

**Inside this issue:**

Devil Ark	p1
HRLN Projects	p2
Spot the Gum	p2
My Favourite Thing in the Garden	p2
New Members	p3
Trees in Newcastle	p3
Mulching Method	p3
Paddock to Plate	p4
Dates for Diary	p4
Contacts	p4

**DEVIL ARK**

The Tasmanian Devil is in dramatic decline due to the highly contagious devil facial tumour disease (DFTD), identified in 1996. Less than 15% of the pre-disease population is left with no end in sight to the devil extinction process.



The Tasmania based, Save the Tasmanian Devil Program and the Zoo and Aquarium Association are helping to ensure the long term survival of this iconic species, to provide a disease free source for eventual return to the wild. The Australian Reptile Park, Devil Ark initiative is regarded as the 'linchpin'.

This revolutionary conservation facility at Tomalla Station east of Scone and high in the Barrington Tops (elevation 1,350m) is on 500ha of bushland donated by the Packer family. It has an impressive tall Eucalypt forest, despite previous logging. A short term invasive weeds control program is underway (including Scotch Broom, stinging nettle and thistle) with a long term plan being developed.

The Devil Ark mission will provide the greater proportion of 'captive devils' for this vital conservation program while DFTD completes its continuing devastation of wild populations. This is one of the most ambitious, important conservation breeding initiatives ever for Australia. Researchers looking for a DFTD cure now accept that Devil Ark provides the best and perhaps only devil survival chance.

A large healthy and genetically diverse population of devils will ensure a sustainable source for reintroduction to Tasmanian landscapes in the future. "Founder" animals have been collected from strategic locations in Tasmania and captive bred stock from the Australian Reptile Park and other mainland zoos.

Thirty 'founder' devils from Tasmania were welcomed to the Hunter in January and keepers are eagerly awaiting signs that 'little devils' will be born in coming months. Social groups of 6-8 in each 6 hectare pen maximizes conservation of genetic variation as well as wild-type behaviour. The Tomalla facility will grow to meet the expanding devil population and more 'founder' stock will come from Tasmania, with an expected 360 devils by 2016.

Tasmania has a remarkably diverse and plentiful fauna. Tasmanian road-kill mortality levels reflect this wildlife density, including species once a feature of mainland fauna before the arrival of foxes, dogs and cats. Devils have long been at the top of the wild carnivore food chain in Tasmania, maintaining a key ecological niche. Facial tumours in the devil and population devastation has radically altered this. Dogs and cats pose a big threat to devil survival in the wild and surplus carrion in the landscape (up to 100 tonnes a day) give feral pests a ready source of food. Cats largely fill this predator niche with expanding fox populations posing a real possibility of enormous Tasmanian native biomass loss and species extinction, as has happened on mainland Australia.

Loss of the Tasmanian devil may only be the tip of the iceberg.

[www.devilark.com.au](http://www.devilark.com.au)

John Weigel  
Australian Reptile Park



#### HRLN PROJECTS

- Field Day late June at HRLN's Liddell site - improving degraded soils using Organic Recycled Waste
- HRLN Website upgrade incl. Landcare Farming & Composting data
- Long term research into climate change in the Hunter for Sustainable Farming initiatives
- River Redgum project—local provenance plantings along the Hunter River
- Regional Landcare Facilitators—Hunter/Lower North Coast & Central Coast
- Landcare Assistance Funds to local Landcare Groups in the Hunter Water Corporation catchment
- Educational resources - incl. mobile Puppet Theatre
- Workshops - Wildlife Corridors & Weeds Control
- Landcare facilitation at a regional & state level - representation on Landcare NSW
- Local Council partnerships to address land and water conservation and rehabilitation needs
- Hunter indigenous riparian plants nursery

#### SPOT THE GUM

An Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) stands proudly in the grounds of the Thornton Public School near Newcastle - our Lower Hunter Spotted Gum Ironbark Forest. School children, parents and staff have long been caring for this EEC with progressive conservation and improvement activities undertaken.

In 2008 we received a Small Projects Grant from the HCR CMA and created an outdoor learning area complete with deck area for class learning activities, dedicated pathways to protect delicate grasses, herbs and orchids (like White Caladenia) and interpretative signs indicating plant and animal species within the forest. Some 500 endemic species shrubs, grasses and trees like *Acacia longifolia* and *parvipinnula* were planted, with 80 sq. metres of forest mulch laid down.

Thornton Public School Landcare Group was established in 2009 and is run by two parent volunteers at lunchtime on Wednesdays. Children work with parents to build a sense of ownership and pride in their local community and gain skills in caring for their environment.

We have some very eager 'environmental rangers' at the school!

Our Bush Tucker Garden is a new project, courtesy of a Landcare Assistance Fund grant through HRLN. Children will learn about Aboriginal perspectives on native food and species, plant uses and conservation practises. The garden will provide another outdoor learning environment for students to investigate and explore aspects of their curriculum based Science and HSIE content including What's Alive or Wet and Dry Environments. Planning, recording, maintaining and monitoring are all part of student/teacher activity for the garden.

Caterina Poggi



#### MY FAVOURITE THING IN THE GARDEN

To celebrate reaching 1,000 Coles Junior Landcare grants since 2008, a photographic competition for children was recently held by Landcare Australia. Hundreds of children from all over Australia sent in entries showing their 'favourite thing in the garden'.

The Hunter should be very proud of Jack Lockhart and Ben Fragiadakis from St. James Primary School in Muswellbrook who took out two of the five prizes. Ben won the 8-12 year old category and Jack the People's Choice Award. Jack had photographed a Noisy Miner because he said "I love searching for birds hiding in the trees in the school garden" and Ben's close up photograph showed how "I love the bright colours and patterns of the inside of this leaf".

I was asked by Landcare Australia to represent them at the Awards ceremony at St. James. It is a long, long time since I was last at school assembly! Two very delighted boys were presented with their prizes by representatives from Coles.

Well done Jack and Ben!

Ruth Hardy



## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

One Individual member

### TREES IN NEWCASTLE

TIN's website has had a makeover and is resource rich and ready for action (courtesy of a HCR CMA grant). "Sharing our resources is part of our mission to protect, promote and enhance local native vegetation and support people with a passion for plants" said General Manager Louise Duff. "We're on Facebook and have a YouTube channel to strengthen our community connections". Our Resource Library has lots of information from starting a bush project, a habitat garden in the city or setting up a native plant nursery.

**Basic bush regeneration** skills and common weeds are covered. There are introductory guides to ridgeline, coastal, estuarine, rainforest, riparian and swamp wetland communities in the Lower Hunter and guides to common plant communities as mapped in the Hunter & Central Coast Regional Environment Strategy.

**The TIN Topics** have a fresh look and have an archive of previous newsletters. How to build a Frog Pond and Bush Food Garden booklets are finally available and also lots of other resources.

**Tools4Schools** is an information repository produced through the Landcare4Youth project, including OH & S guides for school groups to identify risks associated with working outdoors, use of hand tools, tree planting and weeding activities.

**Nature Watch Journal** for children gives month by month activity ideas that encourage recording observations of nature.

**The Nursery** resources include the Seedy Side of Plants series covering seed identification, collection, treatment and storage as well as documentation you may need on collecting and keeping track of your seed. If starting your own nursery is a dream then the nursery establishment and operations booklets are a must read. The site layout is easy to navigate with TIN's main areas of action being clearly identified; Bush Regeneration, Local Native Plants, Education & Training and Volunteer Engagement. You'll read about TIN's main activities, the people involved, current projects and have a link to the resource library.

The site is a one stop shop for local Landcaring in the Hunter region and we at TIN are thrilled to be able to share it with you. Go to [www.treesinnewcastle.org.au](http://www.treesinnewcastle.org.au) to find out more.

Suzanne Pritchard

### MULCHING METHOD

In 2009 I introduced a programme at The Hunter Wetland Centre Australia (HWCA) for a trial of long term mulching to control weeds in the plant beds. This method has had significant results for the HWCA. Weeds are almost nonexistent in the prepared beds, almost eradicating the need for weeding. Plants are very healthy and growing at a faster rate to maturity than previously planted sites, despite the long dry spell we originally had.

The success of this method has made our volunteers and staff happy as they can concentrate on other tasks, rather than repeat weeding. Our visitors get a better view of the native plants and wetland areas too!

This mulching procedure takes about twelve months:

- Gather cardboard and newspaper for recycling from local sources - the pub, newsagency, hardware store etc.
- Choose a plant site, spot weed it of large woody weeds [blackberry, lantana etc.]
- Use the right poison on the site at least twice, then rest it while the poison takes hold.
- Cover with cardboard or unfolded newspaper (as thick as cardboard).
- Cover that with at least 3 foot of mulch.

Let the site rest for several months before planting.

After that, sit back, praise your fellow volunteers and watch the vegetation grow!

Jenny Castles.

#### Dates for diary:

HRLN General Meeting:  
10.00 a.m. Saturday 13th  
August—venue TBA Singleton

National Tree Day 31st July  
Register your school, public or  
private planting event at :  
[www.treeday.planetark.org/](http://www.treeday.planetark.org/)

National Landcare Week  
5th-11th September

NSW Landcare Muster/Forum  
& State Landcare Awards  
5th –7th September at Parkes  
Contact Gerald 0428 743 846  
Email: [pdls@bigpond.com](mailto:pdls@bigpond.com)

National Biodiversity Month -  
September

#### PADDOCK TO PLATE

'Paddock to the Plate' was the theme for this years Tocal Field Days, from home grown produce, features on paddock plants and weed control to cooking your produce (and sampling it too). Along with the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA, Hunter Farm Forestry Network, Australian Plant Society, Hunter Botanic Gardens, Conservation Volunteers Australia and Trees in Newcastle, HRLN was in good company with all of us supporting the theme in different ways.

The HRLN general stand was popular with young visitors, their attention caught by a 'magical castle' built entirely of recycled cardboard and paper. Instruction sheets on How to build your own Castle went like wildfire along with other factsheets for recycled craft activities. Parents (and grandparents) were very pleased with the money saving factsheet How to run a 'green' Birthday Party.

Our resident model, Contrary Mary, with her wonderful sense for fashion, graced the HRLN stand each day. Complete with Landcare hat and Landcare t-shirt, gardening gloves and a bag of produce she received some very interesting compliments from visitors!

We had local provenance River Red Gums tube stock for landholders whose properties border the Hunter River, who can be part of this project to revegetate the Hunter with this iconic Australian tree. Several people signed up for this project, taking home over 400 tube stock between them.



Our Regional Landcare Facilitators for the Hunter/Lower North Coast, Jackie D'Arcy and Central Coast, Trevor May were on hand at our adjoining stand, to meet farmers and other landholders, responding to a wide variety of questions on farming issues, innovations and landscape use. Visitors were asked to 'plot their spot' on a huge map of our catchment. This gave us insight into likely project areas for the future.

Jackie said "it was a fabulous way to meet a large number of farmers and landholders. Despite the rain, the crowds were great and we were able to meet many people. We were kept busy with lots of questions about weed control and requests for information on best practice land management techniques. We will be holding workshops and field days for farmers and other landholders and attending other events to share knowledge in sustainable agriculture and landscape conservation".

Trevor added "Jackie and I are keen to hear from people in the region about issues in their area, to help us work with landholders to determine priorities for sustainable agriculture and enhance programs in the region".

You can contact:

Jackie on 0408 230 238 or email: [rlf.hunterinc@bigpond.com](mailto:rlf.hunterinc@bigpond.com) (Tues to Thurs)

Trevor on 0409 613 240 or email: [rlf.centralcoast@bigpond.com](mailto:rlf.centralcoast@bigpond.com) (Tues to Wed)

My thanks to the RLF's and all the volunteers who made Tocal Field Days so successful for the HRLN and so welcoming for visitors.

Helen McClelland



Jackie D'Arcy  
RLF Hunter/Lower Coast

HRLN Chair: Ruth Hardy Tel: 0458 348 110 (HRLN Mobile)

HRLN email: [hrln@bigpond.com](mailto:hrln@bigpond.com)

Shirtsleeves Editor: Ruth Hardy

Landcare NSW Inc: [www.landcarensw.org.au](http://www.landcarensw.org.au)

Publicity: Helen McClelland Tel: 4930 1030

Website: [www.hunterlandcare.org.au](http://www.hunterlandcare.org.au)

Shirtsleeves articles to email: [hrln@bigpond.com](mailto:hrln@bigpond.com)

Landcare Australia: [www.landcareonline.com.au](http://www.landcareonline.com.au)

Shirtsleeves is supported by  Hunter-Central Rivers  
CMA CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY