy's knowledge, great personality and calmness around fires (not to mention his hat) will be missed by all the staff who have worked with him and wish him the best in his next venture.

NATIVE DAISY GARDEN OPENS AT THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS: Visit our new garden dedicated to daisies - now on permanent display at the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra. The garden emphasises the striking variety of forms, growth habits, colours, textures and aromas exhibited by Australian daisies. It features more than 80 species of Australian daisies, including 10 threatened species, many alpine daisies and a number of species not grown in the gardens before.

SEED BANK HELPS PROTECT ALPINE SPHAGNUM BOGS AND FENS: Staff at the National Seed Bank have made 232 seed collections as part of a unique collection of Australian native seeds for conservation and research focussing on subalpine sphagnum shrub bogs of the ACT and other Sphagnum bogs across the Australian Alps. Seeds were collected sustainably and by hand thanks to the collaborative effort of Gardens' staff and volunteers, ACT Government rangers and ACT conservation and research staff. Experiments are underway on 13 species important to the plant communities as part of research into the seed ecology/biology of bog and fen plants.

CORROBOREE FROG UPDATE: Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve holds a captive population of around 1000 critically endangered Corroboree Frogs, of which less than 100 remain in the wild in the ACT. The 2014 breeding season was another successful year, with over 500 eggs being produced by our captive breeding population. Around 400 of these eggs have already hatched and completed metamorphosis. Some of these froglets

will be released to the wild sphagnum bogs in Namadgi National Park in about a year or so. Captive-bred Corroboree Frogs from Tidbinbilla have been released back to the wild annually since 2011. The aim of releasing Corroboree Frogs back to the wild is to re-establish breeding populations and provide the opportunity for development of disease resistance to Amphibian Chytrid Fungus. Corroboree Frog numbers are monitored in the wild each year, although it is too early to determine the success of these releases.

EASTERN BETTONGS @ TIDBINBILLA: The Eastern Bettong, a small species of Macropod, was once found in the ACT but is now extinct on Mainland Australia. They're fairly common in Tasmania but numbers are in decline. A joint project between ACT Government and Australian National University began in 2011 with 60 Bettongs being brought to the ACT, half released into the Mulligan's Flat Woodland Sanctuary and half housed at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve for a captive breeding program. The program at TNR has been very successful with more than 40 young Bettongs being produced and a number being released at Mulligan's Flat Woodland Sanctuary. The ACT government is now looking at implementing a wild release program for the Bettong in the ACT.

MANY THANKS TO THE EAST ALPS VOLUNTEERS: The transition from winter into the summer months is a busy time for everyone and it's no exception in the remote Eastern Alps. Volunteers have been *instrumental* in clearing seasonally closed tracks, cleaning up popular visitor sites and maintaining the historic remnants within the Cassilis Historic area. Thanks to Yarra Valley 4x4 Club, Mid Week 4x4 club, Friends of Cobberas and the local communities.

BROOM SEED-EATING BEETLES: A workshop was held recently to discuss expanding the distribution work of the Broom seed-feeding beetles (*Bruchidius villosus*) and Broom gall mites (*Aceria genistae*). Dr Robin Adair from Australis Biological, an expert in weed management, provided an overview on past results, recent biological control successes and future recommendations. Natalie Brida, Pest Plant and Animal Project Office for Parks Victoria has been working with park staff and local communities to extend the English Broom biological agents range.

THE MOUNTAINS' BIG DAY: Each year on December 11 we celebrate International Mountain Day – a day designated by the United Nations General Assembly in 2003 to encourage, “the international community to organize events at all levels on that day to highlight the importance of sustainable mountain development.”

News from the Alps (in magazine and newsletter format) is published by the Australian Alps national parks. Program Manager and Editor: Andrew Nixon; Parks Victoria office at the Alfred Nicholas Memorial Gardens, Sherbrooke Rd, Sherbrooke 3789. Andrew.Nixon@parks.vic.gov.au For more information about the Alps, including information about the Parks, other publications and news, visit the Australian Alps Web Page: www.australianalps.environment.gov.au Thankyou to those who have made time to be interviewed; and to the photographers for their images. Without this support, *News from the Alps* would not be possible.

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