

WILDTIMES

Issue 26
December 2005



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Newsletter of *WILDCARE* Inc

Tasmania's largest incorporated volunteer organisation, caring for wild places, wildlife and cultural heritage.

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***WILDCARE* Inc is now a Registered Environmental Organisation**

- Donations are tax deductible.

WILDCARE Inc, and its public fund the *WILDCARE* Gift Fund, was entered into the Register of Environmental Organisations on 31 October 2005, entitling it, under the Income Tax and Assessment Act 1997, item 6.1.1 of subsection 30-55(1), to receive tax deductible donations. This is something the Board of Management has been working on for a number of years.

The purpose of the *WILDCARE* Gift Fund is to receive gifts (including donations and bequests) of money or property to support the Primary Purposes of *WILDCARE* Inc, which are;

- 1) Supporting the PWS and other land managers to undertake those activities deemed as necessary to conserve natural heritage on and off reserve in Tasmania and to assist with the management of reserves
- 2) Providing opportunities for community involvement related to the above
- 3) Fostering community interest, support and involvement in the activities and functions of Reserve management and nature conservation (on and off reserve).

The *WILDCARE* Gift Fund Management Committee will be chaired by Richard Hammond. Committee directors will be announced in the next issue of *Wildtimes*.

WILDCARE Inc is now seeking donors, large and small, to support nature conservation, reserve management objectives and projects undertaken in cooperation with its partner organisations. As a member of *WILDCARE* Inc you are encouraged to also promote this opportunity to friends and business acquaintances.



About 12 months ago the Premier of Tasmania announced that State Servants would be able to direct salary deduction donations to Deductible Gift Recipient Funds. The Registration of *WILDCARE* Inc and its Gift Fund now allows State Servants to donate from their salary to the *WILDCARE* Gift Fund. If you are a State Servant and interested in making a regular donation, please talk to your Human Resources Branch about arranging for the deductions to be made.

If you are interested in making a donation, either a once-only donation or a regular donation from your salary, please complete the forms elsewhere in *WILDTIMES*. You do not have to be a State Servant to made a regular donation from your salary.

If you are interested in making a bequest to the *WILDCARE* Gift Fund please ask your lawyer, or whoever is helping you to write your Will, to contact the *WILDCARE* Office (office@wildcaretas.org.au) for any further information they may require. 

TO ALL OUR MEMBERS

From the Co-Chairs

*Happy Christmas and a prosperous and caring 2006.
Take care over the break, be safe and be back next year.*

WILDCARE VOLUNTEERS MAKING A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION

WILDCARE volunteers are making a major contribution to the protection of Tasmania's natural and cultural heritage conservation and reserve management.

The involvement of volunteers in this important role is in line with a key Tasmania Together goal of encouraging Tasmanians' participation in volunteering to the benefit of the community.

Tasmania Together Progress Board chairman Bob Campbell said the benchmark established in 2000 to increase Tasmanians' participation in volunteer work to 24 per cent by 2005 was actually achieved in year one and improved in subsequent years.

Mr Campbell said it was important to recognise the contribution of volunteers and unpaid workers and WILDCARE provided a prime example of the value of volunteering to the community.

'WILDCARE volunteers work alongside the Nature Conservation Branch of the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment and also with the Tasmanian Heritage Office and the Parks & Wildlife Service of the Department of Tourism, Parks,

Heritage and the Arts.

'Importantly, WILDCARE provides a member database for volunteer call up, insurance cover for members working on projects, a quarterly newsletter, mail out facilities, funding assistance for WILDCARE approved projects, and skills-based training for volunteers.'

Mr Campbell said WILDCARE was a valuable community partner in the Tasmania Together process and the organisation's involvement had stemmed from the original goals and benchmarks established in 2000.

'We are now reviewing the Tasmania Together plan and I encourage organisations and individuals to put forward their comments to ensure that all the relevant issues are considered as we move forward,' Mr Campbell said.

'We've already received a range of comments from people telling us what's important to them.

'All these issues are important and it emphasises the value of public input in reviewing Tasmania Together after its first five years.'

As well as visiting the information bus that is touring the State, and attending

consultation sessions, people can have input to the Tasmania Together review in a number of ways.

Comments and submissions can be forwarded to the Tasmania Together Secretariat, GPO Box 123, Hobart 7001, or via the website www.tasmaniatogether.tas.gov.au, by email to secretariat@tasmaniatogether.tas.gov.au, or by telephone on 1300 306 302.

Comments and submissions need to be provided before Christmas and all contributions will be considered in the review of the Tasmania Together 20-year plan.

WHERE DO VOLUNTEERS COME FROM?

Volunteering is an amazing commitment made by many people from many varied lifestyles, backgrounds, incomes and education. Statistics tell us a lot about volunteering in a general sense, but little about the individuals involved. So where do they come from? What in their lives has led them to dedicate so much of their time, life and effort to volunteering for the environment? What sort of people end up being WILDCARE volunteers?

Perhaps the following profiles of two highly dedicated members of WILDCARE Inc will help answer these questions. One thing is certain, volunteers have an amazing wealth of knowledge, experiences and wisdom to draw on - and Bill and Richard demonstrate this clearly.



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Volunteering Tasmania Inc.

Andrew Smith & Richard Hammond have been elected to the Board of Volunteering Tasmania Inc.

There has only been a single meeting of the Board so far.

Richard was additionally appointed as the Public Officer.



Happy Christmas and thank you to everyone who has participated in volunteer activities during 2005 - ranging from whale rescues to track maintenance, monitoring endangered species to educating bushwalkers, weeding to leading tours, staffing visitor centres to staffing offshore islands.



WILDCARE Volunteer Profile - Bill Forsyth

I became a WILDCARE member prior to May 1998, 'one of the originals'.

In October of that year I saw an article in the second issue of WILDTIMES about the intention to have a trial Overland Track Warden (OTW) scheme, based at Waterfall Valley.

After walking the Overland Track several times with people who had never walked or carried packs before, two areas took my eye, Waterfall and Windermere, and I thought I would like to spend more time at each. On seeing the article I thought this would be a great idea.

My first trips to the Cradle area were when I lived in Devonport as a child, schooling at Devonport High School. I enjoyed those years immensely. While nothing fantastic scholastically, I did succeed as an athletics champion, made the football team in 'D' class and was an officer in the cadets company.

I introduced my children to the Cradle area at a young age and they had all climbed Cradle Mountain by about the age of 10. Two of the boys have gone on to climb in Nepal and the Andes.

On leaving school I went into the Agriculture Department in the Port Inspection Division base at Devonport. My next job was with A. Wander P/L, makers of Ovaltine based at Quoiba, in the building that is now Simplots Head Office. My sporting activities during this time included playing football with Devonport. From there I was transferred to Melbourne office, to the sales division for a number of years.

In Melbourne I was invited to train with Melbourne Football Team and Banks Rowing Team, however these interfered with my social life a bit too much.

After that I returned to Tasmania and joined H.C. Sleigh (Golden Fleece) marketing division, with responsibilities and travel statewide, where I spent most of my working life.

Later I moved into the management consulting area in the petroleum industry, which led me to Arnhem Land and into my own business as a ships provodore, providing a service for the bulk minerals carrier that frequented 'the Gulf'. I spent my time bushwalking, camping and running. I was a member of the local Hash House Harriers. I was living at Nhullunbuy (aboriginal for meeting place by the sea), which is on the north western coast of Arnhem Land, where the Arafura Sea meets the Gulf of Carpentaria.

From there I would holiday in Bali and shop in Singapore, because it was cheaper than heading south!

I returned to Tasmania after 10 years in the north and took up bushwalking in a serious manner. I walked in Freycinet, the Denison Ranges, on the Tasmanian Peninsula, on Maria Island and of course in the Cradle area.

Seeing the article in WILDTIMES lit a fire. If you had time it was a wonderful way to spend the summer.

Over the past eight years volunteer work has taken me to all parts of Tasmania, including the Cradle area, Narcissus, Birches Inlet and Melaleuca with the Orange Bellied Parrot program, and Maria Island, working with PWS staff and making friends, along with meeting walkers from all over the world.

WILDCARE Volunteer Profile – Richard Hammond

Born in Sydney, educated at Merrylands Primary School and Fairfield Boys High.

BSc and MappSc from UNSW part time while employed by CSR Chemicals on the shores of Homebush Bay as a chemical analyst responsible for product and waste stream analyses.

Athletics Blue, captain of the UNSW Athletics Club, captain of the UNSW Rifle Club, Secretary, then Treasurer, then President of the Sports Association, President of the UNSW Union. Also played squash for UNSW in Sydney club competition.

Joined NSW State Pollution Control Commission to help study Botany Bay while the port was being developed – best job I ever had, diving every day, out & about in boats, etc. I did a lot of open water diving in this period in Botany Bay, Jervis Bay and Sydney Harbour, and probably ate more than my fair share of Jervis Bay scallops.

Joined the mining industry as environmental superintendent of the first major open-cut base metal mine to come on-stream in NSW just outside Canberra, after the enactment of pollution control legislation in the mid-1970s. We proposed a long-term rehabilitation strategy to turn it into a waste dump for the ACT but that was rejected. It's now producing energy for the NSW electricity grid from biodegradation of household waste.

Resigned from the mining industry in 1983, got married and walked through a plate glass window three hours before the ceremony (which should have told me something, I guess, but I wasn't listening).

Joined the Department of Environment & Land Management in 1989 (leaving a 5-year-old daughter in Canberra), responsible for scientific services, after-hours complaints and


emergency response to chemical spills etc, including the development of response plans for maritime oil spills for all Tasmanian ports.

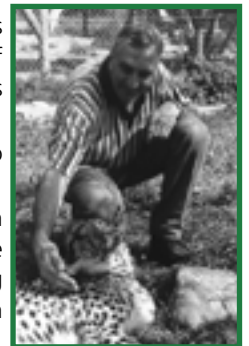
Transferred to Launceston in 1993 to run the Tamar Valley Airshed Study. Held the position of State Oil Pollution Control Officer and was one of the first to be notified of the grounding of the Iron Baron on Hebe Reef on 10 July 1995.

During this period, I chaired an ANZECC committee on marine debris which was part of an over-arching Federal government initiative on maritime pollution generally.

When in late 1996 it was decided that maritime pollution wasn't part of the core business of DPIWE, I decided it was time to do my own thing.

Since then, I've done vegetation mapping for an NHT project with Southern Midlands Council, consolidated emergency risk management plans for the SES and local councils, distributed mobile mapping software & solutions and promoted the appreciation of high quality single cask malt whiskies from Scotland. Not all of these 'activities' produce an income – particularly true of the last, but it is really enjoyable.

I went to the first AGM of WILDCARE in March 1998 and wasn't quick enough to step backwards when nominations for Vice-Chair were called for. I've been elected as Vice-Chair or Co-Chair every year since then. 



Happy Christmas and thank you to those people who may not have been able to volunteer but who continue to join and support WILDCARE Inc.

Group Reports

Gambusia Awareness and Eradication Project - Rodney Miller

We are almost at the end of the current Gambusia Project with just the Management Plan to complete.

We prepared a progress report for NRM North to show how successful the project has been. Copies of the report have also been sent to Andrew Smith, Michael Ferguson, Kerry Finch and Ruth Mollison.

Julie, Janice and Quenton met with Cathryn Murdoch and Howard Colvin from NRM North to discuss the project and funding. It looks like NRM North is willing to consider continuing the project until June next year to coincide with the next round of funding through the Investment Proposal process in May 2006, which may see the project funded for another year. We are waiting on final confirmation of how the process will work.

Since the last *WILDTIMES* report I have:

- attended a Coastcare Forum at Tamar Yacht Club, which provided the opportunity to talk to people familiar with the Gambusia issue as well as a few who were not.

Quenton from Fishcare delivered a presentation to the forum and included their involvement with the project.

- attended Science Week Event at Tamar Island, a great opportunity to talk to a different group of people from the community. Unfortunately poor publicity for the program meant numbers were low, however I did talk to a few people who were unfamiliar with the issue.
- expanded the Gambusia Management Committee with Kay Bailey from Tamar NRM and Steve Powell from TEMCO agreeing to sit on the Committee.
- attended the Trout Expo at Cressy and with Kerri's assistance spoke to approximately 185 people and gave out 77 brochures. This was a great event that provided an excellent opportunity to promote the Gambusia Issue.
- implemented an ongoing monitoring program of two eradication sites, which involves observation, dip netting and water testing. We are also going to begin some macro invertebrate sampling in the near future to gauge how the diversity and numbers recover.
- delivered a presentation to Devonport Fly Fishing Club where I spoke to 22 members about Gambusia and left 50 brochures for the club to distribute.
- attended the Five Rivers Waterwatch Seminar for Schools at Camp Clayton and gave presentations to a 2/3 class of 22 students, teacher and parent, a 3/4 class of 24 students, teacher and parent, plus spoke to 6 other people about Gambusia.
- distributed Gambusia brochures far and wide around the State with copies going to the Tasmanian Conservation Trust, Tasmanian Environment Centre and DPIWE in Hobart, Fishing Gear tackle shop and the Launceston Environment Centre. Schools involved with the Five Rivers Waterwatch Seminar including Miandetta, Sassafras, Railton, Nixon Street, Hillcrest, East

Devonport and Devonport Christian Primary Schools also received copies of the brochure.

- met with Rob Moreton (DPIWE Soils Officer) to discuss acid sulphide soils at the Wetlands and the risks associated with the proposed drying-out of areas of the wetlands to eradicate Gambusia. We have decided to contract a consultant to assess the risk of the drying process as well as a hydrologist to look at water movement in the lagoons.

While we have achieved a great deal in the last 12 months, there is still a lot to do, so hopefully further funding will be forthcoming and we can get rid of this devil of a fish once and for all.

Friends of Kate Reed Reserve – Rodney Miller

Our Work for the Dole team, under the supervision of David Ross and Chris Williams, are back in the reserve continuing track work. Some of the work involved re-laying some of the track beside the rivulet that had been washed away by flooding after the recent heavy rain. Unfortunately, after the track was re-layed our very unwelcome "friends" on motor bikes turned up and made a severe mess of the work. This ongoing saga with motor bikes is disheartening to say the least and PWS are endeavouring to address this difficult issue with extra patrols in the area.

Given the recent wet weather the team looks like they will be back on weed work for a while as some areas of the reserve are not accessible by vehicle to enable the transport of shale.

Friends of Wellington Park – Mike Bowden

Several working bees and other events have been held since June.

Weed removal Knights Creek Track 4 Oct 2005

Originally planned for the Mountain River site of a broom infestation, with snow low on the mountain it was decided to work on the area near the Tolosa entrance to Wellington Park where erica is threatening *Epacris acuminata* and *E. virgata* 'Kettering'. The weather also probably had an impact on volunteer turnout.



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Happy Christmas and thank you to the WILDCARE Office volunteers for each week updating member records, doing working bee mailouts, organising newsletter packaging and distribution, answering email, mail and phone enquiries, filling and generally keeping things ticking over.



We initially checked an area of *E. virgata* where a low volume erica infestation and some radiata pines has probably been worked on previously. We worked up from a boundary, below which the weeds were bad, and cleared through to the upper end of the Epacris. It was noted a small creek with a patch of erica still threatened this area plus that of Knights Creek Trail. This and the area before the lower work boundary was noted for future working bees (access to gate key would assist).

The Knights Creek Track erica infestation commenced near the junction with Tolosa Trail and followed up Knights Creek for a little over one kilometre. We cleared all sighted erica as per data from Richard Schahinger and also others found on an old side track. We found and removed a pine at the top end of the work area. The area is now basically cleared of erica and will be noted for follow up.

Check track for weeds North West Bay River and Cathedral Rock area 21 Sep 2005

The old track west of Cathedral Rock was checked for weeds and none were noted inside the park, nor anything of significance outside as far as we went. An old report indicated blackberry was present near Cathedral Rock, but it may have been removed.

We also checked the areas worked on previously beside the North West Bay River. The blackberry work seems to have been successful but an area of erica has some seedlings, which is not unexpected.

Gorse eradication Middle Island Fire Trail 6 Sep 2005

We completed the removal of gorse to the bend of Middle & Inglewood, worked on erica near the water hole, and old and new gorse growing in forest on the south side of Inglewood. This latter area had gorse removed some years ago, had been burnt in the interim and now has gorse seedlings.

The HCC ran a plant give-away prior to work starting which attracted quite a number of residents, but none to assist with the working bee.

Check condition of Mt Marian Track 29 Aug 2005

A check was made on the state of Mt Marian track, particularly

where the new section crosses over pineapple grass, and was found to be in satisfactory condition.

Erica eradication Goat Hills 2 Aug 2005

We cleared the erica area that had been worked on above the Goat Fire Trail over the previous three working bees. On checking towards the Montrose Trail a patch of old broom and erica was located near an old dwelling site that escaped the spraying done last year; these were cleared. Numerous broom seedlings were noted emerging from the soil.

An area of largish erica closer to Chapel Fire Trail was also noted for future work.

Weed eradication New Town Track, Main Fire Trail & McRobies Gully 5 Jul 2005

Follow-up visits to sites on New Town Track, Main Fire Trail near Breakneck Track and Main Fire Trail near McRobies Gully successfully cleared spray failures, other regrowths, missed and seedlings of erica.

A small area of gorse outbreak was dealt with just inside the park boundary on McRobies lower Fire Trail. A new erica site in the gully was noted for future action.

Tamar Island Wetland Centre Volunteers – Julie Nermut

Although it is winter we have been active as usual in the wetlands.

We held a successful launch of a photographic exhibition of Tamar Island Wetlands by volunteer St John Pound who has spent many hours photographing the wetlands and its wildlife.

Our interpretation skills were enhanced by an overnight trip in June to Freycinet National Park, with discussions with the staff at the visitor centre, walks in the park to view the scenery and the wildlife, and a trip to Bicheno to experience the penguins coming ashore.

Fifteen of our volunteers participated in tourism training with Transtrain on 27 July with a familiarisation trip of the Tamar Valley to develop and update our local knowledge. We visited the Exeter Visitor Centre, participated in a very informative guided tour of

Yorktown, had fun in the maze at Glengarry and had a delightful walk in Notley Fern Gorge.


As part of Science Week we staged activities for families at the centre on Saturday 20 August, the theme being "Winter in the Wetlands". Volunteers conducted guided tours and together with Waterwatch Co-ordinator, Sarah Tassell, helped children construct models of macro-invertebrates and paint a backdrop of the wetlands.

Friends of Mount Field – Peter Franklin

The group continued repairing the Lake Nicholls Hut. A new door and log book storage unit were fitted to the hut on 25 June, and a new log book delivered. The benches in the hut were painted. The door was constructed and painted by Kerry Smith and carried in by Greg Kidd and Michael Johnson from PWS. Kerry and Leigh Smith carried the old door most of the way out, with help from Greg


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Happy Christmas and thank you to Board members – the Co-Chairs, Secretary, Treasurer, Group Presidents and staff from our partner organisations.

and Michael for the remainder. A mighty effort with such awkward and heavy objects. Kerry did the bulk of the fitting of the door, with assistance from Mike Bowden, Leigh and Greg. Leigh installed the log book unit while Bronwyn Smith ruled the pages and stamped column headings. Peter Franklin and Dave Tucker worked on two drains where water flows onto the track and Dave assisted Sue Franklin with trimming overgrowing bauera and banksia near the hut.

Friends of Lillico Penguins – John Hughes

Activity for our group has been limited over the past four months as we don't man the platform during the non-breeding winter months.

In June we had a successful working bee where over 140 coastal native trees were planted at the eastern end of the reserve. The plants were donated, and the mats and guards were recycled from another project. We took the opportunity to also pull a few weeds and clear around earlier plantings. Revegetation and weeding of the reserve is an ongoing project.

We had our annual meeting at the end of August, which effectively marked the start of activities. Our roster commenced in the first week of September and we also had a roadside

clean-up day during the month.

Our Secretary, Julie Walker, represents us on the Devonport City Council weed strategy group. Membership of this group has two advantages for our group:

- recognition and support from the council
- assistance with weed control

North West Coastcare groups have come together to form a regional body to enhance their strength and better represent all coastcare groups. Friends of Lillico Penguins have affiliated with this body to ensure we are kept in the loop.

Our members were invited to the Coastcare Forum to be held in Burnie on 24 August and a number took part. Burnie City Council, Natural Heritage Trust and Cradle Coast NRM host the forum.

Derwent Avenue Group (DAGs)

Reserve I

Our Land Manager is the PWS and we are now in the process of drafting a Partnership Agreement with them in order to formalize our group's activities. This will give evidence of the scope of our work and the amount of voluntary hours involved. The process has covered most aspects of our work including risk management. Paul Dimmick, Land Manager PWS, was invited by the group to examine issues of warning signs and safety barriers, and to assist deciding to which level the Dave Burrows Pathway fits the different Australian track standards.

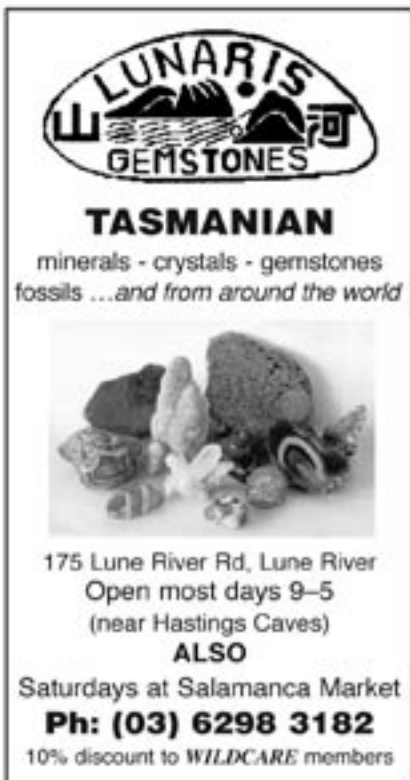
In our recent routine work our focus has been on redirecting excess water away from slumping cliffs and the sea shore by retaining water in small pools in the Reserve and by increasing endemic planting in areas where the exotic plants have been removed thus improving our knowledge of propagation. One of our members is successfully propagating plants from seed and is preparing papers on seed collection and propagating techniques for particular species in our area. We are also having success with propagation of cuttings. Our planting work has been boosted by three memberships of the Understorey Network. Three local growers are now propagating seeds and the seedlings will be available to us in six months.

Reserve II

Melanie Fazackerley of Coastcare visited the site recently with Paul Dimmick. She advised that the first step requires a map of pathways, the creek, pools of water, damaged trees, significant plants, etc. The second step will be listing of flora and fauna.

The site has considerable environmental damage but the flora is original. We are aware that it will require very careful planning to preserve the area and yet allow future public access.

When PWS formally approves managing Reserve II we plan to contact private owners adjoining the reserve and meet with Kingborough Council, PWS, WILDCARE Inc and Coastcare to discuss environmental damage, the contaminated creek, willow removal




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Board Meeting 11 August 2005

- The Board agreed that, given the continuing membership fees income, project funding would be put on hold pending a review in the future
- The Board agreed to not consider running paid membership advertisements in local journals & newsletters, in light of low membership
- The Board agreed that funding priority in the future should be aimed at employing an administrative assistant in the WILDCARE office
- DGR status is still pending. We continue to be advised by DEH that the application "is progressing"
- The Board resolved to seek alternative suppliers for our vests (including the provision of long sleeve jackets), given the problems with the current supplier
- Janice Miller reported the formation of another group in the north, based at Bell Buoy Beach. 

Happy Christmas and thank you to the PWS Rangers, Nature Conservation staff and Forestry Tasmania staff who have worked with our members on a wide range of projects, all over the State.



and possible usage by the public. Andrew Smith, Co-Chair WILDCARE Inc, visited the site in September and has offered to chair such meetings. This may be a very helpful way of handling the issues.

Wild Weeders – Jamie Cooper and Greg Stewart

The 'Wild Weeders' have recently returned from another successful mission on Flinders Island, where bridal creeper, *Asparagus asparagoides*, and asparagus fern, *Asparagus scandens* were treated. This year a team of six, with assistance from PWS and DPIWE Weed Section covered 650ha over 10 days, contributing over 500 hours of volunteer time. The team, with the assistance of legendary local weed-basher Wayne Warren, or the 'pink panther' as he is now known, crawled, bashed and climbed across the island to treat the infestations. All known sites were controlled and surveillance undertaken in the area surrounding the infestations. Bridal creeper (a Weed of National Significance, WONS) is a deciduous plant that dies back in summer and produces fresh vigorous growth during winter prior to the flowering period in spring. The ideal time for treatment is May to September.

Control of bridal creeper on Flinders Island is a national priority as it could potentially cause the loss of a number of species over the next decade or so. This is the second year the group has undertaken the control program. The results to date are excellent, with plant biomass reduced by an estimated 75%. Total eradication is feasible within the next decade, so long as the program is maintained and provision of support (financial and in-kind) is continued.

The Wild Weeders group was formed a couple of years ago to undertake strategic control efforts on weed threats to biodiversity and have since been involved in a number of projects. It is comprised of individuals from a range of backgrounds who are prepared to donate their time for high priority weed control. The team used the mighty yacht *Valhalla* to transport equipment and some personnel from Bridport to Flinders Island, substantially reducing transport costs.

The effort from the team was outstanding, with little time for recovery. Jason, our ex Taronga Park Zoo keeper, caused a bit of stir at the local hotel when he decided to put his foot up after a fairly productive day. He removed

it and sat it on the bench next to him (even amputees are Wild Weeders).

This year, to highlight the control program, we used a digital video camera to collect about seven hours of footage, which is currently being edited. A DVD will be produced outlining aspects of the eradication program and control efforts involved, and it will be used for monitoring purposes.

In addition to the work undertaken on Flinders Island we were able to call in to Long Island in Franklin Sound where an infestation of gorse, *Ulex europaeus*, is still present. The gorse was initially controlled in 2003 by a team of volunteers including a few of the Wild Weeders members and a number of control options were employed at the site ranging from application of Metsulphuron-S-Methyl (Brushkiller®) by handgun, to 'cut and paint' techniques using glyphosate. It was interesting to observe the effects of the treatments since 2003 and the recorded footage will be included on the proposed DVD.

The group has also been involved in a project to control boneseed, *Chrysanthemoides monilifera*, on Egg Island, situated in the Tamar River near Hillwood. The island is a Pacific Gull breeding site and dense infestations of boneseed covered approximately 85% of the island. The Wild Weeders, using the cut and paint method and hand-pulling, have cleared 80% of the mature boneseed plants. Another working bee is planned for 3&4 September. This will complete the removal of flowering plants with follow up control on seedlings required annually until the viable seed-bank is exhausted. 🐾

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**Happy Christmas and thank you to members of our Community Action in Reserves groups
– supporting 35 reserves throughout the State.**

Volunteering in Paradise

During a holiday on Flinders Island in 2001, my wife and I fell into conversation with the Island Development Officer. He told us of a Tasmanian PWS program that put volunteer caretakers on a small island in Bass Strait, approximately halfway between Flinders Island and Wilsons Promontory, for periods of three months. Our curiosity, and the thought of being 'lighthouse keepers', prompted us to contact the coordinating PWS ranger and apply for a posting.

After filling in the appropriate applications and supplying CVs and lists of abilities etc., we journeyed to Tasmania for an interview and were accepted as the first 'mainlanders' to be included in the program. We were initially to do the winter shift but were offered the summer 2002 period following the unavailability of the original caretakers.

So began the master plan

- Research and gather as much information about Deal Island
- Understand the duties and expected outcomes
- Establish how much personal gear we could take via aircraft to Tasmania and ultimately to the island
- Plan supplies for three months at our own expense, with no re-supply once on the island. Food would have to be purchased and packed in Launceston.
- Coordinate the payment of bills and holding of mail during our three-month absence, with no mail deliveries or posting facilities on the island

Deal Island is part of Kent Group National Park, Tasmania's latest park gazetted in 2001. It is approximately 1700 hectares of absolute beauty - high rocky headlands, secluded sandy beaches, tussock grass plains and forested areas. It is 60 kilometres from Flinders Island and about 80 kilometres from Wilsons Promontory. It supports a wide variety of wildlife including wallabies, possums, penguins, the occasional seal, raptors and other bird-life, and the white-lipped snake that is fortunately small and fairly inoffensive. The crystal clear waters abound with a good selection of fish, squid, crayfish and abalone. These waters have recently been declared a marine reserve.



Yachts at anchor in East Cove

The lighthouse, built in 1847 and operated by convicts,

stands on a high headland, 305 metres above sea level, and is the highest light in the southern hemisphere. This unfortunately proved a problem in low cloud and fog, which obscured it 40% of the time. Its exact location is Lat. 39° 29.8' S Long. 147° 19.3' E. The lighthouse was decommissioned in 1992 and came under the control of Tasmanian PWS.

As the light station was considered the most complete station remaining in Australia, it was heritage listed and the caretaker program was commenced. The caretakers' residence is in a compound about three kilometres from the lighthouse and overlooks East Cove and Murray Pass, a one-kilometre wide passage of water between Deal, Erith and Dover islands. The compound contains the caretakers' residence, a visitors' house, the original superintendent's house (built in 1847 and now a museum), a radio room, a generator room, a large well-appointed workshop, a storage shed, a large vegetable garden and the oldest existing outhouse in Australia. As caretakers, we were to maintain a presence to protect the facilities and to carry out a list of work duties. These duties included painting (anything that didn't move), fencing, cleaning, weed eradication, animal and bird surveys, rain recording, track work, gardening, and maintenance of the generator, quad bike, mowers, pressure pump, water storage amenities and the lighthouse and houses.



Deal Island Lighthouse

So at the end of November we travelled to Launceston and spent a week buying, packaging and delivering our supplies to the shipping company that would deliver them to Flinders Island. We would fly by light aircraft to

Happy Christmas and thank you to our network of wildlife carers all over the State - working around the clock to care for and rehabilitate hundreds of injured or orphaned animals.

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Membership Renewal Form (2006)

Complete and mail to *WILDCARE Inc*, c/- GPO Box 44 Hobart 7001

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Post Code: _____

Contact Phone number: _____

If the above details have changed since you renewed/joined in 2005 please provide your previous address details so that we can find you on the membership database.

Please leave my background information and volunteer preference unchanged on the database.

Please update my record with the following additions...

Preferred reserve/place (if you have one) _____

Tick any volunteer activity categories you wish to add to your record.

CARes — Community Action in Reserves: General management assistance, Adopt-a-Track Program, Enterprise projects, visitor education, walking hut maintenance, Habitat Care, Action for Coasts, Cave Care.

Naturecare — conserving Tasmania's plants and animals: Whale rescue, Oil Spill response, Raptor research, Wildlife survey, Threatened species assistance, Data records (computer), Community education, Fox eradication assistance, Land For Wildlife, Caring for injured/orphaned animals. **Botanical Guardians:** Monitoring, Survey, Replanting, Propagation, Field collection, Community education, Orchid Guardians program.

Heritagecare — conserving Tasmania's cultural heritage: Site recording, Data records (computer), Archival research, Excavation assistance, Community education, Historic site management.

Fishcare — promoting a sustainable fishery: Fishcare North West, Fishcare North, Fishcare South, Office support, Community education, Schools education, Research assistance.

WILDCARE Inc Office: Special event assistance, Administrative assistance, Member records, Newsletter production.

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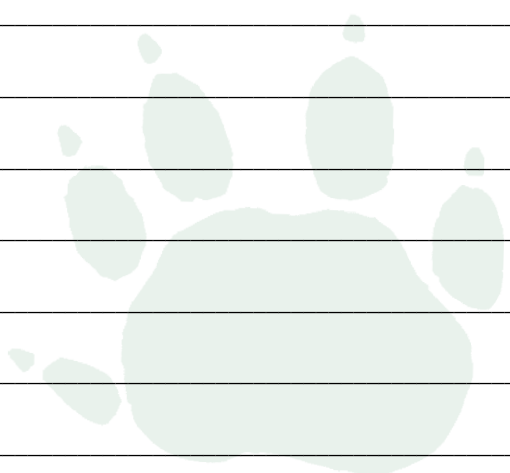
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I wish to support the WILDCARE Gift Fund by making a once-only donation by Cheque or Money Order

I wish to support the WILDCARE Gift Fund by making an automatic fortnightly donation from my salary
(see form on reverse)

...of the following amount:

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Payment details (tick as applicable)

I have attached a Cheque Money Order for the amount indicated above, made payable to 'WILDCARE Gift Fund' for my once only donation

I have completed the Salary Deduction Form on the back of this form. I understand that WILDCARE Inc will forward the form to my Employer so regular fortnightly deductions can be arranged. (NOTE: State Servants need to complete a Tasmanian Government Direct Deposit Authority – please contact your Human Resources Branch or Department intra-net site)

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I understand that this information is for internal records only and will not be distributed other than for taxation, legal and auditing requirements.

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The WILDCARE Inc Office will enter you on our donor database and forward this form to your Employer.*

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Date entered into donor database _____ by _____

Date forwarded to Employer: _____ by _____

Employer HRM use only

HRM Actioning Officer: _____ Date: _____

Checked by: _____ Date: _____



Flinders, load our supplies onto a charter fishing boat and head off to our home for three months.

So began the adventure

Our research had not entirely prepared us for the beauty of island, which is reminiscent of a tropical Queensland island - until you step into the water. Water temperature was about 14°, but did rise to about 19° in February. We had also not envisioned the number of yachts, fishing boats, crazy kayakers etc that would call in to visit the island. Many a great BBQ was held at the jetty and many friendships were made and experiences shared. This was the bonus of our stay. In between performing our duties we walked all over the island and wondered at the many magnificent sights and intimate coves and cliffs. Fishing was always on the agenda although I had to rely on the resident fish identification book before enjoying the meal. I spent a day aboard a visiting fishing boat from Victoria and made it back to shore with very rubbery sea legs and a bucket full of superb fish that sustained us for a month.

Our house was very comfortable, with gas stove, gas hot water and a gas fridge that regularly needed servicing. Power was supplied at night from a beautiful old Lister generator that was lovingly cleaned everyday and serviced religiously. Although there was considerable water storage we could not get water through the day without starting the generator and turning on the water pump - so I was tasked to install a large tank high on a hill to gravity feed to the compound to give us 24-hour pressure. A freighter delivered this tank at 7pm one evening along with four 220-litre drums of fuel and 10 large gas cylinders. Imagine our surprise when the freighter edged in towards the beach and rolled everything into the sea. Fortune would have it that we had some other volunteers on the island that week so it was strip off, into the water and get the supplies ashore. With great difficulty drums and tanks were loaded onto the trailer and the tough little quad bike dragged several loads up the one-kilometre track to the compound. Moving the tank was a little more complicated as I had to build an extended frame to the trailer, load the tank and then very slowly edge it up the track to its prepared site. I then installed the fire pump adjacent to the main water storage, connected it into the line and within 30 minutes pumped 5000 litres of water up to the new header tank. Mission accomplished.



The House Compound

I resurrected the old HF radio and was able to establish communications with Mersey Radio, a volunteer station in Devonport. This station supplied weather forecasts and assistance to Bass Strait 'boaties'. I had many enjoyable chats with the station operator Lionel on 2524 and 4535, and regularly acted as a relay when communications proved difficult. Bass Strait is a very unpredictable mass of water. You would experience two to three days of perfect calm and then rapid deterioration with squalls and wind. Wind would blow continuously for days at 20 to 40 knots and at times up to 70 knots. Learning to work (and walk) in this wind was an experience. It would blow your tools away, blow your ladders over, blow your paint off the brush and occasionally blow you off your feet. The trick was to plan your jobs on the side of the island away from the wind and be ready to change quickly if the wind tracked you down. There were days when we experienced severe squalls with mountainous seas smashing onto the rocky headlands and casting salt spray right across the island. It was an exhilarating experience to 'crawl' out to the edge of a cliff, stare into the face of the gale and feel the power of nature.

One day we received a phone call from a boat anchored in the cove below the compound. It turned out to be the Australian Customs boat *Corio Bay*. We were invited on board to meet the crew and the invitation was extended to dinner. As we went ashore on that beautiful, sunny, clear afternoon, a heavy sea fog rolled in and nil visibility prevailed for several hours. Another vagary of Bass Strait.

New Years Eve was celebrated at the top of the lighthouse with a lovely hot dinner and champagne. We started the lighthouse generator, turned on the internal lights and toasted the New Year. No, we did not turn on the beam (totally forbidden).

At the end of our stay we returned to Brisbane very relaxed and filled with great memories. We were asked to include a section in our report as to how we dealt with the isolation. Isolation wasn't the problem - returning to civilisation was more difficult. Noise, smells, large crowds, gaudy shopping centres, forgotten pin numbers, road rage, countless stories from stressed friends etc and the frenetic pace of society convinced us it was time for a 'sea change'.

Paradise revisited

Within six months we were offered the Autumn 2004 stint on the island and so began the second adventure. This time we decided to move permanently to Tasmania and to get actively involved in their volunteer *WILDCARE* programs. We returned to Deal in June 2004 and found the island still as beautiful, the weather still as variable, the water still as cold, the visitors still as interesting and the solitude still as perfect. We experienced weather patterns that were considered to be the worst for 30 years but were still entertained by the variables of these patterns.

As Anzac Day fell during this stint we decided to hold our own dawn service. On 23 September 1943, an Airspeed Oxford aircraft out of East Sale had been performing an anti-submarine exercise near the island. The aircraft had been performing several rolls over the island when it went into a dive and crashed into a hillside very close to the

lighthouse. All four crew were killed. They were buried on site but eight months later their bodies were removed to the Victorian War Cemetery at Springvale, Victoria. The engines and several pieces of the aircraft remain in the bush, so pre-dawn we made our way to the site of the crash and held a very private but moving service. There was a very surreal moment as the day dawned and we looked down into Squally Cove, not unlike another cove so far away, and visualised landing craft, high cliffs and that moment in history.



The Aircraft Wreck Site

The island had now been equipped with VHF and UHF radios, so we could now talk to yachts, fishing boats as well as volunteer marine radios. This proved very helpful as many craft sheltered around the islands during the many storms. It was not unusual to receive a phone call from a yacht owner planning to stay at Deal, offering to bring any supplies that might be running low, especially red wine.

At the end of this stay we headed to our new home in Tasmania, content with the wonderful opportunities we had experienced. The offer has already been made to

return for another stint within the next two years. How could you refuse? There are many volunteer programs on other islands around Tasmania and we will also entertain these possibilities over the next few years. I have joined the Tasmanian Division of the Australian Institute of Emergency Services and have also become a member of the Lachlan Rural Fire Brigade. Volunteering is addictive.

Shirley and Dallas Baker OAM

Photographs courtesy of Shirley Baker.

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WILDTIMES
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Issue #	Article Submissions Due	Publication Date
27	31 Jan 2006	Feb 2006
28	30 Apr 2006	May 2006
29	31 Jul 2006	Aug 2006

* Publishing of Issue 26 delayed to Dec 2005

Publication dates are subject to receiving a sufficient number of articles to allow publishing to go ahead.

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WILDCARE TASMANIA NATURE WRITING AWARD 2005

The following story by Dael Allison was judged one of two runners-up for 2005, with the other by Adrienne Eberhard to be published in Issue 27. The winning story by Mark Tredinnick was published in Issue 25.

Portrait of a Wild Pool

*They carry/Time looped so river-wise
about their house*

Robert Graves

There are a dozen of us, two families. The adults laze on the clear gravel shelf of the creek-pool's outlet end while the kids, and an eager black-and-tan border-collie, mill in the water.

Bryony asks suddenly 'Do you have another dog?'

'No...'

She is pointing to a small humpy shape in the shaded shallows near the western bank. It is a platypus. It drifts calmly a couple of metres distant from the kids' and dog's noisy midstream oblivion. Then it executes a sleek rolling dive and disappears, probably to the hidden water-level entrance of its burrow.

I had previously experienced a platypus swimming with humans. Years ago, when we owned a remote East Gippsland property in the foothills of the Great Dividing Range, we were tranquilly swimming in the magnificent, broad stretch of water formed by the confluence of the Wentworth and Mitchell rivers, when a platypus surfaced a mere body-span away. Its appearance was so unexpected I yelped in surprise, but the platypus was undeterred. Like a languid water-sprite it duck-dived, reappearing to swim close by. Then it slid beneath the surface again, gliding off downstream.

Everything I've ever read on this small mammal, fact and fiction, notes its reclusive nature. A favourite childhood book, exquisitely illustrated by Walter Cunningham, was Leslie Reef's *Shy The Platypus*. Platypus are shy. Theories for their aloofness range from their territorial nature to the unfortunate reality that a century ago, in parts of Eastern Australia, they were shot and trapped to near extinction. Their soft, double-layered pelts, denser than otter fur, made them commercially exploitable. Platypus were made into coats and hats, both in Australia and overseas.

Lore also indicates the platypus lifestyle is predominately nocturnal;

zoos and sanctuaries dimly illuminate their enclosures to simulate nighttime conditions. Yet from our verandah or the creek bank we often see a platypus calmly exploring its territory in full daylight. One year, after a summer flood manifested a cone of gravel in the very heart of the pool, we saw the platypus frequently over a week, often at midday. Beneath the sunlit water it busily vacuumed the cone's fine gravel with its electro-receptor-rich cartilaginous bill, foraging for aquatic delicacies like caddis fly larvae, worms, shrimps and tadpoles, happily submerged for five or ten minutes.

My most intriguing meeting with this curious monotreme occurred in the creek-pool a few years ago, during another flood. This was a biggie, breaking a three-year drought. The rain started on Christmas Eve and its drumming on our iron roof soon drowned out the thunder. By daylight the usually tea-clear creek was a churning chocolate mass metres higher than its normal level, filled with the detritus that accumulates from the forest and upstream farms over dry years; a minestrone of uprooted plants, leaves, moss and algae, made thick and chunky with rotting logs, fence posts, broken branches, whole trees.

That spring I had witnessed two platypuses in the pool. I saw them separately but as they are generally solitary mammals, and one was distinctly larger, it was exciting to think there was a mating. The pool's silty western bank provides a perfect habitat for a platypus burrow. The water's edge is overhung with strappy green lomandra, and the bank is stabilised by long-buried logs and the binding roots of ironwood trees and kanuka, as well as that relentless colonizer, privet. This is the creek's backwash side. Even in

full flood the flow here is gentler, the main-current scything along the steeply plunging rockface of the opposite bank.

The platypus digs with strong claws, the front-feet web membranes that make her a powerful swimmer are folded back. She uses her broad tail to shift the silt aside, excavating a burrow up to twenty metres long, sloping upwards so the nesting chambers are above the water level. In summer we often find holes in the silt of the bank above the burrow. I have found no information to suggest these could be airholes, but each year we check for them amongst the bank's weeds and native grasses. Sometimes they are gone or barely visible, filled with crusted silt, webs and dead leaves, but when we see a platypus in the pool the holes are clear, with silt freshly scratched from below the humus level. They were clear this year, it seemed the female was nesting. Gestation is approximately one month then the female lays her small sticky eggs, usually a pair. The pups hatch a week or so later. (Perhaps kittens is more apt name for platypus young; there doesn't seem to be an official title. Nor is there a designated plural; platypus, platypuses and platypi are variously used.) Small



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and hairless, the young crawl to where they can suckle the seeping milk from mammary patches, attaching themselves to motherfur. The mother curls her tail against her belly in lieu of a pouch, holding them safely.

When, after three days, the flood peaked, the bank sheltering the burrow was a metre and a half underwater. What sort of instinct would such animals have to predict this sort of calamity? In years of drought or other stress a female kangaroo can re-absorb her waiting embryo; chances of survival are far greater without a foetus attached to the nipple as well as a joey in the pouch. Could a platypus have the wild intuition to predict a flood and cache her young in safety, or prepare her burrow defensively? By this flood's occurrence in late December would the pups have been mature enough to leave the nesting chamber?

On day three, fretting about their fate, I donned my blue gumboots, grabbed

a multi-coloured umbrella and threw my young daughter's Red Riding Hood cape over my head and shoulders for extra protection from the relentless rain. Skidding down the narrow path to the grassy tractor track, normally three meters above the pool, I found it was now the edge of the flood. Standing on the water-lapped grass, a spot of ludicrous brightness within the valley's streaming green, the peculiar roll of a slick dark shape in the moiling water caught my eye. A sub-note in the swollen creek's roar, the basso rumble of large rocks rolling along the streambed underlined the flood's destructive force. There seemed little chance anything living could survive in the rampant mass of debris thrashing through the central current.

But the dark shape rolled again, a few metres further downstream. Why hadn't it spun away in the seething detritus? I peered through the rain, trying to make out what it was; a car tyre perhaps or a dead animal, the scaly knob of an elkhorn fern. Then it turned back towards where I stood, dodging through the stick-matted backwash, and swam directly to my feet.

The platypus! She hovered there, paddling gently in the grassy shallow, small and sleek and unscathed, taking a breather not a foot from my blue boot tips. We sized each other up. This small unassuming animal seemed the essence of wildness; I wondered what she made of me. Time seemed suspended; after a long moment she pushed away from the grass and plunged, with apparent relish, back into vortex of the flood.

Each flood writes a new narrative in the pool. Spring-birthing from the flank of the sleepy plateau to our north, the young stream bolts down the escarpment, broadening when it reaches this narrow twisting valley. The dense stands of red and white cedar, white beech, turpentine, tallowwood and brushbox succumbed to beef and dairy farms a hundred years ago. These trees were giants; the first white settler here bark-roofed a hollow stump to live in while he built his house. Felled with sweat and cross-cut saws the forest elders were dragged by straining bullocks for loading onto creaking jinkers, and the long trip to the fledgling settlement on the mother river. There, in one of the last patches of subtropical floodplain rainforest left standing on the east coast, they were milled into flitches and loaded onto paddle steamers; the turpentines destined to prop up

wharves and quays in Sydney Harbour, the cedars to grace the New South Wales Parliament and the grand homes of Sydney as wall-panelling, balustrades and furniture.

There were escapees. In the emerald denseness of slopes that should have been too steep for pillaging there remain some moss-shrouded forms of the fallen. If the old trees hold the wisdom of the forest, perhaps that wisdom is maintained by these fallen ghosts. Some travelled the flood pathway down the creek; four or five large trunks are buried in the silt and gravel of our pool, each flood unwraps a new snag or re-covers an old one. Resting on the backwash side these logs contribute to the bank's humus and stability, creating habitat for platypus.

A Chinese Proverb advises 'When you drink the water, remember the spring.' Farms patch the valley between this pool and its source. The nearest up-stream settlement is a cluster of structures; farmhouses, outbuildings, a hall, the old school. After these the creek winds a secret three-kilometre path, gurgling over rocky reefs and tumbling into tree-shaded deeps to reach our property, which we have dedicated as a permanent conservation zone. There the waters slide below a remnant of the original dense rainforest, a richness of spreading figs, canopy birds-nest ferns and hanging vines. The forest floor is a multi-jewelled litter of fallen leaves, orchids, algae-graced rocks, fluorescent mosses and fungi. Water purifies, to a certain extent, through aeration. By the time the creek has tumbled this downstream path to the pool the water is well oxygenated and sparkling fresh. We remember the spring because we rely on it. We pump its water to our gardens and our mudbrick house. We drink it.

Due to the creek's rapid cleared-country fall, and the dirt roads edging and crisscrossing it, flooding is often significant and can carry a huge burden of silt and gravel. The pool's bed changes constantly. Typically there is a broad shelf of sand at the outflow end, a gentle entry-point for the young and the tentative, easy on the feet. But some years we stumble in over large pebbles and slippery bedrock, with a wary eye to the newly exposed stubs of the old, pool-embraced logs.

Winters here are dry, summer brings the floods. The first, usually freezing, swim of spring, or the first post-flood

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dip is cautious. There is no knowing what changes time or deluge have wrought. The gravel dump, that the platypus so patently enjoyed foraging in, materialised during a mid-summer flood. Returning home from a few days' absence in hot and sticky weather my first impulse was a plunge into the pool. Breast-stroking against the turbid, turbulent, mid-stream current I ran aground! The central flow depth of the pool is normally over two metres; inconceivably it was now twenty centimetres. Fine gravel had been swirled into an elliptical cone, we could barely swim past in the new shallows on either side to reach the deeper water beyond. We feared a progressive clogging of the pool would spell its demise, but another flood a month later took all the gravel away.

In *Waterlog*, Roger Deakin's wonderfully idiosyncratic 'under the skin' swimming exploration of Britain's waterways and pondages, it is clear that no matter what hidden or well-used stretch of water Deakin samples, his homing instinct is locked on the moat by his home in Suffolk. Each time he dives in he gauges the water's freshness, its temperature and weed-growth. He takes stock of the air, the birdlife, the seasonal changes of the overhanging trees. He checks the state of the moat's inhabitants and incubates tadpoles in an aquarium to better their chances of survival. Annually he clears the smothering weed. He knows his stretch of water intimately.

Despite similar touchstones there can be no such shepherding of our pool. Deakin's spring-fed moat is topped up by England's usually reliable rainfall. This, along with aquatic creatures and plant-growth, keep the water fresh and viable. The pool I have co-existed with for over two decades depends on unpredictable rains and floods. Twice we have seen the creek-flow reduced to a barely discernible trickle, the pool remaining deep but developing a stagnant smell while we waited with bated breath for rain. Floods can be destructive but they are necessary to the epic story of the pool, the way it is shaped and renewed. Without these periodic scourings the pool would choke. Tonnes of matter pass through it each year. The first white settlers on our land, drivers of an ill-fated bullock team, depended on the creek for more than drinking water. The family shat

from a forked tree hanging over the water downstream, calling the floods 'the twice yearly flush'.

This pool exists because the landform once slowly shrugged itself almost vertical, then infinitesimally the rocks disrobed. Above the pool the hill rises like a sensuously naked shoulder, smooth and darkly glistening, the creek wrapping it like a silk-velvet stole. A while back, give or take a few million years, the somnolent earth of this region yawned and magma gushed into its opening throats. Volcanic plugs show where the earth once spread its surface; now they thrust high and bare from the valley floor to touch the sky. The smooth dark density of the rock rising from the pool is probably igneous; I wish I knew more of its morphology. If I shared artist William Robinson's godlike view I could look down on this land's topography and read its turns and twists, the pentimento of changing. And I could follow the progress of the earlier, higher incarnations of the stream as they polished the rock-shoulder smooth. I feel very small under this hill.

Trees manage to grow on the hill's rocky face although none are large, the soil profile is too thin to support vigorous growth. Tenaciously they root in crevices, exploring for deeper seams. In drought many die, thin sticks bear testament, but after rain the survivors leaf densely, simulating a bushfire's aftermath. The strong, slender verticals of the dead and living trunks patterning the hill echo Arthur Boyd's vast tapestry in the Reception Hall of the Parliament in Canberra.

Leaves fall constantly from these trees into the pool. They glide to one end, then the wind changes its direction and they glide back. Slowly, inevitably, they saturate and sink. When the creek runs low and the flow is dormant the drowned leaves sigh up from their rotting netherworld in gentle, silent, explosions. Swollen with their own decomposition they recompose in a lilting dervish whirl, back to the redemption of light. Flesh and colour leached away, glossy black and stinking, they clot into ghostly mats on the surface, clinging in a communion of decay, then slowly separate and spread apart. Some seek immortality, drifting on the wind again, the pressure-change from water to air inflating them into

small black bladder-sailed boats. But their grasp on air is ephemeral. They sink alone, for the final time.

The pool often dresses in vivid raiment. Leaf and petal cast bronze and silver wishing coins on the meniscus and on days when the air is perfectly still, the pool's dark face captures the sky; cumulus clouds building their snowy billowings downwards into blue. Sculptor of place, Andy Goldsworthy, could have chased the wind to gather all the scattering leaves, weaving them into a gently heaving Persian carpet of scarlet, ochre, green and russet. In spring falling kanuka flowers cloak the surface with a floating filigree of deepest yellow; in December the pool is swathed in a peachskin fuzz, the stamens of ironwood flowers and their fine pollen rendering the surface the palest gold. When I breaststroke through, my wake is clear, fluid darkness.

Wodwo, Ted Hughes' solitary, mythic creature of the river ponders 'What am I to split the glassy grain of water'. There is something mythic in bodies of wild water; in their unpredictability they can never be completely known. Beyond controlling, they contain the essence of place. It is easy to imagine

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Thanks for all of your hard work and dedication!

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a sub-aquatic deity in this pool, an amphibious Wodwo wandering as easily through the water as through air, watching, protecting, being. Animistic religions ascribe a soul to all things in nature, each rock and tree. Aboriginals often clap their hands or throw a pebble into a body of water to alert its Spirit of their approach. Walking alone down the narrow, deeply shaded path to this creek pool, stepping over the moss-soft log to the dark lap of the water's edge and looking through the veiling leaves up the still, indifferent stretch of water, there is that imperative of awareness. To recognize. To be respectful.

What is this Wodwo mythicness? Annie Proulx calls it the Wer-Trout in a short story of the same name, pitting Sauvage and Rivers, her eponymous protagonists, against a welling fear of wilderness. The more deeply the two men journey into the swampy heartland of wild rivers the more visceral their terror becomes. If one considered nature malign it would not be hard to imagine the pool below our house as the seat of a vengeful god or creature spirit. A Yowie perhaps. In the deep indefinable reaches of the dark water something unknown could be lurking, keeping itself to itself. Or not. It could be waiting, with long cold fingers ready to reach, to grasp and explore. There are times in this pool when the impulse is to swim only in the top layers of the water, to draw knees closer to chest, to avoid the shadowed recesses. Of course there could equally be benign presences, water sprites or faeries; nurturing, beneficent, seductive. Is it human instinct to anthropomorphise such places? To weave stories, spells of awareness and protection? The mythic nature of this pool could simply be the pool itself; the mystery of its source, its flux and changing, its continuation. An existence neither malign nor benign – an existence that simply *is*.

What *is* part of this pool is poetry, the hieroglyphy of reflections, the light and dark polarities of planished ripples. The follow-me loopings of the pair of monarch flycatchers dropping from twigs to write on space in curling arabesques. The sound of air unzipping as an azure kingfisher flashes up the creek, a pure, straight arrow-point, like a tiny jewel-bright Shinkansen in a vast green tunnel. Mild October evenings are a lacework of drifting fireflies; crickets and frogs creak songs of seduction, silvering the silence with tremulous longing.

The pool's calligraphic brush drips colour. Eucalypts drop leaves like scarlet scimitars and vermilion dragonflies dart

and hover, dabbing a heart's brilliance on khaki water. The gloom below is saturated with the greens and ochres of water-polished rocks, pebbly shallows flaunt the nacre of mussel half-shells, cracked open by cormorant and heron. Freshwater crayfish, glimpsed rarely, flash car-duco turquoise, olive and peacock blues, and when rain paints a lavender lustre on the grey rockface the scraggy black-green mosses effloresce to viridian. By day the sky is here, caught in the pool's blue or goose-down mirror; by torchlight at night the eyes of tiny shrimps, tenaciously clinging to rocks under gushing water, are neon-pink. A pallid Marlene Deitrich moon floats face up in the inky water.

The string-like Gordian worm has its own sheen as it twines around my hand. I release it back to the pool and watch it swim in sine-waves, a delicate underwater rainbow. Named for Gordius, a peasant of Ancient Greece who, by being in the right place at the right time, fulfilled a prophecy to become King. Gordius gratefully dedicated his cart to Zeus, tying it to a post with a knot that could never be undone. Alexander the Great solved the problem in 333AD in his usual forthright manner, hacking through the knot with his sword - proving the power of lateral thinking. Gordian worms often cluster in writhing knots, although we see them singly in the pool where they happily corkscrew and untangle themselves. The hatched Gordiid larvae inch (or millimetre) along the shallows until imbibed by a host, usually the aquatic lava of an airborne insect, which then flies off to fulfil its life-promise – to be eaten by something bigger and hungrier. The worms here develop in mole-crickets. If you accidentally step on one a worm extrudes from its anus. Clearly, hosting a worm parasite that is half your body mass is not much fun; mole crickets are cranky and they clatter malevolently across the floorboards of our house on summer nights. The Gordian worm, however, is harmless to humans and a fascinating inhabitant of the pool; we see several each summer, looping along in the slow current.

Eels are the pool's dark notes, the crotchets and quavers, sly squiggles seen from the corner of the eye, the sinuous rods that rule the pool. Their snake simulation is redeemed by their curiosity and wry, fixed, sphinx-like smile. Small eels sometimes slither between our feet in the shallows and from the bank I once watched in awe as a king glided past, thicker than

my arm and half as long again. There are other sinuous dwellers here too, reptiles like to live near water where frogs and crickets are plentiful. But the few black snakes we see are cautious, flickering quickly away, or if they are swimming they ripple to the furthest bank, beating a quicksilver retreat. Once we saw a python at the pool. Wrapped around itself like a turban it hung in the branches of a tree, low over the water, probably digesting, its light and dark green patterning mirroring the ripples below. We swam beneath, watching. After a week it was gone.

Another one-off poolside sighting was a small, grayish snake also coiled but without the python's sinuous elegance. This stumpy little reptile looked like a baby when I stepped unwittingly beside it in long grass; small and harmless. Its response was not to slither off like a black snake but to point its tail-tip in the air, wiggling it like a worm. I was enchanted – as an unwary bird might be, the lure of easy prey. I watched for a while then plunged in for my swim. A friend identified it later as a death adder. Disbelieving we consulted a snake book; the description fitted perfectly and we were geographically within its range. The pool's environs also shelter funnelweb spiders. There are basic rules for co-existing with such potent creatures - awareness and, in the immortal words of comic Ali G; 'Respect Mon!'

The pool engenders endless stories, its inhabitants could write their own 'Secret Life of Us'. The caddisfly larvae in their commandeered twig suits, creeping along the rockface gobbling algae, then losing their grip, rolling into chasms, and slowly, heroically, clawing their way back. Or the sexy damselfly equivalent of the Mile High Club. Or 'The Push', a dozen yellow-cheeked black cockatoos, flying over; a dynasty of entrenched larrikins with tight familial loyalties. They loop together in a lazy rabble, shouting insolently, cracking cocky jokes, with no qualms about disturbing the neighbourhood. Setting up a squat in the trees above the pool they sociably crack gumnuts and peel bark from the branches, scrabbling in a grub quest. Gouging with hooked beaks, their litter patters into the water. A cockatoo flying alone sounds bereft, calling for reassurance or muttering querulously to itself as if it can't stop talking. Reunions are cacklingly joyful. I float languidly, listening to their gossip. A lapis lazuli dragonfly lands on me.

On summer evenings we take plastic chairs and beer down to the water's



edge and watch the drama of the golden skinks and punkish baby waterdragons darting after fallen alates on the sloping rockfaces. Alates, the breeding phase of ants and termites, issue from the earth in a swooning, light drenched flight. They fall in thousands, dropping their wings, their life so random that only a few pairs will breed and form new nests. With our feet in cool water tiny guppies cluster to suck skin flakes from our skin. There are bigger fish too, bass, catfish. We take no fish, crustaceans or shellfish from the pool; with logging and fertilizer-based farming up the valley, its balance is fragile. An upstream fertilizer spill years ago caused excessive algae growth, de-oxygenating the water. For some time the pool looked dead, even small stream-life all but gone. Farmers upstream also use poisons. Corporations like Monsanto swear blind that glyphosate will kill only targeted plants, but time and trials have proven otherwise. Leached into waterways Roundup kills small crustaceans, affecting the foodchain. 'Aquatic-safe' poisons have been developed with similar reassurances. Why should we believe them? We weed by hand.

Long before committing to parenting, I read *Escape to an Island*, Eleanor Alliston's account of her family's life on Three Hummock Island, north of Tasmania. I was struck by a photograph of Eleanor's young daughter, swimming naked in a grass fringed pool. From memory the sub-text was; 'We came to the Island to give our children this.' My children have also grown with wild water and nakedness is first nature to them. My daughter's childhood summers centred on pool play, bare-bottomed handstands the order of the day. Every summer children have added rocks to the natural weir hemming the pool; here the creek's quietude is shrugged off, releasing it to sing again its tributary song as it hurries downstream to its next manifestation. My son places bigger rocks now, tending the wall with the measured reverence seen in the old black-clad women who nurture the ancient shrine gardens of Japan, sweeping each leaf from the purity of moss with soft twig brooms. His efforts secure three or four additional centimetres in the pool's depth, then floods move the rocks away again.

Now twenty, my son shimmy's up an ironwood, a tree that has grown tall with him. White and naked in the green gloom of foliage he snakes along a branch finally stout enough to hold him, tying a rope fast. Back on earth he

attaches a cross-stick to the dangling end, tests the swing's strength, finds it adequate, and backsteps up the bank, rope taut. He pauses in anticipation, then bolts downhill into a flying leap. From my water-level vantage he is all skinny luminosity and hairy bum. The splash is volcanic, the depth seems inadequate, I hold my breath. He shoots back into air, exultant, water streaming.

'Did you touch? Are you ok?'

'Yeah. Just my feet. Its great, you can't hurt yourself.'

Swivelling in the effervescence he absorbs the still swinging rope, a life-long dream. Turning back, his face is radiant.

'Sweet!'

He thrashes through the shallows, clambers up the bank, grasps the rope again, the water still sparking and popping where he landed.

Friends come from the city, setting themselves adrift on a blow-up boat, immersing in the pool's *sonne et lumiere*. Bright ribbons of water reflect a sunlight dance up tree trunks, under leaves, into air. Birds, bees, cicadas, zinging flies and beetles create contrapuntal melodies; sandpaper figs plop, the water chatters over stones like a half-heard, half-known language; a hidden pigeon's liquid pouring notes sound like red-wine decanting from a bottle.

Maggs drags herself away from the pool to return to work. Veteran of disaster relief and humanitarian work, nursing in countries like Somalia and East Timor, now she leaves for Iraq. We party in Newtown with other friends from Aid missions, to send her off, delaying her departure by two days. Her arrival briefing in Baghdad is rescheduled, so she is not killed in the bombing of the U.N. Headquarters in Iraq. As she surely would have been. As her briefing manager was. She coordinates the relief and cleanup, mopping skin and blood from walls and floors, sifting through shattered glass and the confetti of papers to match documents with bodies. Once this grisly and monumentally tragic task is done, she e-mails; 'The creek! The creek!' The pool becomes an invocation for reality.

What happened to the platypus in the year of the Christmas flood? I can only assume, from the way she plunged back into the chaotic flow, that she was happy feeding in the cornucopia of the pool's flood-rich consommé. But the fate of her young? Platypus breed in late winter or early spring. The young take to the water after about four months. When

the flood came the pups would have been too young to cope by themselves in a stream, much less a raging torrent. If the mother had plugged the burrow they may have managed on limited air for several days, or if she was able to hide them somewhere above the flood, safe from predators, it is possible they could have survived.

We look for happy endings, but the pool is ongoing, endings have little relevance. We look for purpose, but what is the purpose of the Gordian worm, to kill the mole cricket or to simply exist? What is my purpose in this place? Like time, purpose is a human construct, an intellectualism. Perhaps my only purpose here is to witness the pool and protect it, so it continues, after its own fashion. In his Walden Pond rumination Henry David Thoreau said '*Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count one.*' Although we do not fish in the pool, living by it is a meditation. I witness its being, drink deeper, learn the humility of awareness. I too can count neither the myriad of pebbles in the pool nor the stars reflected in it, but by living with them, life is infinitely richer.



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