

ARMIDALE TREE GROUP NEWSLETTER
Number 123 - Spring 2021



RECOVERY

Editor: Narelle Clarke

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*Photo: Resident of the Michael O'Keefe Woodland Centre enjoying the spring weather
by Narelle Clarke*

Editor's note: 2021 Spring Edition

While looking for inspiration for this edition I revisited the 2020 Spring Newsletter, edited by David Curtis, devoted to the 'Wonder of Trees'. David started by noting that we entered a more pleasant spring than that of 2019. Except for an unprecedented tornado in Armidale, and the lengthening shadow of climate change this spring has largely continued the trend, with ample rainfall continuing to support abundance in the previously drought ravaged landscape. So in the words of David Curtis: *'May the pleasure of being amongst trees and growing them be with all readers'* and as we each continue our own journey with trees, remember what a nice thing it is to be a 'tree person'.

In this edition:

- **From the committee – Dave Steller** - The President's Annual report
- **Manager's Report – Alicia Cooper**
- **Lead Article – Recovery from Fire and Drought - Chris Nadolny** From the safety of a wet spring Chris's lead article is a personal account of fire and drought and more recently regeneration on his Guyra property, Barn Gully. It is a reminder of both how little time has passed since the drought and the extent to which resilience has been tested.
- **Feature Article The Birds and Bees - Peter Metcalf** - The subtitle of Peter's article *'Sex and the Single Flower'* sets the tone for a joyful celebration of an abundant spring and the welcome return of the birds and bees to woodlands and gardens.
- **My favourite tree - Lynne Hosking** Lynne's poetic tribute to her favourite tree in all of Tasmania is a welcome contribution to this regular feature and an open invitation to all our members to share one of your favourite trees with like minded 'Tree people' in 2022.

From the Committee

ARMIDALE TREE GROUP inc. 2020/21 PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Dave Steller

Well, what a year we have had, after the breaking of record drought years we have been run off our feet and sold every bit of stock we had for this spring 2021. Strong sales from last year's flurry of activity up to June 2020 has continued this year with propagation struggling to keep up with demand. This report covers the financial year 2020/21 but I am pleased to report that from June to October 2021 propagation by our staff and volunteers has been very solid. As an example, our sales for this financial year to June 2021 were 54,000 plants including trees and shrubs and in the 4 months of the new financial year we have sold 52,000 plants excluding vegetable seedlings and herbs.

The Annual Financial Report being presented at the AGM shows a profit of \$144,000 and it is great to be back in the black following our \$68,000 deficit last year due to the prolonged drought. The turnaround has been due to a number of factors including the Federal Governments Covid Employment assistance, hard work by our staff and volunteers and terrific change in the weather with lots of wholesale and retail sales. Our reputation as an iconic native nursery has stood us in good stead as new and regular customers are drawn to our unique products and produce. The improvements to online advertising, marketing and sales will continue to show rewards for the effort and time being put in by Alicia and Garry over the past 12 months.

The diversification of our work in Environmental Services to work outside of our normal regional area has had and is continuing to pay major dividends. Our planting services at Manildra and Beryl Solar Farms near Orange last year have developed into a 4-year ongoing maintenance contract this year 2021/22 that will see two staff permanently located in the Orange District to undertake the maintenance contract work. This has allowed Paul Cahill to resign his position as Environment Services Coordinator and take up the Maintenance Supervisor Position for ATG and relocate to Gulgong.

Thank you to Alicia, Rob, Jane, Paul, Dan and all the new staff and our dedicated volunteers for all your work and effort in developing new ways to assist our long-term survival and for your dedication, initiative and support. There has been a lot of work done looking at how to expand our

nursery's operational footprint to meet the growing demand for native plants from our nursery. Plans are underway to install two new hoop houses and one large shade house to basically double our annual propagation output. Thanks to the Committee and staff who participated in our recent Strategic Planning Workshop that has given us a clear direction for the future. We look forward to growing our relationships with Southern New England LandCare with joint and supported projects with the Armidale Rivercare Group and Des Andersen's Koala Habitat projects.

To our volunteers, especially our Committee of Management who have kept a close eye on our operations and strategic direction in providing skills and guidance to assist our staff and the community to contribute to a better environment on the tablelands. Special thanks to Chris, Dave, John, Kate and Peter for their technical, botanical, ecological and governance skills in assisting with grant application opportunities and advice to our customers and community generally. Thanks to Narelle for taking minutes, editing the newsletter and keeping our recording of important events up to date, and Kerry as our education and Public Officer. Thanks to Paul MacFarlane for his valuable contribution and Susan Newey for taking up a position as a new Committee member over the last year.



A very special thanks is extended to Garry Slocombe. As well as undertaking the Treasurer's role and the huge workload required to rearrange our accounting system to make it our operations more efficient, he has stepped up to help

run the office during Alicia's maternity leave and continues to assist every week improving our systems and supporting the staff. Thank you, Garry also for organising Covid safe weekend visits for staff and committee members to New England National Park.



Images: provided by Dave Steller. Aurelia made a valuable contribution to both her first and second 'Every Tree Counts' tree planting events this year.

Congratulations Alicia on your return to work after maternity

leave and balancing your family life with Ambrose and Aurelia with your work commitments. Your leadership of the staff and volunteers is commendable and your advice to the Committee is always timely, well thought out and valued. Thanks again must also go to Carla for her efforts keeping our bookkeeping up to date. Lastly to Greg Clarke who has been able to audit our financials in record time due to in no small part the work taken on by Garry and Carla.

Thanks to members for their continued support of our business and spreading the word. Our membership is increasing which speaks volumes for the value people see in our work. Thank you one and all and may you have a happy Christmas and Prosperous New Year.



Images: Dave Steller November 2021

MANAGER’S REPORT – Alicia Cooper

HABITAT AND HAVEN EVERY TREE COUNTS – SECOND PLANTING EVENT November 6th 2021

We would like to thank all the volunteers who attended our ‘**Habitat and Haven**’ community day this November. A total of 24 volunteers helped with planting wildflowers, grasses, trees and shrubs at our Salisbury Waters revegetation site. The planting was followed by a well-deserved afternoon tea and a guided walk through the site, conducted by retired ecologist and ATG committee member Dr Chris Nadolny, and ATG General Manager Alicia Cooper.

We surveyed the riparian plantings after the recent flooding and it is a credit to all involved that the little plants were still holding on! Thanks again to members of the community, ATG committee and ATG staff who made the afternoon a success.



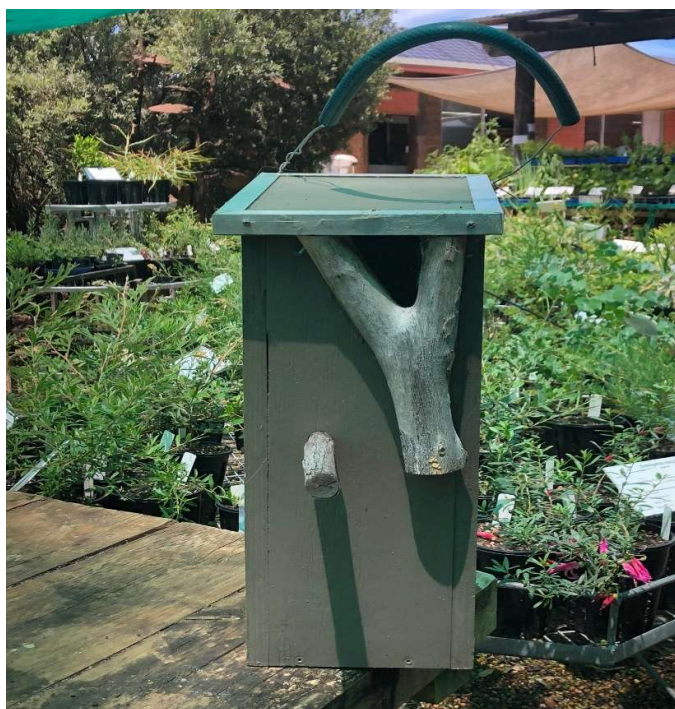
*Images:
Dave Steller
Nov 6th 2021*



NESTING BOXES

Our local wildlife is facing a housing crisis - one caused by clearing and climate pressures, (including tornados!).

It takes at least 100 years for a suitable nesting hollow to form; our furred and feathered friends simply don't have the time to wait for new homes to form. This is where we can step in. The Tree Group has received a kindly donation from one of our members to put towards building nesting boxes. These will be installed in the Mike O'Keeffe woodland (also known as the Black Gully Reserve). This area is a remnant threatened ribbon gum-mountain gum-snow gum grassy forest and woodland ecological community.



*Image: Luxury wildlife accommodation
Narelle Clarke*

We are hoping our members and friends will be able to help us augment this with the donation of suitable materials (see list below) you might have lying around. A very gentle reminder that we can't use huge amounts of old garden hose, clothesline or corrugated iron, so please don't make us a

substitute for a trip to the tip! :)

Salvaged, recycled, or new:

- 1 inch - 1-foot natural hollow hardwood sections.
- 17 - 20mm marine ply sheets.
- 10 - 25mm hardwood (seasoned)
- 1 - 2 inch square mesh.
- Old garden hose.
- Multi-strand clothesline wire or similar.

- Corrugated iron sheet (off cuts okay)

Cash donations would be wonderful for materials we cannot source. Donations over \$2 are fully tax-deductible and can be made using the following bank details.

BSB: 932000

Account #: 100431904

NOTE: Please specify 'nest boxes' and your name in your donation

WATTLE SEED NEEDED

'Tis the season for seed! Acacia (wattle) seed in particular! If you have access to fruiting wattle trees/shrubs in your patch, would you be able to collect some and drop it into the nursery? We would greatly appreciate it!

We will accept any species you have (EXCEPT *A. baileyana* - Cootamundra Wattle, and *A. rubida* - Red Stem Wattle).

To be useable, there are a few points to note:

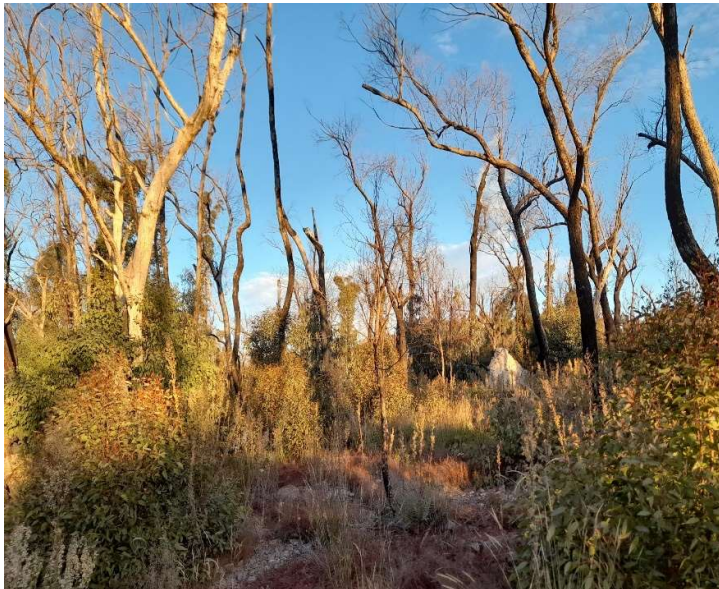
- We need a minimum of a shopping bag full of pods (a little bit of branch material is ok)
- Seed must be ripe, no green pods (see attached photo for ripe seed pod example)
- We must have a voucher specimen (about 20cm of the plant for ID purposes). Even if you are confident you know what your plant is, please include this!

Due to La Nina, seed is ripening much later than usual, so seed from various species might be available now and/or over Christmas

Recovery from fires and drought Chris Nadolny

My property, Barn Gully, about 40 km west of Guyra, has been severely affected by drought and fires over the last few years. It is a 1000-hectare property that includes a perpetual lease to New Valley State Forest and is heavily wooded. Many thousands of trees have died and even more have lost their crowns and are regenerating from the trunk and major limbs, but an abundance of new seedlings are establishing and, if you count them, there are now probably more trees than ever.

Image: regeneration and resilience Chris Nadolny



In 2018 it started getting very dry. By winter the ground cover was crisp and dry, with heavy frosts almost every morning. In late July a neighbour misjudged the signs and decided to burn off some rank grass. The afternoon wind sprung up and the fire took off, reaching my property. By the time I arrived the local volunteer fire brigade had the fire under control. It had burnt about 10 hectares. The consensus was that the fire wouldn't last the night, with -6°C expected in Armidale. But it was so dry that in the morning logs and stumps were still smouldering in many places. I walked the perimeter of the fire all day putting out smouldering logs and preventing flare-ups.

In the afternoon the wind sprung up and I noticed the fire was on the move again on the neighbour's place. I called the brigade and rushed to put it out. We succeeded. But as we congratulated ourselves, we noticed a great plume of smoke billowing from my property. When we got there it was spreading rapidly up a heavily wooded rocky hill. The fire captain decided to back-burn from the grassy flats and to protect my shed and other property. So we stayed well into the night. The line held and the following day a group of volunteer fire fighters trained in remote fire fighting used

leaf-blowers and rake-hoes to clear a line from which to back-burn to secure the whole area. I was very impressed with their skills. The fire was eventually controlled. It burnt out about 100 hectares.

In spring, most trees began to recover from epicormic shoots, with only a few being killed. In December that year a lightning strike ignited another fire in remote country to the northeast of the property. The fire lingered for days burning slowly. Then it rained an inch and the fire was declared under control. But the fire sprang up again over Christmas spreading into New Valley State Forest. This time the remote fire fighting team was not available. The terrain was rough and the safest option was to back-burn from the Tenterden fire trail. The back-burn was initiated in the cool of the evening and, in many places, resulted in a cool burn, which did little damage to tree crowns. But in some places the fire was still spreading in the heat of the following day, resulting in intense fire. A helicopter worked all day to douse the fire where it was most intense, but there was significant damage to trees. Mopping up operations lasted days.

During 2019 it grew drier and drier and the recovery of trees from epicormic shoots was weak, and the regrowth of ground cover plants almost negligible. In autumn several trees growing on unburnt rocky ridges suddenly browned-off, a portent of things to come. There were more bushfires in the district throughout spring and the first half of summer, but none on my property.

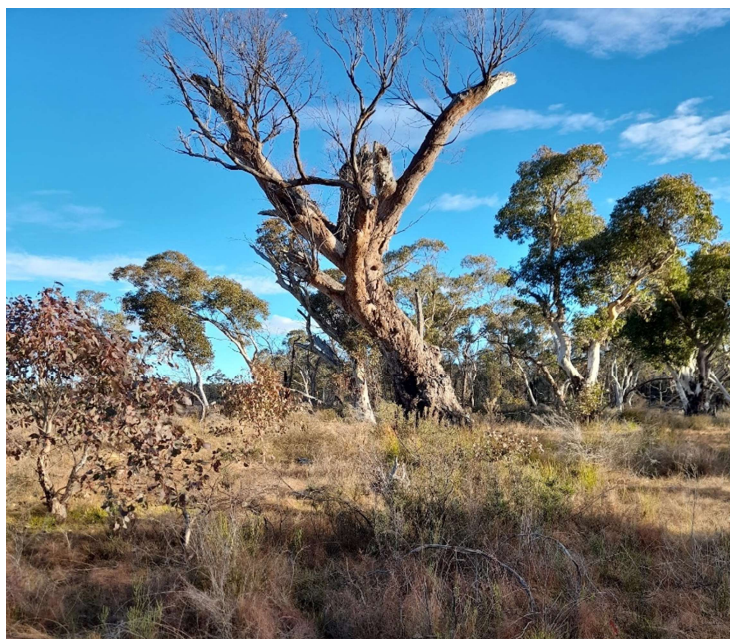


Image: Impacts of drought Barn Gully 2021- Chris Nadolny

However, as spring unfolded hundreds of trees, and then thousands of trees, browned-off, losing their entire canopies. They were mostly stringybarks on ridges and exposed slopes, but Mountain White Gums (*E. dalrympleana*), in particular, in gullies were similarly afflicted.

Such effects were widespread in the region, especially on poor soils with low water-holding capacity, and not just confined to my property. The drought impacts on trees appeared to be almost independent of whether they had been affected by fire, although,

where weak epicormic shoots began to die-off the prognosis for the tree was poor. I don't know the impact of the drought on wildlife, but for many months afterwards the chorus of bird songs was gone.

The rains began in January 2020, washing soil away from burnt areas and enabling prolific growth of weeds in other areas. But it was too late for many trees. Many of the largest, oldest trees failed to recover, and some of them continue to die even nearly two years after the drought. But the late summer and autumn of 2020 provided ideal conditions for the establishment of new eucalypt seedlings. The burnt areas, as well as the areas denuded by drought, provided an ideal (at least initially) weed-free seed bed. A mass of the seed in the canopy is released as fire scorched branches dry out and, I guess that trees wilted by drought also shed seed. While the seed had been lying on the ground for many months, some of it must have escaped predation by ants. Eucalypts require the soil surface to be continuously moist for at least 2-3 weeks to give them enough time for their seed to germinate and send rootlets into the ground. And this occurred.

There wasn't regeneration everywhere and which species regenerated was a bit hit or miss, but my initial assessment that the drought would turn dense stringybark forest into open woodland or shrubland was misguided. In most places, the forest is coming back denser than before. After nearly two years the eucalypt seedlings, while still small, are turning into hardy juvenile trees with the capacity to grow into trees. Eucalypts aren't the only trees regenerating. Several different wattles have increased in abundance. For example, in the area burnt in the winter of 2018, Red-stem wattle (*Acacia rubida*), Hickory (*A. implexa*) and Fern-leaved wattle (*A. filicifolia*) have all increased in abundance, mostly regenerating from root suckers. Where there had once been a single wattle there are often 5 or more. I have also been intrigued by the appearance of scattered Kurrajong (*Brachychiton populneus*) seedlings. I had always thought that the location was too cold for that species. Perhaps it is a sign of climate change.

The Birds and the Bees

Peter Metcalfe

In early October a big flock of both White-browed and Masked Wood swallows rode in the brisk north-westerly winds and settled in the flowering Yellow Box trees near our house. They were able to utilise the nectar in the flowers because they have “furry” tongues that can lick up the little pool of nectar in the base of each flower. This flock moved on later in the day. These wood swallows are more at home in the drier interior than around Armidale. Our local Dusky Wood swallows do not seem to be interested in flowers but feed on flying insects.



Image: Dusky Woodswallow - Nepean Weir

Meanwhile there were several resident species of the honeyeater busy in the crown of the flowering trees. Fuscous, White-naped, White-plumed, Yellow-faced and Brown-headed honeyeaters were there in numbers, along with Red Wattlebirds, Noisy Friarbirds and Spinebills. Absent from the roll-call were the various species of lorikeets. The Rainbow Lorikeets come in occasionally but seem to prefer town as a habitat. The Musk and Little Lorikeets visit us most seasons.

All these birds are effective pollinators of the eucalypts. Later in the season they will be busy pollinating the grevilleas and bottlebrushes as they probe down past the anthers and stigmas to reach the nectar in each flower.



***Image: Red Wattle Bird –
Narelle Clarke 2021***

It will be another year before the fruit from today's Yellow Box flowers are mature and filled with ripe seeds. It is notable that there are no capsules further down

the twigs where the fruit from the previous two years would be expected. That marks the 2019 drought and the 2020 season where the trees were recovering from the drought and did not flower.

For months now the Yellow box has been flowering and the hum of bees has been constant under the chatter of the birds. Honeybees, flies and many native wasps and bees also visit and pollinate the modest creamy flowers of the Yellow Box.

In contrast to these useful pollinators the Crimson Rosellas nip the flowers from the tree, making a carpet of thousands of flowers on the grass under the flowering trees. Perhaps this vandalism moderates the load of fruits each tree has to bear for the next year.

Before the Yellow Box flowered the bees were busy for months in the wattles as they flowered in sequence; starting with Cootamundra in July and rolling on through the many species that will end in summer with *Acacia lunata* and finally *Acacia mearnsii*. The wattles do not offer nectar but provide pollen that is a food source for the honeybee larvae and for other flying insects.



Image: acacia lunata

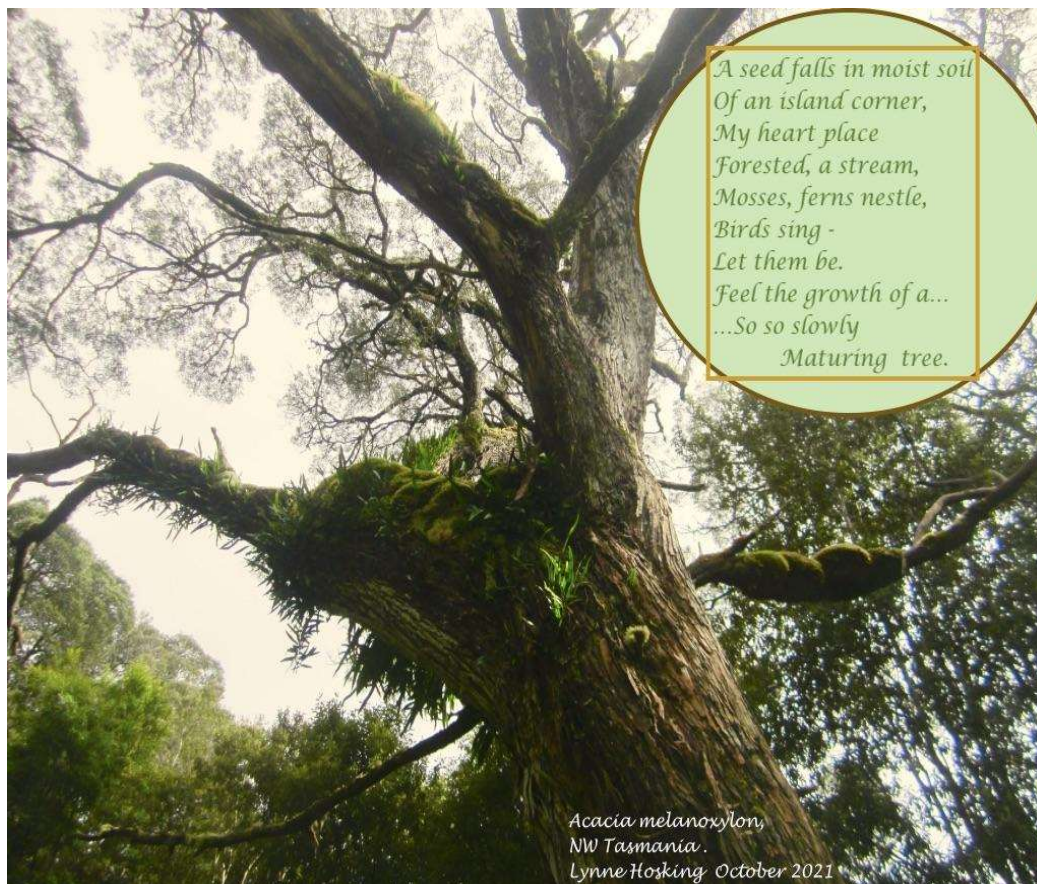
In addition to the flowers, the leaves of the wattles play an important role in the food chain of the insectivorous birds. Many species of insect eat the protein rich leaves of the leguminous wattles. Have a close look at the phyllodes of your wattles and see if the glands on the edge of the leaf have been neatly

removed by some insect fattening up, ready to enter the food chain of the insectivores.

Thanks to all this pollination activity the wattles are all showing pods of varying stages of development. The pods on the Cootamundra wattle are already quite large. Later on the green seeds in these pods will provide nutritious food for the rosellas and King Parrots. Some wattles seem to have seeds that are susceptible to weevils but most are not troubled. When the wattle pods dry out and drop their seeds in summer the seeds become food for pigeons, doves and ground-feeding parrots.

MY FAVOURITE TREE

Thanks to Lynn Hosking for providing this beautiful photo of her favourite tree. Please consider sharing your favourite tree with our members next year.



*Acacia melanoxylon,
NW Tasmania.
Lynne Hosking October 2021*



Membership Application/Renewal

Date: _____ / _____ / _____
Name: _____
Address: _____

Telephone: _____

***Email (Required):** _____

Please indicate your preference, you will receive an email when membership is due:

- \$5.00 for 1 year
- \$10 for 2 years
- \$25 for 5 years
- \$50 for 10 years

Donation \$ _____ (Donations over \$2 are tax deductible)

Total Payment \$ _____

Payment method: EFTPOS / cash / credit card below / direct credit / cheque

Cheque – Please make cheques payable to Armidale Tree Group Inc.

Credit Card –	Card type:	Visa / Mastercard only
	Card number:	
	Expiry date:	
	CCV number:	
	Name on card	
	Signature	
Direct Credit -	Please remit payment to BSB: 932000 Account No: 10016306 Detail: “Subs <Name>”	

You may email this form to accounts@armidaletreegroup.org.au or post to Armidale Tree Group, 80 Mann Street, Armidale NSW 2350

Office use

Date processed: _____ / _____ / _____



Volunteer Registration

Date: _____ / _____ / _____
Name: _____
Telephone: _____
***Email (Required):** _____

<p>I am keen to help-out the Armidale Tree Group, on a volunteer basis, in any of the following (ticked) areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Propagation <input type="checkbox"/> Planting (Field Days) <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening <input type="checkbox"/> Media <input type="checkbox"/> Grant Applications <input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning <input type="checkbox"/> Office <input type="checkbox"/> Wildlife Corridors (mapping, planning and landholder communications) <input type="checkbox"/> Seed and Cutting Collecting <input type="checkbox"/> Other - Please specify <p>_____ _____ _____</p>	<p>I would like to help-out on the following basis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Fortnightly <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/> Other - Please specify <p>_____ _____ _____</p>
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Thank you so much for your offer of help. The Armidale Tree Group provides a lot of value to the community and it will be greatly appreciative of your efforts. Together we will make a difference.

You may email this form to accounts@armidaletreegroup.org.au or post to Armidale Tree Group, 80 Mann Street, Armidale NSW 2350

Office use

Date processed: _____ / _____ / _____