

ARMIDALE TREE GROUP NEWSLETTER

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Cutting The Ribbon!

Image – Armidale Express



One of the many highlights of the ATG Open Day was the cutting of the ribbon to celebrate the opening of **Michaeliana** the new Hoop House by Local Member Adam Marshal, Dave Steller ATG President, SNEL representative Struan Ferguson and their able assistants.

From The Editor

Celebrating the achievements of the last 40 years has been invigorating. It provided an opportunity to connect with our members and supporters both near and far and to acknowledge their invaluable contribution and that of the staff past and present. It also inspired the idea of the Open Day.

The ATG Open Day on Sunday 7th April exceeded our expectations. More than 600 community members attended and many participated enthusiastically in the workshops and activities. Autumn turned on a glorious show to help us showcase what we do and plan to do in the future. The nursery has never looked better thanks to the commitment, skills and teamwork of the staff. Inspired by the community's enthusiastic response we hope to make it an annual event.



**Staff members
Richard and
Josie
distributing a
free tree to all
who attended
the Open Day
under the
watchful eye of
the Big Koala**

*Image: Dave
Carr*

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FROM THE COMMITTEE

The Bridge

The big news from the committee is that we have purchased a bridge! In January 2023 the ATG was successful in securing a grant for \$32,970 from the NSW government to supplement the cost of buying and installing a bridge in the Michael O'keefe Woodlands. Since that time our members and the wider community have support this project with enthusiasm and generosity. We have closed the gap between the grant funding and the cost of the bridge but will continue to raise funds for installation and to support planned riparian restoration. Our end goal is to improve the habitat value for native birds and wildlife and community access to and enjoyment of this urban wetland gem.



Figure 1 Heyson Truss Bridge

Nursery News

Farewell Ben

The outstanding team we depend on to keep the nursery not just function but continually improving was on full display at the ATG Open Day. They gave their time and expertise to help make the day a success. Sadly a valued member of the team is leaving.

In the three years that Ben has been with the ATG he has acquired a wealth of knowledge, which he has the ability to share with customers in a way that ensures they leave happily and with plants. We are hope that he will return at least on a part-time basis in the near future. We wish him well and thank him sincerely for his skills and his calm and friendly company.



Figure 2 Ben Lange-Hedge

MORE FROM THE COMMITTEE

It is that inescapable time of year again when good will is tested to the limit. As the **End of Financial Year** approaches (EOFY) some of our members are considering the benefits of making tax deductible donations to deserving not-for-profit enterprises of which we are one. Please consider the following options:

- **Make a tax deductible Donation** via the ATG website
- **Renew your membership** and or gift ATG membership to friend and/or family. Just go to the ATG website select the **Get Involved** Option and follow the links to the updated **Membership/Renewal Form**. You may have noticed that the ATG has been less than conscientious about sending renewal notices. This may actually be the first time most of you have been sent a reminder regarding renewal. Your renewal will be invaluable in helping us to update our membership database and improve communication.

If you are a new member, having joined since January 2024 you do not have to renew until June 2025. (sadly this is NOT tax deductible as you receive the benefit of membership which included this Newsletter!) Life members also are not required to renew.

- There is an **easy no cost** way to contribute financially to ATG. If you bank with the Regional Australia Bank please consider participating in the **Regional Australia Bank Community Partnership Program**. The Program is an option on the everyday banking account – Community Partnership Account. It is as simple as visiting the branch and changing the name of your everyday account to a Community Partnership Account (from S1 to S3). When you nominate ATG the bank will calculate your average balance and donate 1.00% p.a. for the period from 1 July 2024. In the previous financial year ATG was well supported by this program receiving over \$5000. Thank you to all of our members who are currently participating. This is an excellent program that supports so many local not-for-profit organisations. Please consider it!

ATG OPEN DAY 2024 - Kerry Steller

Over 600 people attended the Armidale Tree Group's Autumn Open Day on Sunday 7th April. The sun came out for a day packed with informative and fun activities for all.

The new tunnel house, which doubles the capacity of the nursery, was opened by Adam Marshall at 10am in the presence of a good crowd of onlookers. David Steller (ATG president) and Struan Ferguson (SNEL) spoke of the great asset this new tunnel house will bring to the region. It was partially funded by the Koala Strategy Northern Partnerships -Biodiversity and Conservation, Dept of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.



Figure 3 Propagation workshop with Sam Arandale-Bioletti

Attendees voted on a name for the new tunnel house on the day and 'Michaeliana' was voted highest. *Eucalyptus michaeliana* (the Hillgrove gum) is a local eucalypt species that grows well in our region.

People flocked to the workshops on propagation by wholesale team leader Sam Arandale-Bioletti, Plant Identification and Plants to Attract Birds by Peter Metcalfe, and Koalas with Dave Carr. Our speakers presented informative talks: Dr Andrew Thornhill on Mosses and Bryophytes, Dr Jane Andrews on Eucalypts, Penelope Sinclair on Mixing Natives with Exotics in your Garden and Dr Jane Pickard on Walnuts and Wattles. Kids were enriched with Nature Journaling and Nature Treasure Hunting in the Woodland with Kerry Steller and Ann Haining.

Figure 4 Plant Identification workshop with Peter Metcalf and New Hoop House



Beautiful plant print artworks by Emily Curtis, Shirley Tier and Lilian Creamer were on show and some are

still available for sale. Displays by SNEL, Australian Plants Society and Northern Tablelands Wildlife Carers sat under the watchful eye of the Giant Koala. Free trees were given to all who attended. Music by Steve Tafra, Sue Metcalfe and the Cello Choir and the Recorder group provided ambience as people enjoyed the nursery and undertook tours of the facility. The Armidale Tree Group thanks all who supported the day. In our 40th year as a community not-for profit group and winner of the ARC Australia Day Awards for an Environment Group, the Tree Group is proud to show off some of the work we do in putting back into the community.



Koala Fund Planting at Kindly Animal Sanctuary

The Kindly Animal Sanctuary, owned and operated by Naomi Hooper was chosen as the site for this project because of its proximity to core koala populations and also because it provides both habitat and connectivity, and the potential for long term security for the planting. The ATG is grateful to Naomi and her family for their support and cooperation in the project and commend her for her deep commitment to wildlife conservation and to care and kindness to all animals.

Figure 5 Naomi Hooper with her daughter and grand daughter planting koala habitat trees -3 generations helping koalas!



On the 10th April students from Martin's Gully School contributed to the final stage of this significant ATG planting.

Eighty students enthusiastically planted, watered and protected more than 200 trees and shrubs, helping to create wildlife corridors for koalas and other native fauna. It was a great effort and an opportunity for kids to be part of the solution to environmental problems they are becoming increasingly aware of. It was also a very positive note on which to complete the final stage of the planting. Thank you to our members and friends who participated enthusiastically in the two previous plantings at Kindly Animal Sanctuary in March.

Figure 6 Thank you to the wonderful team from Martin's Gully Primary School and the other enthusiastic volunteers that helped on each of the Kindly Animal Sanctuary plantings



Figure 7 Jeremy Smith - an invaluable member - enjoying a well deserved break from planting



Figure 8 - The koalas say thank you!

Nyambika Kyuna Visit

Figure 9 Andrew Fuller and Jeb Widders by the creek at Nyambika Kyuna



In June 2023 members of the ATG committee met with representatives of the newly formed Newara Aboriginal Corporation, Callum Clayton-Dixon and Dave Widders to discuss meaningful and mutually beneficial shared activities. The corporation had recently purchased a 600acre block near Boorolong Nature Reserve. The property is called *Nyambika Kyuna* (This is our land). The first part time ranger will be started in July 2023. He has a Cert II in horticulture and experience in general maintenance.

There has been rapid growth in language and cultural revival projects, and leadership programs in school. The corporation is keen to build strong partnerships with

like-minded organizations and to increase employment opportunities for Anaiwan people.

Suggestions at that time included having Newara rangers work with the ATG Environmental Services teams to develop skills in weed control, re-vegetation techniques and plant identification. Up-skilling would enable the ranger to develop as facilitator of future projects and to train new rangers in turn ATG staff can benefit from sharing indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

In March committee members Dave Steller (President), Kerry Steller and Narelle Clarke and staff member Sam Arandale-Bioletti were able to visit Nyambika Kyuna to meet with rangers Andrew Fuller and Jeb Widders. A seed growing project was discussed at that time and the Newara Corporation has since that visit been successful in securing a grant to proceed with the project.

Figure 10 Dave Steller Jeb Widders Andrew Fuller an Sam Arandale-Bioletti - a section of the tree has been cut to make a coolamon



Coolamon were traditionally made by men from hardwood trees and used widely across the country. They had many uses including to carry food and water and as a cradle for babies. They may also have been used for winnowing grain in traditional bread making.

Why Plant Wattles? – Peter Metcalfe

Australia has over thirteen hundred different wattles. Forget the old Cootamundra wattle! There are many smaller wattles that are suitable for home gardens. Different species will give a show of gold in different seasons. Wattles provide a pleasing variety of sizes shapes and different leaf textures to meet your garden or farm needs.

Small wattles such as *Acacia amoena*, *A. floribunda*, *A. cultriformis*, *A. pravissima*, *A. nana* and many others are suitable for gardens. Most wattles will respond quite well to pruning after flowering. There are even prostrate wattles available as ground covers.

Life-span

There is a myth that wattles are “short lived”. Some of the bigger wattles live a long time; 30+ years. Other wattles grow fast to quickly establish a windbreak but die after maybe 10 years. They will, however, naturally regenerate from seed or suckers. Have a look at the second generation of wattles sprouting along the Armidale bypass. Fast growing wattles can be used as a “nurse crop” for softer plants. In the harsh climate of open paddocks in the New England.

Nitrogen fixing

Most soils of the New England are poor so wattles, being legumes, help build up soil fertility. Wattles are important in windbreak and corridor plantings as they fix nitrogen and add to the nutrients available to other plants. Like other legumes, wattles are high in protein and are selectively grazed by stock. This is why wattles are virtually absent from grazing land in the New England.

Wattles provide foliage all year round and produce a mass of pollen in spring. This means that wattles contribute greatly



Figure 11 *Acacia lunata*

to the food web. Insects in wattles are high in protein

thanks to their high protein diet. Thornbills, Weebills and honeyeaters seem to spend a lot of time in wattles foraging for these nutritious insects. Importantly Christmas Beetles do not eat wattles

Wattle seed is an important food source for parrots such as Crimson and Eastern Rosellas, King Parrots and Galahs that eat seeds from the pods while they are green.

Later seeds fall to the ground and are a high protein food source for Crested Pigeons, Bronzewings and Wonga Pigeons. Wattle saetles

Wattles provide **cover for small birds** and the presence of an understory of wattles deters Noisy Miners which tends to colonise tree lots and prevent other birds from living there. The open “park” structure of trees over grass without an understory of wattles and shrubs is an ideal habitat for Noisy Miners. This is why golf courses are invariably colonised by this aggressive species.

Soil health

One important part of the food web is the mulch, leaf litter and soil layer of the system. We often overlook this part of the food chain. The leaves and bark shed by the trees and shrubs provide the basic energy for the litter ecosystem. The multitude of litter consumers are helping break down the organic matter and return the nutrients to the soil and ultimately back to the plants. These small organisms are simultaneously part of the food chain. Scrub Wrens, Choughs and Yellow Robins are examples of birds reliant on the organisms of the leaf litter.

If you need more convincing to plant wattles just visit the ATG nursery! There are so many to choose from!

