

**ARMIDALE TREE GROUP NEWSLETTER**

**Number 121 Autumn 2021**

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**Biodiversity in our Backyards and School Grounds**



*Photo: Frogs in the Back Yard by Narelle Clarke*

*Editors: Narelle Clarke and Chris Nadolny*

Armidale Tree Group

80 Mann St, Armidale, 2350

Phone 67711620

[www.armidaletreegroup.org.au](http://www.armidaletreegroup.org.au)

## **Editor's note: 2021 Autumn Edition**

During this amazingly beautiful autumn when gardening is just irresistible the time is right to turn your attention to re-building biodiversity after years of drought. This Edition can help. Committee member Peter Metcalf's lead article is a guide to planting to attract a diversity of birds, bees and other wildlife to your garden and Susan Newey, our newest committee member, provides a blueprint for a five star bird bath, when all those birds return. According to Susan, with bird baths as with real estate position is everything.

The Woodland Centre has been a hive of activity hosting educational events for school groups from Presbyterian Ladies College, Armidale City Public and most recently the Armidale Home School students. The enthusiasm of the students to learn new skills was matched by their willingness to translate what they learned by planting native gardens at their school. Armidale Secondary College students were equally enthusiastic to be involved in improving the biodiversity of their school grounds with some help from ATG.

### **In this edition**

- Manager's Report - including introduction to new staff
- From the Committee – School visits and other news. Also - it's not often that we include a book review but this one is special.
- Lead Article – 'Peter Metcalfe Biodiversity in your back yard'
- Susan Newey 'Building a better bird bath'
- Des Andersen Report on - 'Koalas in the Spotlight'

## **Manager's Report**

### **From the Acting Manager - Garry Slocombe**

What great events we have had since the last newsletter. First there was the Habitat and Haven planting on Enmore Road that saw 55 volunteer members make short work of a big job. What was especially pleasing was the large number of young people who attended. Congratulations to all those concerned. This was preceded by a propagation day at the Woodland Centre where children made seed balls that were distributed at the planting.

More recently there was a two-day seed-collecting workshop held by David Carr, the first of which was in the Woodland Centre.



### **Enmore planting event – photo by Dave Steller**

Next there was the opening of the exhibition in the Woodland Centre by long-time ATG member Terry Cooke. Terry gave a fascinating talk and question and answer session about what each piece represents and what he was thinking. He also described the techniques he used. Around 25 people attended it and we sold 8 works making it a successful fundraiser as well. Extra thanks to Terry for the cards and books he donated for us to sell. The exhibition is still in place and all are very welcome to come in and have a look around.

On the production front, the keyword is growth. Everything has picked up after the devastation caused by the drought, but more than that the demand for our services are increasing significantly. Environmental Services has seen a 400% growth in sales over the last 6 years and wholesale has seen similar growth over the same period. In recent times a lot of this growth has been created by large contracts with solar farms from Manildra to Metz and the size of these contracts is increasing. However, we are starting to see significant potential in 3 other areas: Koala trees, biodiversity offsets and sequestration. We already have to plan for the next stage of growth in Environmental Services whilst

keeping our eyes on the potential for significant expansion of the Tree Group in general.

We are so lucky to have the staff and volunteers we do, who are all cheerfully settling into the prospect of an exciting ride.

### **New Busy Bees at ATG by Alicia Cooper**

We specialise in growing plants here at the Tree Group, but over the past year we've also been growing our team! We have welcomed six wonderful new staff members to our organisation and they bring enthusiasm and a fresh perspective to the team. I'm very happy to introduce them all to you below.



#### **Rachael Bailey - Retail Nursery Hand**

Rachael holds a Certificate III in Horticulture and brings her experience working at a native wholesale nursery on the Gold Coast. She has a wealth of customer service experience and enjoys interacting with Tree Group customers, especially as many of them have nuggets of plant wisdom to share. Coming from a warmer climate nursery, Rachael is also

enjoying learning the different frost tolerances of our garden natives and which plants suit the various microclimates of Armidale.

**Jay Sinclair - Wholesale  
Nursery Hand**

Jay has a Bachelor of Environmental Science and Management and has a keen interest in horticulture with an emphasis on native plants. Jay gained experience in native plant propagation during his 4 years of volunteering at the Shortland Wetlands Centre and enjoys experimenting with propagating herbs and vegetables in his home garden. Jay's love of



plants and identification skills are serving him well in our wholesale plant department, as he helps Rob propagate and care for our tree and shrub seedlings.

**Dan Fawell –  
Environmental  
Services Field  
Supervisor**



Dan has a background as a National Parks and Wildlife Services ranger and has extensive experience in Conservation and Land Management. He is enjoying the challenge of working on our bush regeneration sites,

which involves careful plant identification and selective weeding amongst ecosystems supporting threatened orchids and eucalypts. Dan is looking forward to gaining a more holistic view of the New England Tablelands ecology and environs.



**Kjell Knable -  
Environmental Services  
Trainee**

Kjell has been working with us on our casual roster for over a year and was given a traineeship with the Tree Group in January. Kjell enjoys our native seed collection trips where he can expand his identification skills and add to his plant knowledge

while being out in the bush. One of Kjell's life achievement goals is to help end climate change and save the world – a worthy aspiration if ever there was one!



**Tom Faithfull -  
Environmental Services  
Trainee**

Tom has been working with us on our casual roster for over a year and was given a traineeship with the Tree Group in January. Tom enjoys the fact that his role allows him to work outside, often in bushland settings. He is looking forward to expanding his knowledge

of the plant species of the New England Tablelands, and being able to utilise this knowledge when hiking in our local National Parks.



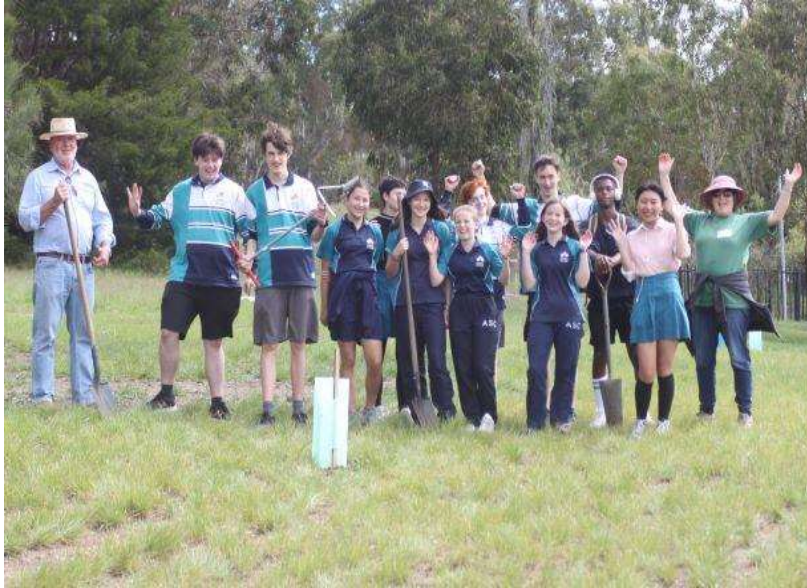
**Matt Cubis –  
Environmental Services  
Crew Member**

Matt has been working with us on our casual roster since 2018 and has recently started on a part-time basis. Matt has a love of the outdoors and animals and likes fossicking in his spare time. He enjoys the fact that his role allows him to work outside and likes the satisfaction of completing a good day's work, especially evident

when looking down the rows of thousands of successfully planted trees and shrubs.

## From The Committee

The tree planting with the Armidale Secondary College Environment Group, led by School Captain Jordan King went very well. We planted 40 eucalypt trees in the southeast corner of the school grounds on the boundary of Kentucky and Butler Streets. The species selected were *eucalyptus viminalis* (Ribbon Gum) *eucalyptus dalrymliana* (white gum), *eucalyptus blakleyi* (Red Gum), and *eucalyptus mellidora* (Yellow Box).



**Group Photo:  
David Steller**

Although the ground was pretty hard and compacted with the help of Armidale Tree Group Committee members, Kerry Steller,

Chris Nadolny, John Lemon, Dave Steller and Dave Carr who generously donated the tree guards, the planting was completed by school knock off time.

## Woodland Centre Educational Events

ATG continues to provide well resourced educational experiences for students of all ages as recently demonstrated when the Woodland Centre hosted fieldwork activities for students from PLC, Armidale City Public and the Armidale home school community. Through concrete, fun activities students discovered their own definition of biodiversity and used role-play to explore the causes of dieback and the origins of the ATG.



Nursery tours revealed the processes from seed to planting out and there were opportunities to develop planting and seed ball production skills.



*Photos: Photo Provided by PLC – SRC Nursery Visit*

*Tree Planting at School*

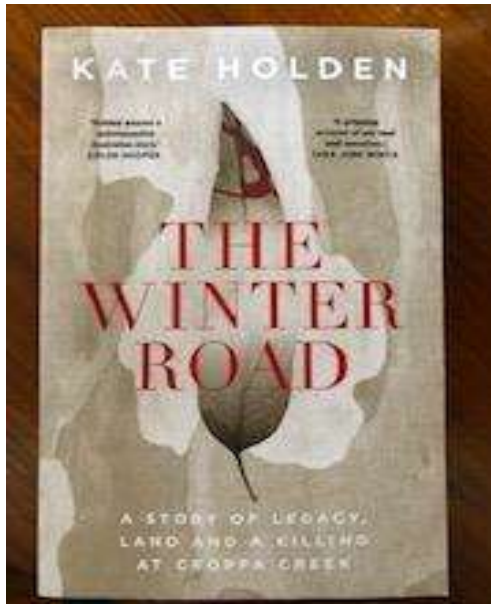
Planned and Co-ordinated by Kerry Steller and assisted by other committee members and staff these events empower students to take action in their school yard and back yards.

*Photos: Kerry Steller – Armidale City Public Students in the Woodland Centre*



## Book Review 'The Winter Road'

Ecologist and committee member, Chris Nadolny, features prominently in the recently released book, **The Winter Road'** by Kate Holden. This



artfully crafted work sets the tragic events on the road between Croppa Creek and Moree on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2014 against the historical and physical context essential to understanding why this could happen. In so doing Holden reveals the complexities, conflicts and contradictions that continue to plague environmental protection and why the task is as tough as the ancient, remnant Brigalow scrub it seeks to protect. This thoughtful, insightful page-

turner is available at 'Readers Companion' Armidale and online.

## Biodiversity in Your Back Yard – Peter Metcalf

The Armidale Tree Group has a wide spectrum of native plants suitable for home gardens. They will form the basis of complex food chains that are the building blocks of biodiversity.

Each new species of plant added to your garden is an addition to your biodiversity. Don't forget the grasses and water plants. Then the fun begins!



Some popular garden species are real magnets for birds and insects. A good example is the Grevillea "Wee Jasper" which flowers for months and several species of honeyeaters come for nectar. Honeybees and other insects come for the pollen and nectar too. With all these visitors it is odd that "Wee Jasper" never sets any seed.

Image: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wik/gevillea\\_iaspicula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wik/gevillea_iaspicula)

From my observations every other cultivar of Grevillea is a nectar source appreciated by the honeyeaters and often bees and flies too. Some reliable bird attracting grevilleas are “Molonglo Gold”, “Canberra Gem”, *G. rosmarinifolia*, *G. arenaria* and there are many more of all shapes and colours.

All the varieties of bottlebrushes (**Callistemons**) are also splendid sources of nectar and pollen but their spring flowering season is brief, offering a feast for a short time. Good management and careful pruning can stimulate a second flowering in autumn. You can extend the flowering period in your garden by planting several cultivars so they do not all flower at the same time. Bottlebrushes typically get pollinated by the local honeyeaters and set fruits with fertile seeds inside. One interesting observation was a plant of a western, arid land bottlebrush *C. brachyandrus* that flowered for many years but never set seed until a pair of “western” White-plumed Honeyeaters set up territory in the garden. Plant and pollinator reunited.

Watch the bees in a bottlebrush and you can see that they duck under the anthers to reach the nectar in the cup at the base of each small flower. They probably do not pollinate the flowers. Honeyeaters reach down through the anthers and stigmas and they are the natural pollinator of bottlebrushes.

Thinking of dry-land plants the **Eremophilas** (emu bushes) are great at attracting birds. These long-lived drought and frost resistant plants are specially adapted for bird pollination and always seem to set seed. They offer nectar in long tubes with the anthers and stigmas out the end to deposit pollen on the visiting birds’ forehead and later receive the pollen to fertilise the seeds. They produce many fruit but seedlings never appear. Apparently in nature, the fruits are eaten by emus and the digestion process prepares the seed for germination. Unless you have a pet emu you may never discover a seedling of *Eremophila* in your garden!

**Eremophilas** come in many different forms, from ground covers to substantial bushes and a pleasing range of flower colours. One interesting plant is “Kalbarri Carpet” which is a vigorous ground cover with furry silver leaves and yellow flowers. *Eremophila maculata* comes with many flower colours.

Another diverse genus is **Correa**. There are many growth forms from ground covers to large shrubs with a range of flower colours, reds, pinks and yellows featuring. They flower for a long period, starting in late summer and continuing through to early winter. The flowers are adapted for bird pollination. They have nectar at the base of long tubes with anthers and stigma protruding to dust the visiting birds. Bees cannot reach the nectar but will collect pollen from the flowers. Correas readily set seed and you may get hybrid seedlings if the Eastern Spinebills have been doing their job, flying from bush to bush visiting different flowers.

At home **Correa “Glabra Green”** has formed dense bushes and has been used for nesting by Blue Wrens and Silvereyes. Correas are in the same family as the citrus and you might be lucky enough to have your correas attract the lovely black and white Citrus Butterfly to your garden. The larvae eat the leaves but that is a small price to pay for having such big, graceful insects at your place.

There are genera of that are insects

The insects of the food birds, other plant that



quite a few garden shrubs attractive to rather than honeyeaters. are then part chain for spiders and insects. One is an amazing

insect magnet is **Beckea “Clarence River”**. It produces a myriad of tiny white flowers like miniature Teatree flowers that have a subtle perfume and offer nectar in shallow cups.

[Image:https://en.wikipedia.org/wik/Correa-Glabra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wik/Correa-Glabra)

When in flower they attract a huge diversity of small native bees, flower wasps and flies. Have a look and just see what diversity they attract to your garden. With all this attention this plant sets a huge number of seeds in small fruit.

*Westringea* and *Prostanthera* (mint bushes) are other genera of shrubs that are popular in gardens. These too are insect rather than bird pollinated. They offer pollen and have nectar in shallow cups or short bells. The insects are effective pollinators and the fruit eject the seed about a meter when the fruits mature.



*Photo: Westringea and Prostanthera together - Narelle Clarke*

If you love butterflies, all the members of the **daisy family**, native or introduced, have heads of tiny flowers that are adapted for butterfly pollination and attract every butterfly about. The Glencoe Paper Daisy is one local that attracts butterflies. Buddleia is one introduced shrub that has a reputation for attracting butterflies.

**Wattles** attract insects with profuse pollen in spring and protein rich leaves all year round. Parrots just love the almost ripe seeds and will visit when the pods are nearly mature. There are many wattles, large and small, and ATG grows quite a few small wattles suitable for gardens. For example the local Boomerang wattle that grows to about two metres.

### **Building a Better Bird Bath – Susan Newey**

#### **POSITION! POSITION! POSITION!**

So many people purchase birdbaths with all good intentions. However, because birdbaths aren't sold with instructions, the baths are usually used incorrectly. Get bang for your buck (and your garden bio system), and follow a few simple rules.

Firstly, position is critical. If you put your bath out in the middle of the lawn, you may actually do more harm than good for your immediate bio

system, as it will probably attract aggressive birds such as Pied Currawong and Noisy Miners in to drink.

Position your bath under thick smaller shrubs, preferably where there are a few grouped together. This gives small woodland birds essential protection from predators such as birds of prey. If positioned correctly, you will witness a wonderful parade of smaller birds enjoying the protection and the opportunity not only to drink, but also to bathe. Since European settlement, so much habitat has been removed, including shaded/protected areas on riparian zones and swamps. You will find even after good rain has left lots of puddles, your small birds will continue to use the protected baths.

Keep the baths off ground level, to reduce risk of cat predation. Trap and remove feral cats from your garden (excellent cat traps can be purchased at Purkiss Rural).

Put in a couple of baths within a few metres of each other. Woodland birds tend to move around their range in “packs” consisting a few species e.g. Scarlet Robin, Grey Fantail, Grey Shrike-thrush, Striated Thornbill, maybe a honeyeater or two. If you have two baths, different species of the “pack” can bathe/drink at the same time.

Purchase deeper baths (these keep the water cooler and cleaner) but put in a sloping rock, which clears the surface at one end, so that there is no risk of drowning. Small birds may not bathe if all they find is a deep bath

with steep sides. Clean your baths regularly (using friction only, no detergents) and keep full with fresh water.



My birdbath is positioned under a big Callistemon seiberi next to the veranda and regularly attracts around 16 species of small woodland

birds. What an incredible privilege, and treat with the morning coffee.

## Koalas in the spotlight – Des Andersen

*Photo: Ruth Tremont –  
Donald Road*

The “Koalas in the Spotlight” event was held at the Newholme field laboratory on the evening of March 19. Newholme is a University of New England research property at Mount Duval and is a well-known koala corridor.



40 people attended the event with numbers limited by COVID restrictions. The amount of interest generated by the event meant that many people unfortunately missed their chance for a ticket, however Southern New England Landcare aims to hold a similar event toward the end of 2021. Koala populations in NSW are under significant threat of extinction due to human impact, disease and climate related events such as drought and bushfires. The event, part of the 2021 Northern Tablelands Koala

Partnership Project, aims to engage the community in koala conservation by raising awareness of local Koala populations and provide a range of simple actions to help our koalas survive.

“Koalas in the Spotlight” included a demonstration by Koala Detective Dogs - a program where "detective dogs" are trained to sniff out koala droppings. The Detective Dog Team, from the University of Sunshine Coast, are currently surveying Northern Tablelands Koala populations. According to the team the detective dogs can assess whether Koalas have been in the area about 150 times faster than it takes humans to assess an area for koala presence.

The event also included a trapping and relocating demonstration from Koala Ecologist John Lemon, to showcase how local wildlife carer groups respond to community reporting in instances where koalas wander into urban areas and become trapped by fences or endangered by dogs and vehicles.

Following dinner and a project presentation by the Southern New England Landcare team, the evening was rounded out with a spotlight walk through bushland to detect local koalas. Although no koalas were “spotlighted” on this occasion, participants were rewarded when finding a Greater Glider, a Tawney Frogmouth and a few possums along the way.

A short film capturing the event can be viewed at the link provided. Southern New England Landcare would like to thank all participants for their enthusiasm during this event and hope to keep in touch with the Armidale community through the Koala Partnership Project.

The NSW Government Saving Our Species program funded the event.

Event video at:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/7ffil00ab1v9n3f/Landcare%20Koalas%201080.mp4?dl=0>

Just a reminder that The Terry Cooke Exhibition is another good reason to visit the Woodland Centre!



**Noah's Next Rescue Mission – Terry Cooke**



## Membership Application/Renewal

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Email (Required):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Payment method:** cash / cheque / credit card / direct credit

Please indicate your membership 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 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please find enclosed my /our cheque\* for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\* Make cheques payable to Armidale Tree Group Inc.

OR

Please debit my credit card for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Card type:** Visa / Mastercard only

**Card number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Expiry date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CCV number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name on card** \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**To pay by Direct Credit Please remit payment to**

**BSB: 932000 Account No...620682 (please tag payment as 'subs')**

[accounts@armidalefreegroup.org.au](mailto:accounts@armidalefreegroup.org.au)

**Donations over \$2.00 are tax deductible to The Armidale Tree Group Fund**

Date processed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Office use only**

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