

ARMIDALE TREE GROUP NEWSLETTER
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The Covid Lockdown Winter Blues

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Photo: 'Shinrin-Yoku' – with Tawny Frogmouths by Narelle Clarke

Editor's note: 2021 Winter Edition

In a cold winter and a Covid induced lockdown the value of trees, beyond economics and carbon sequestration, is helping people to get through. Locked down in London last year Bill Bailey (you may know him as Manny from 'Black Books'), noted on a late evening in May that trees were featuring heavily in his lockdown sensory enjoyment. When the usual noise layers of urban life subsided, he could hear nothing but the sound of wind in the trees. Amidst all the negative aspects of lockdowns, people everywhere are enjoying the opportunity to connect with nature.

The Japanese are world leaders in tree appreciation. 'Shinrin-Yoku' or 'forest bathing' literally means 'absorbing the atmosphere of the forest' and has been government policy since 1980. The decision was based on an extensive study showing that people walking for fifteen minutes in urban areas were more stressed and anxious than people walking in forests. Most of our members would hardly find this surprising but may be surprised to know that there are now 'Shinrin-Yoku' centres around Britain. The Australian translation for 'forest bathing' is probably bush walking. Whatever you call it, walking among trees will help reduce lockdown stress (as long as you don't leave your LGA 😊).

In this edition

- **From the committee**
- **Manager's Report – Alicia Cooper**
- **Lead Article - My Low Maintenance Native Garden**

Focusing on increasing backyard biodiversity, committee member, John Lemon's article provides a step-by-step description of how he developed his native garden using local species.

- **Feature Article - Identifying Old Eucalypts in the Strathfieldsaye/Axe Creek area of Great Bendigo – A project of the Axe Creek Landcare Group.**

It is interesting to see what other Landcare groups are doing around the country. This article has the added benefit of providing a guide to how you can estimate the age of your own old Eucalypts, if you are lucky enough to have them.

From the committee

Committee members worked with nursery staff to replace shade cloth damaged during the big hailstorm in October last year.



Photos by Kerry Steller

Manager's Report - Alicia Cooper

I would like to welcome Jane Pickard back into the Tree Group team as our new Retail Coordinator. Jane has worked as a casual on and off over the years and has also been a member of our committee. We are very thankful to be benefiting from her experience and knowledge, especially during a challenging time. Rachael, our Retail Nursery Hand is assisting Jane.

I would also like to send our warm wishes to Paul Cahill, our Environmental Services Coordinator as he moves on from the role to explore other avenues. Paul has been our ES Coordinator since 2017 and made great strides in our Environmental department. Our Field Officer, Dan Fawell, has taken on the reins and is throwing himself wholeheartedly into the role.

Website Woes and Wins

I would like to thank our members and customers for their ongoing loyalty and patience during our period of closure to the public for lockdown. We understand how difficult it is to “click and collect” when we don’t actually have a web store to “click”! However, we are continuing to work hard on getting our online shop up and running. As it involves sourcing new software and hardware, we are making sure we thoroughly explore our options to ensure we implement the right system for the organisation. Thankfully, we have found some choices that offer special plans for not-for-profits, a huge bonus! We are very excited that we will soon be able to offer our clientele the ability to browse and purchase our products online.

Meanwhile, our Retail nursery team has been working incredibly hard to keep our available plant catalogue up to date for our Facebook page and website. Jane and Rachael are as busy as spring bees as they source, select and pack orders coming through via phone and Facebook messages. This is in addition to their usual work of propagating, watering, weeding and pruning.

So once again, thank you everyone, both staff and customers, for your patience, and stay tuned for some exciting web shop news in the coming weeks!

My Low Maintenance Native Garden

Article and photos by John Lemon

In 2016 we built our new home on a 900sq/m block at the bottom of Illallangi Close on North Hill. The block is quite steep and has a fall of 5.5m from the NE corner to the SW corner. Snow Gum Reserve surrounds it on the southern and western sides. Due to the poor soil quality and the steepness, I faced quite a challenge landscaping the eastern area facing the cul-de-sac.

I have always preferred low maintenance, native plant focussed gardens. So, I chose that direction and I had a clean slate to implement that plan. I started by spraying the Paspalum, Phalaris and other non-native grasses and the blackberries. There weren't many of these due to construction traffic but I still retained native raspberries and other native plants. I decided to undertake the landscaping in two stages, with a path of 7mm blue metal dividing the site and leading to a safe and stable walk to the under deck and house area as well as access to the gas bottle. I didn't want to pay out for any slippage damage claims during winter when the bottle is refilled!!



Stage 1 - 8 December 2016



Stage 1 - 25 December 2016



Stage 1 - 25 February 2017

The real landscaping didn't start until the summer of 2017. I brought back many bales of hay mulch from Gunnedah and even though we weren't in the throes of the worst drought since settlement, hay was in short supply. Prior to spreading this over the bare soil, I dug up the compacted soil and added gypsum before spreading tonnes of topsoil.



Stage 1 - 15 May 2020

I selected several grevilleas, correas, callistemons, as well as several other native shrubs. Interestingly, only one of the correas survived the drought so they weren't in the mix for the second stage of the planting. With each one I dug a large hole, added a generous handful of gypsum and made sure that it was well mixed prior to planting. Obviously, the planting was done after I had built up enough stored soil moisture.

Around this time the block across the road was being developed so I approached the owner and asked if I could dig up and relocate some of the Dianellas (flax lily), Native Sorghum, Poa (snow grass), Danthonia (wallaby grass), and Themeda (kangaroo grass). He agreed and I managed to rescue and replant the majority of the viable plants available. I did this by digging around the tussock or lily and taking a large portion of the soil they were growing in as this kept the microbial environment of the plant when it was relocated. I generally dropped a handful of gypsum in the clay soil and incorporated it when I dug the hole and broke it down into a more plant friendly environment.

This worked very well with no losses when they established – even during the prolonged drought. A word of caution when it comes to using Poa sp. in a native garden. They are a very attractive addition to any garden but tend to become the dominant grass species. I'm constantly digging them up and giving them away or replanting them in suitable areas. I would recommend a ratio of one Poa to three Themeda or other native grasses. During winter I use cutting shears and give the Poa a severe haircut – no real need to do that with the Themeda. It has been interesting to see that over time, especially in the second stage of the landscaping of the lower part of the block, native plantain, native geranium, rice flower, blue bells,

paper daises, Lomandra, native raspberry, bush clover and other species have been flourishing and germinating, especially since the drought broke.

As we all know, the drought was a real challenge for long established exotic gardens and some people had no choice but to lose parts and, in some cases, all of their garden. The reason I chose to establish a low maintenance low-cost native garden was for its compatibility with Snow Gums Reserve and that it flowed into that space. I also didn't want to be bending down too often so you could say that my "farmers back" was a contributing factor to this strategy.

We are also in a position where we have a spacious under house area. We deliberately chose to build our house so that it was all on one level. As we get older no steps will be a big bonus. As a result, the deck in the south-western corner is four metres off the ground. This has enabled me to have my lockup workshop/storage area adjacent to the under-house area where we initially installed a 5,000-litre rainwater tank. Since then, we have installed another 5,000-litre tank and a 4,500-litre tank. The water from these can all be used in unison or separately and I use it to flush the toilets and to gravity feed to the native shrubs and grassed areas when required.



Stage 1 - 11 January 2021



Stage 2 May 2021

A point of interest is that we have approximately 400sq/m of roof, which in a “normal” rainfall year of 800mm of water equates to 320,000 litres of captured rainwater. So 1sq/m of roof x 1mm of rain = 1litre of water. I keep an eye on the weather forecasts so that I can give the garden an extra drink to make more room for the increasingly valuable “free water” from the heavens. Not a bad strategy when our town water costs have risen by 50% recently.

And on it goes. I got rid of the ivy that was embedded on and around the Ribbon Gum in this picture, by cutting and scraping the stems and immediately painting the exposed area with a 50% mixture of Glyphosate. It worked well and after the ivy died, I used a tool to pull it off the trunk and branches. I have also planted native iris and Lomandra to soften the railway sleeper stairs and the western fence line. In addition, I have planted several native shrubs and groundcovers on the southern side of our block. The Hardenbergia and Westringia have done very well. Some of the others initially struggled during early establishment with water restrictions and being on the shaded part of our block but through trial and error and natural selection all are doing well. They also get watered, gravity fed, when required using captured rainwater from our tanks.

In conclusion, the value of a native garden is that, apart from the aesthetics’, it provides shelter and habitat for birds, both large and small lizards and insects. Still waiting for a snake to take up residence!! I recently

counted seven praying mantis nests amongst the grasses and shrubs. It has been a real pleasure to create something that blends into the landscape and gives my wife and I a real sense of satisfaction.

Membership and Volunteer Forms

You will find 2 forms at the bottom of this newsletter – one to say that you would like to renew your membership (Please call Garry on 0418 249 912 if you aren't sure if you are current or not) and the other to say that you would like to discuss volunteering your time to help the Tree Group. We are not precious about these forms, if you get this by email it is probably not the simplest way to have your wishes processed. As long as we get similar information you can use whatever process you can think of. Print and mail the form, call the nursery on 02 6771 1620, call or text Garry on 0418 249 912, drop into the nursery, email Carla at accounts@armidaletreegroup.org.au or Garry at treasurer@armidaletreegroup.org.au, or stop us in the street.

Identifying Old Eucalypts (over 200 years old, pre-European settlement) in the Strathfieldsaye/Axe creek area of Great Bendigo.

This project, organized by the Axe Creek Landcare Group, aims to generate and encourage community interest and pride in preserving the local environment and history.

While we of European origin celebrate and preserve our old buildings and historic sites, little is done to preserve trees that pre-date European arrival in this area. As eucalypts can live to 300-800 years, some even over 1000 years, unless these specimens are identified they cannot be preserved. These trees would have been important for the indigenous population, some being significant in their daily lives, as markers, birthing trees, sources of fodder and bark and so on.

Unfortunately, the landscape of Bendigo region changed markedly with the advent of the gold rush from 1850s onwards. Most trees were removed, the timber being used for shelter, fuel and mining. By 1877, it is recorded that timber for mines was sourced from up to 160km away, and firewood from up to 65km away. Our Box-Ironbark forests are now re-growth forests from coppiced trees. However, a few remnant old trees remain. Research suggests that pre-European settlement, these forests carried 20-30 large old trees/ha. Now maybe 2 trees/ha.

Why are old trees important?

- They are irreplaceable in the short term. Trees being planted now will take 200 years before they take the form of the mature trees we see in the landscape today. Current growth rate for local eucalypts (excluding River Red Gum) is 3.5mm/year in girth. Eg for a 40cm diameter tree to get to 60cm diameter, it will take 60 years.
- Tree hollows, important as refuge and breeding sites for many species of birds and mammals, as well as frogs, reptiles and invertebrates, only begin to form in trees over 100 years old. Large hollows useful for larger mammals only appear in trees over 200 years old.
- Old trees provide more food resources than younger trees. For example, one 300-year-old Grey Box height 20m, trunk diameter 1.5m has a bark surface of 94 square metres. A 20-year-old tree with a height of 15m and trunk diameter 20cm, has a surface bark area of just 9 square metres. Therefore, the large tree provides the same amount of food as 10 younger trees, meaning the forager of young trees needs to move to 10 different locations to feed instead of being able to source food from the one tree. Healthy mature trees produce more nectar, foliage, fruits and bark than younger trees which spend much of their energy on growth in height.
- Litterfall and hollow limbs are also much more abundant under large old trees. These provide fodder, refuge, and breeding sites for many litter and ground dwellers as well as decomposers that are essential to recycle nutrients in a forest. Litter also reduces water erosion.

Why are large old trees valuable for the landowner?

- They provide more shade and shelter than small trees.
- These trees provide a ready source of seedlings of local provenance.
- Old trees have deeper roots so can tap into underground nutrients unavailable for pasture and shallow rooted plants.
- Often the timber in old trees has limited value, with hollow centres, cracks and rotten limbs. So better left standing!
- Likewise, younger trees established in woodlots are a better source of firewood...easier to fell and split while drying.

Identified Old Eucalypts in the Greater Bendigo Region

- Huntley, 2008. Garry Cheers surveying the area for a development proposal identified 12 Very Old Trees and 5 old trees that needed to be preserved in that plan.
- In 2014, 9 400-year-old Iron Bark trees were identified in the then Wellsford State Forest.
- On Mandurang-Sedgewick road a river red gum of European historic importance, is claimed to be 700 years old.

How these very old trees can be identified

Maldon Urban Landcare group have collated information, over the past few years, about original indigenous eucalypts that were growing in the Maldon area. They found 263 trees aged between 170 to 545 years old. The species they identified comprised 45% Grey Box, 31% yellow Box, 8% Long Leaf Grey Box, 8% Yellow Gum and 8% Red Box.

The method used entailed measuring the circumference of the tree 1.3m above its base. From that measurement, in mm, the diameter of the tree is calculated by dividing the circumference by 3.14. This is referred to as DBHOB... diameter breast height over bark. A report from the Environment Conservation Council (2001) used the average growth rate of eucalypts in the Box-Ironbark forest in the Bendigo region of 3.5mm/year.

The estimated tree age, in years, is DBHOB, in mm, divided by 3.5.

These Old Trees can be quickly identified...if their circumference is greater than 1815mm, the tree will have existed before 1850.

This method will be used to identify trees in the Bendigo region.

The Strathfieldsaye/ Axe Creek project aims to construct a record of Old trees that existed before European settlement 1830-1850. These trees may be on public land or on roadsides. However, it is hoped that owners will nominate trees on private land. The Axe Creek Landcare group will collate this record to include species, GPS location, street address, photograph, estimated age, number of hollows present and other distinguishing features, or cultural significance.



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"/> 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"/> 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.

Office use

Date processed: _____ / _____ / _____