



North Head Sanctuary Foundation Inc

Custodians of North Head

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Education Room - Bandicoot Heaven

We are closed due to COVID-19.

We hope to open our doors some time in January 2021.

Native Plant Nursery



Photo by Ian Evans who therefore could not be in the group photo.

Fortunately, we were able to have our outdoor Christmas morning tea before we had to close again for COVID 19 on Friday 17 December. Unfortunately, not all our volunteers could make it our Christmas morning tea.

We hope to be back at work on Tuesday 5 January.

If you would like to join us, there is plenty to do, especially planting and weeding, please call in any Tuesday or Friday morning between 8am and noon to have a look.

To join us one needs to be a member of North Head Sanctuary Foundation. For more details, please send an email to northhead@fastmail.com.au

135 Bus

Our 135 bus was replaced by 161 bus – Manly to North Head and back again - on 20 December 2020.

The 135 went from Warringah Mall to North Fort and back



again. The buses have not been going to North Fort on a regular basis as they have trouble turning around as

Fairfax lookout is still closed. Timetable <https://transportsw.info/routes/details/sydney-buses-network/161/28161>

Seeking the Ninja echidna

“Butterflies are not flowers!”

Peter Macinnis

You may know that, but as Christine and I come along the Ferny Track, counting the species in flower, we know the last 150 metres should get us over the 30 mark, and there’s a temptation to count the odd Lepidopteran. The thing is, counting flowers is a blind, because what we really hope to see is a snake or an echidna, and my focus has switched recently to echidnas.

I write for adults (easy!) and youngsters (much harder). As the result of a casual remark at a kid-lit talk, several friends nudged me towards a factual echidna book, and I’m now scoping the idea. It has legs.

The literature says echidnas are shy and reclusive, but on North Head, they are sly and exclusive, and often hide in plain sight. A few weeks ago, though, we saw four in one week, and over Christmas, we saw three in five days.

The echidna brain is large, with an extensively folded cerebral cortex, and if you graph brain mass against body mass, they are well ‘above the line’. I think it quite possible



that they have decided that I, knowing they have ticks, giant fleas and worms, may be simpatico.

Or it may be an age thing: the longest-lived zoo specimen survived in Philadelphia for 49 years. Perhaps, in a secret conclave, they have decided that these curious apes are on their Covid way out, and so require urgent study.

The writer’s research assistants.

They are certainly senior to us: the first echidnas were probably platypuses that left the water 13 million years ago, and their four (or five) subspecies are now all over Australia. Only this morning, I had a note that the acanthion subspecies from the Dryandra in WA are becoming more companionable.

On North Head, our echidnas vary in size and mass (age and gender play a role here: when they when they leave

the shallow hole, often called a burrow, at 6-8 months, they weigh one to two kg, but can grow to five). They also vary considerably in colour, and I had thought one of my finds was fire-blackened**, but Geoff Lambert says it was always so.



Just a word of advice: don't ask me about echidnas for the next few months: I am overloaded with echidna trivia and cute images.

A younger echidna, just past the stone arch, eastern side.

**see last month's newsletter.

Allowing recovery from fire, naturally... but watching for weeds

Judy Lambert

The amazing efforts of Viyanna Leo and her little team at Australian Wildlife Conservancy, working with staff from NPWS and Taronga Zoo have ensured that animals displaced by the 17 October fire have emergency shelter, food and water.

New green plant life is emerging from the ash and blackness. As experienced regenerators from the Australian Association of Bush Regenerators (AABR) advise in their November 2020 newsletter the first step in post-fire bushland recovery is to "Allow the site to show a recovery response before undertaking any work on site". This requires patience. Depending on the season and rainfall "... some sites might not start to substantially recover for several months".

We are fortunate that coastal heathlands, including our Critically Endangered Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub (ESBS), grow on nutrient-poor sandy soils – not the preferred habitat of most weeds.

Our various studies of ESBS recovery after past Hazard Reduction burns indicate that relatively non-invasive weeds such as Cudweed (*Gnaphalium*) and Inkweed (*Phytolacca*) turn up in open spaces left after fire, but these are often overtaken by native species.

Of greater concern are prolific seeders such as Pampas Grass (*Cortaderia selloana*), African Lovegrass (*Eragrostis curvula*) and Lantana (*Lantana camara*) – all of which are found at North Head. While the adult plants of these species are killed by fire, their abundant seedbanks see them regenerate prolifically after fire.

Both the Harbour Trust and NPWS contractors are monitoring the burn areas for invasive weeds. We can all help by being observant when out walking. Watch out for these unwelcome invaders and let the land managers know when and where you've seen them. Avoid going into any recently burnt areas. By doing so we avoid trampling newly emerging seedlings (often not easily noticed when

they are only 1-2cm high) AND we avoid introducing weeds. A 2010 study by Prof Brian Sindel and his UNE team showed that we unwittingly carry an amazing diversity of weed species on our walking shoes/boots and our clothing.

Sound post-fire management requires a "watch and wait" to allow plants to establish without disturbance, while also ensuring that weeds are not taking over in barer patches.

Regrowth after September Controlled Burn

The area behind the Nursery was burnt in a controlled burn on 4 September and is now showing signs of renewal.



Taken from the outside of fire area, note the Xanthorrhoeas are flowering on 30 December by Jenny Wilson.

Back in Time

Glen Innes Examiner (NSW: 1908-1954), 21 November 1918.

COMBATING INFLUENZA. SYDNEY TAKING PRECAUTIONS. INNOCULATION FAVORED.

A special meeting of the State Cabinet was held on Monday in order to devise measures to meet any possible outbreak of Spanish influenza in New South Wales. Information has been obtained from the New Zealand authorities that the death rate in the Dominions has been appalling. The Cabinet has decided to adopt the recommendations of the health officers and to take immediate steps to prepare an elaborate organisation to combat the epidemic. The Coast Hospital will be cleared of patients as far as possible and put in readiness for the reception of large numbers of epidemic and pneumonia patients. Special transport arrangements are to be made and an extensive chain of inoculation depots will be established. The medical officers attached to the Board of Health and other departments will be inoculated during the week with special vaccine prepared from a culture obtained from a patient at North Head. Tens of thousands of doses will be ready shortly. It is proposed that the suburban Town Halls should be utilised as inoculation depots, in addition to other halls. Suitable arrangements are also being made for country centres.