



North Head Sanctuary Foundation Inc

Custodians of North Head

ABN 97093480659 PO Box 506, Balgowlah, NSW 2093
northheadsanctuaryfoundation.org.au

Newsletter No 192 Nov-Dec 2024

Getting to know North Head's ESBS plants

Judy Lambert

Over the past week or two we've been renewing some tired old trackside signs that have been in place for 4-5 years. These are designed to help visitors get to know the 40+ plant species on North Head that are part of the Critically Endangered Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub. As you walk around the various tracks you'll see yellow name plates, each with a plant photo and a QR code.

Point your camera/ QR code reader at the sign and you'll be taken to a page on our website, which will



tell you a little about that plant. Enjoy the walks and let your friends know about this ongoing project.

Bandicoot Heaven – volunteers needed

Are you a people person? Do you want to know more about the flora and fauna of North Head?

Join our volunteer team on Saturdays and Sundays 10am- 4pm. Contact Judy Lambert: M: 0427217580, or E: twsombat505@gmail.com

The Old Oval: A Good News Story

Toni Stevenson

In 2009 the Nursery group commenced a project aimed at providing better habitat for native fauna, and in particular the threatened bandicoot population. The guidelines were simple - fill the prepared finger beds and perimeter with plants. What I remember most about the beginning was personally feeling daunted by the scale of the project, as well as being buoyed by the enthusiasm of everyone else.

Over the next 10 years several thousand tube stock were added. Our work was disrupted during Covid but the garden/bush areas continue to grow. A walk around shows that our efforts now provide good habitat for fauna, birds, reptiles and insects. Regrettably rabbits also take advantage of the excellent cover. This pest is hard to control and local land managers keep it under review. Most plants fresh from the Nursery require some type of protection until the leaves mature enough to make them unpalatable to the pest.



A mature 'finger' on the old oval

Photo: Ian Evans

The AEP recently informed us that there are 30 cameras spread over Sydney Harbour Federation Trust and National Parks & Wildlife land, all positioned to capture wildlife activities. These cameras record the good (penguins, bandicoots, possums, flying foxes etc) and the bad (foxes, cats, rabbits etc). Of particular interest is the fact that a camera on the Old Oval registered more activity than the other 29 during the survey period.

While the reason for any one spot being favoured over another is hard to quantify, I believe that here it can be attributed to our wonderful revegetation work.

"The AEP monitoring camera located on the oval at North Head Sanctuary has the highest recorded fauna biodiversity on the headland for 2024. The camera is located within the finger-like vegetation established by NHSF and recorded 20 different species. The high number of species at this site is likely due to animals foraging in an open space encouraged by the safety of vegetation cover nearby." Toni Blackwell, AEP

'Endangered' Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub. What's special about it?

Judy Lambert

From the earliest days of NHSF's presence at North Head, our native plant Nursery has focused on growing plants that are part of the Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub (ESBS).

While very few of the individual plant species that make up the ESBS community are rare or endangered, the mix, or 'assemblage', of plants is sufficiently restricted that, in 1997, it was listed as 'Endangered' in NSW. In 2017 the Scientific Committee upgraded the community to Critically Endangered ie "facing an



Photo: Geoff Lambert

extremely high risk of extinction in NSW in the immediate future". At that time, the Scientific Committee also revised the list of species that are 'characteristic' of the ESBS community. Fifty-five of the 67 species on this list are found at North Head.

ESBS occurs on well-drained, nutrient-poor windblown (aeolian) sands in coastal areas from North Head to the Royal National Park. It is estimated that less than 10% of the original ESBS heathland community remains, much of it in small scattered sites. North Head has some of the largest remnants.



Restoring complex ecological communities is a challenging task. However, our Nursery team is making an important contribution to maintaining this special community.

Third Quarantine Cemetery

Kaye Lee

The scourge of smallpox was to hit Sydney many times, but none more so than the epidemic of 1881-82, with many of those affected residing in and around Sussex Street Sydney. Mrs Selina Elliott, the first person to be buried in the Third Cemetery, was just one of those who lived in this area.

She and her husband, William, lived in one room of a boarding house on the corner of Sussex and Fowler Streets, a building in which one John Emerson had already succumbed to smallpox on 24 August 1881. When visiting Mrs Elliott there on Thursday 8 September, Health Officer Dr Caffyn found that she too was suffering from smallpox, but in its early stage. People were being quarantined locally at the time, but other 'inmates' of her building insisted on her early removal to the quarantine ground, which took place the following day¹. She was to die on 12 September 1881.

Unlike Mrs Elliott, when John Emerson's body was removed to the quarantine ground just 3 weeks earlier, he would have been buried in the Second Quarantine Cemetery (though no register of those burials seems to have survived). If Emerson had lived just a few weeks more, he too would have been interred in the Third Cemetery.

Why both Mrs Elliott and Mr Emerson were susceptible to the disease can be seen in the very inadequate conditions of their boarding house and similarly for others living close by, in what was

essentially a slum area not far from the Darling Harbour wharves.

"The building consists of three rooms and a shop on the ground floor and 2 small attics. The 5 rooms were occupied by no less than 3 families, consisting of 11 people. A Mr Emerson, a coal carrier, rented one of these rooms, which was occupied by himself, his wife and his child. This room was not only used as a sleeping apartment, but had to serve the purposes of sitting and dining room, while the cooking &c, were done in it. One may judge of the age and condition of the building when it is stated that some of the walls were covered with paper to the depth of nearly an inch, successive layers, numbering eight or nine, having from time to time been put over the other."... At the back of the corner building occupied by the 11 souls was an outhouse, which seemed to have been used as a stable, fowlhouse, &c. In this outhouse there was a large accumulation of decayed and decaying matter, consisting of the excrement of poultry, pumpkins, and house refuse." ⁽²⁾



Cnr Wellington Place off Sussex St, opposite Fowler St 1875 ⁽³⁾

Overcrowding, small size of rooms, insufficient window space, habits of uncleanliness and the impossibility of insuring isolation of the patient in respect to the other inmates lead to at least 154 cases of smallpox in Sydney in 1881-82 and 40 deaths.⁽⁴⁾

1. Sydney Morning Herald Friday 9 September 1881 p.6 downloaded Trove 10/11/24
2. Sydney Morning Herald Friday 27 August 1881 downloaded Trove 19/10/24
3. State Library New South Wales downloaded 10/11/24
4. Cumpston JHL The History of Small-Pox in Australia, 1788-1908 <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/xqtw6gna/items/downloaded/10/11/24>

Kindy Neighbours' Surprise Visit



Photo: Ian Evans

Tuesday volunteers were treated to a 'thankyou' visit by children from Montessori Child Care bearing trays of freshly made biscuits and handmade thank you cards. It made our day!