

Shrimptons Creek small bird habitat corridor progress report

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Summary

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.

Summary

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 have been door knocked and from time-to-time invited to help with community plantings via letterboxing or emailing.

In 2015 we undertook 2 community plantings in Greenwood Park and in early 2016 we had another 2 community plantings near Bridge Road (Greenwood Park and Tindarra Reserve). Since then plantings have been carried out by volunteers under supervision of The Habitat or by corporations under supervision of City of Ryde Council bushland staff.

When talking to the neighbours around The Habitat we were told that prior to 2007 there had been fairywrens in their gardens. Council received funding for the upper stretch of Shrimptons Creek to undertake works which started in 2007. This Council project removed all vegetation from Bridge Road to Quarry Road, except for larger trees, resulting in the loss of all weedy and native understorey flora, fauna and fauna habitat; consequently the small native birds are no longer seen in this area or in the neighbours' gardens. Council re-planted the area with natives to create an open forest. Our

project is specifically planting small bird habitat along the eastern side of the creek. Following the replanting with appropriate native vegetation with the required structure for small bird habitat it is hoped the small birds will return along the Shrimptons Creek corridor.

Unfortunately following removal by RMS and contractors in 2015 of the Lantana, where small birds had been breeding, only 8 small birds remain in this corridor. A red-browed finch was photographed in 2012 in Booth Reserve but not seen since. Small family groups of superb fairywrens (2 x 2) and white-browed scrubwrens (2 x 2) have been found from time-to-time in Booth Reserve, ELS Hall, Greenwood Park or Wilga Park. They have also been heard once in Tindarra Reserve. No more than 8 small birds have been identified in any 1 survey since that time.

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 either expand in population or have new recruits move into the area and hopefully one day see them at The Habitat and in our neighbours' gardens. How long will this take? 10 years – 20 years - never? Let's 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 City of 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 and community food garden 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, 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. We estimate over 200 people attended.

Habitat Network as at end 2019 has over 1000 contacts on its emailing list and The Habitat volunteers contribute close to 5000 hours per year (up from just under 3000 hours in its first year) all within its operating hours of 10 am to 4 pm every Wednesday and Saturday (excluding some public holidays and special events). These hours are contributed by around 50 fairly regular volunteers and another 80 or so irregular volunteers each year. Having a very flexible structure and volunteering arrangement encourages people to contribute what hours they can, when they can and allows students to fulfil their community and award volunteering obligations.



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. This project has since expanded to the Hunter’s Hill Small Bird Habitat Corridor Project which extends about 4 km – see separate story.

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.

In 2017 Habitat Network was recognised at the Greater Sydney Local Land Services Awards and NSW Landcare Conference in Albury for our work with The Habitat, its community and specifically the Shrimptons Creek Habitat Corridor Project.

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 Council 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. In 2018 we grew close to 10,000 plants (up from around 5,000 in our first year).

Monitoring and bird surveys

The Shrimptons Creek small bird habitat corridor 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, i.e. 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 planting days. See

<https://www.habitatnetwork.org/PhotoPages/ActivitiesPhotos.htm>

Bird surveys are undertaken every 6 months.

Grants

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

Annually (to 2017) Johnson Controls Inc (JCI) provided funding of \$1000 to help with bush regeneration at Greenwood Park and/or have volunteered their time doing a half day's weeding or planting.

Community Engagement

Utilising the introductory brochures and with a native plant in hand, during the period from 2015 through to 2016, we door knocked all 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 1st planting day – Aug 2015 – door knocked Kent Road to Bridge Road east side
- For 2nd 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 3rd and 4th – March and April 2016 - door knocked remainder of residents and letterboxed all other target audience residences.

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



Red-browed finch at Booth Reserve 2012 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

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. A variety of other mid-storey and under-storey plants have also been planted in Santa Rosa Park to create larger areas of denser habitat suitable for the small birds.

- 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 at Santa Rosa Park.

- 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.
- 2017/2018 young people volunteering for work experience planted small clumps of habitat from Greenwood Park back towards The Habitat through Tindarra, Flinders and Santa Rosa Parks. These plantings were within existing planted areas.
- 2017/2018/2019 The Habitat volunteers continued to do in-fill habitat planting along the eastern side of Santa Rosa Park and planted and maintained a habitat haven close to The Habitat. This habitat haven was mown in October 2019 and had to be replanted.

Planting Habitat Havens or islands:

- August 2015 100 plants planted at Greenwood Park just south of the pedestrian bridge – 10 volunteers attended.
- November 2015 100 plants planted at Greenwood Park to the north west of the pedestrian bridge – 16 volunteers – 2 from target area who also joined Greenwood Park bushcare group.
- March 2016 100 plants planted at Greenwood Park next to Kent Road – 8 volunteers – 2 from target area – this area has since been mown, replanted, flooded several times and now only a few plants remain.
- April 2016 100 plants planted 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.
- 2019 Council planted around 300 plants at ELS Hall with a corporate group and another 100 plants were planted with school volunteers at the August 2015 planting site
- Since May 2017 on RMS land near Epping Road we have been slowly planting and maintaining a habitat haven with our nursery volunteers – this habitat area will gradually grow. The soil is extremely compacted and is a fill site and is too difficult for general community volunteering.

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

Connectors:

Hakea sericea

Melaleuca lineariifolia

Syncarpia glomulifera

Habitat havens or islands:

Acacia echinula

Acacia linifolia

Acacia longifolia

Acacia suaveolens

Acacia ulicifolia

Bursaria spinosa

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 – recorded:

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

Red-browed finch (1)

Sacred ibis

Sulphur-crested cockatoo

Superb fairywren (12)

Bird survey 2019

no – probably due to drought conditions

no – but often seen at The Habitat

Australian raven

Brush turkey

no

Common Koel

yes

Crimson rosella

Dusky moorhen

no

Eastern whipbird (male only at Wilga Park)

yes

yes

yes

yes

no

yes

no

Pink galah

yes

no

yes

yes

yes (heard 2 only)

Tawny frogmouth (mum and chick)

White-browed scrubwren (heard 2 only)

Note these surveys did not include healthy population of small birds found in RMS site near Epping Road. This site was cleared in 2015 and all birds lost.

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
Tawny Frogmouth x 2
White-browed scrubwren (ELS Hall)
White-faced heron

Other fauna

Blue-tongue lizard

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

Green tree frog

Native bees at The Habitat

Blue-banded bee

Carder bee (African)

Neon cuckoo

Teddy bear bee

Tetragonula carbonaria

Note – native hive of *Tetragonula carbonaria* was bought and installed at The Habitat November 2016, this hive was split in 2017 and again in 2019. A second hive from the 2019 split has been installed at The Habitat.

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



In-fill planting eastern side Santa Rosa Park June 2019 with volunteers from The Habitat. Previous plantings well established.