

# Shrimptons Creek small bird habitat corridor progress report

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*By Bev Debrincat, Executive Director, International Environmental Weed Foundation trading as Habitat Network (a not-for-profit NGO). Edited by Pam Ward and Louise Brodie.*

## *Summary and results*

The Shrimptons Creek small bird habitat project was conceived in November 2011 along with the plan to establish The Habitat community native plant nursery and community food garden at Santa Rosa Park at the head of Shrimptons Creek.

Shrimptons Creek Master Plan states:

The parkland is approximately 3.3 km in length running north-south...The creek embankment is steep with level ground beyond the embankments. .... A portion of the Parklands is classified as natural area although the majority of the vegetation along Shrimptons Creek and the adjacent parks have been highly disturbed with weed species more prominent. However there are some good stands of remnant plant communities situated within Shrimptons Creek Parklands. This includes three endangered ecological communities along Shrimptons Creek, Blue Gum High Forest, Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest and Sydney Sandstone Gully Forest.

In 2012 an initial bird survey was undertaken and photo points established. Plants were grown and initial plantings with volunteers from The Habitat were undertaken in 2013 – 2014. These plantings were mostly canopy species suitable for acting as connectors between small bird habitat areas.

In 2015 we formalised the plan for the habitat corridor and received funding to help with promotional materials from Greater Sydney Local Land Services. In 2015 we identified and started door knocking all residents who back onto Shrimptons Creek between Epping Road and Quarry Road (near The Habitat). All residents in our target area (give or take 10 houses at Quarry Road end) have been door knocked and are invited to help with plantings via letterboxing or emailing.

In 2015 we undertook 2 plantings in Greenwood Park and in early 2016 we had another 2 plantings near Bridge Road (Greenwood Park and Tindarra Reserve).

When talking to the neighbours around The Habitat we were told that within the past 10 years there had been fairywrens in their gardens. Council received funding for the upper stretch of Shrimptons Creek to undertake works started in 2007. This project removed all vegetation from Bridge Road to Quarry Road, except for larger trees, resulting in the loss of all native understorey flora, fauna and fauna habitat, consequently the small native birds were no longer seen in this area or in the neighbours gardens. Following the replanting of the area with appropriate native vegetation it is hoped the small birds will return along the Shrimptons Creek native corridor.

The nearest population of superb fairywrens, red-browed finch and white-browed scrubwrens are near Epping Road, and are heard and seen in Booth Reserve, ELS Hall and Greenwood Park. They have also been heard in Tindarra Reserve.

Our aim is to provide suitable small bird habitat all along the creekline from Epping Road to Quarry Road and eventually have the small birds come back up the creekline to The Habitat and our neighbours gardens. How long will this take? 10 years – 20 years? Let find out.

## Habitat Network and habitat corridors

In 2008 International Environmental Weed Foundation (IEWF), in partnership with City of Ryde Council and Hunter's Hill Council, ran a series of workshops as part of a Restoring Natural Capital (RNC) grant project, looking at landscape level ecological restoration. This RNC project was funded by a NSW Environmental Trust grant. Through this workshop series it was identified that most people in the local community did not know the local native plants (where to buy them or how to grow them), did not know most weeds or how to control them and it was highlighted that the community had noticed that we are losing our small native birds (such as fairywrens and red-browed finch). From these simple ideas Habitat Network was started which runs as an IEWF project and is the name by which IEWF is now generally known.

Habitat Network aims to connect people and native habitat, while teaching people about native plants, weeds and ecological restoration. It encourages and assists people in planting local native plant habitat with a specific focus on small native bird habitat connections in private gardens and as corridors to connect bushland areas.

For this project to grow and to support the creation of small bird habitat corridors and connections it became obvious that a local community native plant nursery which would attract and involve the community was needed. This would allow communication with a wider community of people while providing an affordable source of plants.

## The Habitat community native plant nursery and community food garden

In December 2008 at a Christmas celebration for Ryde bushcare volunteers at Field of Mars Reserve Bev Debrincat, Pam Ward, Ryde bushcare volunteers Steve Holmes, David Martin, Michael Crane (Certificate of Horticulture from Ryde TAFE) discussed starting a community native plant nursery.

A business plan was first drafted in February 2009 - written by: Bev and co-authored by Pam Ward (Ryde – Hunter's Hill Flora & Fauna Preservation Society (RHHFFPS), Steve Papp (FOM Environmental Education Centre), Robbie Renu (Mars Inc), Ryde bushcare volunteers Steve Holmes, David Martin and Michael Crane.

**Mission:** Through a community native plant nursery & community food garden to provide opportunities for the residents of Ryde and Hunter's Hill to grow native plants and food plants. And in a fun way learn more about and work towards improving our local environment and creating habitat corridors.

**Our vision:** To grow a vibrant community nursery and food garden, supported by the local council and community.

From 2009 to August 2010 we lobbied all City of Ryde Councillors and finally in August 2010 the nursery was approved by Council to be at Santa Rosa Park. With a lot of help from Council the land was re-categorised as "Community Open Space" (endorsed by Council Oct 2011) and the Shrimptons Creek Master Plan was updated to allow the nursery.

We received a 2010 NSW Government's Community Building Partnership program (CBP) of \$18,323 in 2010 which was sufficient to get this project up and running. In November 2011 The Habitat community native plant nursery and community food garden was officially opened by NSW Government MP the Honourable Victor Dominello. This was a fun event to which all local residents and the local community groups related to plant and the environment were invited.



Pam Ward at proposed site for The Habitat at Santa Rosa Park March 2010. Pam is standing on Shrimptons Creek which is a closed culvert at this top end.



Workshop at The Habitat Feb 2016

## The science

In 2009 and 2010 we researched small bird habitat and made connections with Sue Stevens (who had completed her research project and thesis on Small Bird Habitat in the Urban Landscape), Steve Anyon-Smith (a bird expert who after many years of observation wrote an article "Habitat protection for small birds in Honeysuckle Reserve, Jannali") and Kurtis Lindsay (a bird expert who helped with project planning, bird surveys and mapping).

We developed a simple diagram to explain / illustrate the structure and diversity of plants required for small bird habitat havens or islands. With the help of Virginia Bear (graphic artist) we enhanced this diagram to have more of a visual impact. We also developed a range of printed resources and talks to further explain the concepts.

During 2009 and 2010 we were also doing on-ground works with Hunter's Hill Council to establish some small bird habitat connections in Riverglade Reserve, Gladesville.

For this work in May 2011 the Habitat Network won both the Innovation Award (joint 1st) and a Highly Commended for Urban Landcare. These were awarded by Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority as part of their 2011 Regional Awards.

## Growing plants

With Bev having been a professional bush regenerator, with experience growing native plants with Greening Australia as a volunteer and independently growing plants for bush regeneration projects, and with Pam Ward having come from a plant nursery family and gardening background, we had growing skills already at hand. Many volunteers also have wonderful knowledge they share with us and so we are always learning.

During 2012 we started collecting cuttings and seeds from the local bushland with permission granted by both City of Ryde and Hunter's Hill Council. As habitat for small birds is the focus we concentrate on growing plants which are specifically suited to small bird habitat and not those that attract larger birds.

## Monitoring and bird surveys

This project was conceived back in 2012. Mark Cachia and Bev Debrincat undertook a baseline bird survey on 15 April 2012.

Sightings near The Habitat and along the creekline are also recorded if significant, ie new or target species.

Photo points were established in January 2012 and a set of photos taken. Also some of the birds and animals seen at that time were photographed.

Photos are taken of every planting day.

We plan to undertake another bird survey in Spring 2016.

## Grants

In February 2015 we received funding of \$1000 from Greater Sydney Landcare Network to produce introductory brochures for engaging the neighbours, who back onto Shrimptons Creek, and Habitat Network stickers.

Annually Johnson Controls Inc (JCI) have provided funding of \$1000 to help with bush regeneration at Greenwood Park and have also volunteered their time for either doing a half day's weeding or planting.

## Community Engagement

Utilising the introductory brochures and with a native plant in hand we have from 2015 through to 2016 door knocked (all bar about 10 houses) that back onto Shrimptons Creek. When the resident was home we explained the project. If not at home we left the brochure and plant at the front door.

Before each planting we door knocked the next strip of houses from where we left off the previous time and we invited them to the up and coming planting. For each subsequent planting we then letterboxed all other neighbours (previously door knocked) and if we had collected an email address we emailed an invitation to help.

The following table shows numbers of houses door-knocked.

Location	East side of creek	West side of creek	Existing members	Date door knocked	Added to Shrimptons email list
Kent to Epping	26	5	0	2015-05 or 2015-10	9
Bridge to Kent	27	23	0	2015-05 or 2015-10	3 (1 reg vol now)
Quarry to Bridge	29	31	9	2016-03 or 2016-04	Total now 33 from door knocks and from plantings
TOTAL all		141	9		

#### Letter boxing

- For 1<sup>st</sup> planting day – Aug 2015 – door knocked Kent Road to Bridge Road east side
- For 2<sup>nd</sup> planting day – Nov 2015 - letterboxed Epping Road to Kent Road to 500 residents (except those being door knocked) with help from Greenwood Park bushcare volunteers and Council plus Council organised sausage sizzle – this included many houses outside of target area to encourage new bushcare volunteers
- For 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> – March and April 2016 - door knocked remainder of residents except for about 10 residences and letterboxed all other target audience residences.
- Still to door knock last 10 residences close to Quarry Road.

After each planting we add new local volunteers to our planting volunteer email list for future contact.



Red-browed finch at Booth Reserve near Epping Road – white-browed scrubwrens and superb fairy-wrens have also been observed in this area. These are the target species for this project.

### *Shrimptons Creek small bird habitat plantings*

Plantings have included planting of habitat havens or islands using 100 plants per haven.

**Habitat connectors** of 3 to 5 *Hakea sericea* or a *Melaleuca lineariifolia* or a *Syncarpia glomulifera* have been planted by various groups of volunteers from The Habitat.

- In July 2013, November 2013, April 2014 *Melaleuca lineariifolia* and *Syncarpia glomulifera* were planted in the upper section between Quarry Road and Bridge Road on the eastern side of the creek.
- April/May 2016 some clumps of 3-5 *Hakea sericea* were planted in the upper section between Quarry Road and Bridge Road on the eastern side of the creek and also between the Greenwood Park plantings and Epping Road.
- Follow-up plantings of dense areas and *Hakea sericea* connectors are still needed all along the project area. Council will also ask the contractors looking after ELS Hall and Booth Reserve to plant some dense habitat areas.

#### **Habitat Havens or islands planted with 100 plants:**

- August 2015 planting at Greenwood Park just to south of pedestrian bridge – 10 volunteers attended
- November 2015 planting at Greenwood Park to the north west of the pedestrian bridge – 16 volunteers – 2 from target area and joined Greenwood Park bushcare group
- March 2016 planting at Greenwood Park next to Kent Road – 8 volunteers – 2 from target area
- April 2016 planting at Tindarra Reserve next to Kent Road – 17 volunteers – 3 from target area
- August 2016 Johnson Controls Inc under supervision of Council planted a large 200 plant habitat area in ELS Hall on west side of creekline.
- Next in November 2016 will be Tindarra Reserve starting from previous planting towards the south – planting will be all connectors and also in-fill planting of a previously planted area (planted by Tony Finnemore) and within weedy edges between last planting and Tony's area.

## *Species list of plants used in habitat havens or islands and as connectors*

### **Connectors:**

*Hakea sericea*

*Melaleuca lineriiifolia*

### **Habitat havens or islands:**

*Acacia echinula*

*Acacia linifolia*

*Acacia longifolia*

*Acacia suaveolens*

*Acacia ulicifolia*

*Bursaria spinose*

*Dianella caerulea*

*Dianella longifolia*

*Einadia hastate*

*Glycine clandestina*

*Hakea salicifolia*

*Hakea sericea*

*Hardenbergia violacea*

*Kunzea ambigua*

*Lambertia Formosa*

*Leptospermum polygalifolium*

*Leucopogon juniperinus*

*Lomandra longifolia*

*Melaleuca lineariifolia*

*Melaleuca nodosa*

*Micrantheum ericoides*

*Ozothamnus diosmifolius*

*Phyllanthus hirtellus*

*Platylobium formosum*

*Platysace lanceolate*

*Pomax umbellata*

*Trachymene incisa*

*Woolsia pungens*

*Xanthosia pilosa*

*Zieria smithii*

## *Bird surveys and fauna sightings*

### **Bird survey 2012**

Australian black duck  
Australian magpie  
Buff-banded rail  
Crested pigeon  
Eastern spinebill  
Grey butcherbird  
Indian myna  
King parrot  
Laughing kookaburra  
Magpie-lark  
Noisy minor  
Pied currawong  
Rainbow lorikeet  
Sacred ibis  
Sulphur-crested cockatoo  
Superb fairywren

### **Birds sighted at or near The Habitat**

Australian magpie  
Buff-banded rail  
Common koel  
Crested pigeon  
Figbird  
Grey butcherbird  
King parrot  
Little lorikeet  
Masked lapwing  
Moorehen (Flinders)  
Noisy minor  
Pied cormorant (Talavera Rd)  
Pied currawong  
Pink galah  
Rainbow lorikeet  
Red-browed finch (Booth Reserve near Epping Road)  
Sacred ibis  
Sulphur-crested cockatoo  
White-browed scrubwren (ELS Hall)  
White-faced heron

**Other fauna**

Brush-tail possum

Diamond python - reported as 2 m or so near Bridge Road

Lace monitor (Talavera Road)

Water dragon

Water skink

**Frogs at The Habitat**

*Crinia signifera*

Eastern striped marsh frog

Peron's tree frog

**Native bees at The Habitat**

Blue-banded bee

Carder bee (African)

Neon cuckoo

Teddy bear bee

*Tetragonula carbonaria*

Photos



Quarry to Bridge July 2013 –  
volunteers from The Habitat



Quarry to Bridge near Bridge Road April  
2014 – volunteers from The Habitat



Epping to Kent - Greenwood Park planting  
August 2015



Epping to Kent - Greenwood Park planting  
November 2015



Epping to Kent - Greenwood Park near Kent Rd planting March 2016



Kent to Bridge - Tindarra Reserve near Kent Rd planting April 2016



1 indicates location of March 2016 planting site at Greenwood Park  
2 indicates location of April 2016 planting site at Tindarra Reserve