

Annual Report, Catchment Officer and Waterwatch Coordinator MCG 2013

This position of mine has undergone a distinct change of focus in the last year. The direct emphasis on citizen science in matters limnological (Waterwatch) has been turned towards an emphasis on water catchment restoration, and the encouragement and supervision of on-ground works in creek lines and the surrounding countryside. The shift in emphasis has taken me into areas of work where I have little training and only haphazard experience. While the camaraderie of Waterwatch has been maintained, it is no longer the centre of my job. While the classroom engagement continues, the actual exercises in which the students participate have become surveys of catchment condition. It is interesting that the survey approach fits and extends the new curriculum and still provides the outdoor education experience. Just how well this will be done with the lower primary (and middle school) I do not know.

WATERWATCH: We have continued to have a very active group of volunteer citizen scientists across the whole catchment. They find that couple of hours once each month to perform the half dozen tests on the waterways near their homes, and then occasionally report on more than just the water quality. We have 75 sites reported on in the most recent CHIP report.

We have lost a few familiar volunteers this year... John Bruggeman has gone west to live further down river, John Bisset has gone to Victoria, the Tadpoles all finished their qualifications and went home, Kate de Smeth went to study in the Netherlands. The Catchment Group and the region have been richer for their efforts. We do have quite a few new recruits! Welcome on board! And to you all, my sincerest thanks for all your information; it has been valued and used to increase the understanding of matters aquatic in the ACT and region, and without it there would be gaping holes in our knowledge and ability to maintain our waterways.

CALENDAR:

This job is remarkably weather responsive. **January** was dry until late in the month. When Dr Jane Roberts and I reviewed the state of Kelly's Swamp and The Billabong at Jerrabomberra Wetlands we were confronted by drying pools, sulphurous mud and stranded carp. It was good to work with Jane again, and contribute to a better development and management plan for the wetlands. The enthusiasm for the area of both the new Board and the revived Friends group first appeared in January and has continued all year. Although we are just one supporting group, I'm very pleased it is all happening.

In the middle of the month I showed Woo O'Reilly the upper reaches of the Queanbeyan and the Molonglo. We chose a very hot day for the trip, but the waterways were in good condition on the whole. At the end of the month there was a downpour. It was centred over the Googong Village development. It demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of all the erosion and run-off containment features of modern greenfield land development. It reinvigorated interest by the residents along the Queanbeyan below Googong dam wall in their backyard and its environmental health. For us this meant we got a new Waterwatch team and we engaged with the Queanbeyan City Council and the Googong Village developers about the formation of a community engagement group associated with the development. This took time to bear fruit, but it was started by a breached dam wall. Well done Sue Gibson!

Everyone from the Catchment Groups went to the Canberra Show in **February**, and we had a good time, giving away show bags with environmentally educative material inside. We also went to ANU

for the Sustainability Fair. We increased the Tadpoles and got interest in other areas, even if it was just a one-off look at Sullivans Ck. I also helped with a biodiversity practical at the Fenner, and that raised awareness.

In **March** the US Embassy asked to 'do their bit' and we engaged the Watson Woodland mob, together with Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch and the WSUD gang from ESDD and we removed the small forest of chinese elms and box elders and fleabane and thistle from around the North Watson Wetland and its overflow. I had a well booked calendar for schools, and also completed the CHiP Report for Spring-Summer 2012. Many thanks to Richard Larson and his friends.

The appearance of the Elm Leaf Beetle caused a renewed interest in biological control of weeds. Various members of the Landcare and Parkcare groups have become experts in mites and eelworms and other sap-sucking or leaf chewing organisms.

I've got my Conspicuous Algae Glovebox Guide together, but then we didn't have funds for printing (or anything else much!). We started on finding water plants for the revegetation of Woolshed Creek when it is realigned at Southwell's. It was **April** when Anna and I got our White Cards, so we can enter and work on construction sites. As a bonus for doing a weed assessment along Pialligo Brook we came home with potato bags of Quinces! The people in the Weeds part of TAMS did follow up on the willows, but...they are still there! The QAQC day was at the Valley Ponds. How sad that Water Sensitive Urban Design is called in to preserve a functioning natural system but given boundaries that suit the developer's car parking needs rather than the natural drainage.

Hayden Burgess and I spent one chilly morning in **May** digging up the local emergent water plants and storing them for replanting, in Woolshed Ck. We didn't know it at the time, but this was not going to happen; someone from Fulton-Hogan disposed of the *awful Styrofoam boxes!* We did our 'In Safe Hands' training, so we don't harm our volunteers. The big success for the office this month was the week we had with the two indigenous students from Karabar High School. They lapped up everything we could offer from water quality testing to *PlaceStory* production! We also had the opportunity to demonstrate to the boys that we worked with a range of other organisations, including the Queanbeyan City Council and the local Landcare group.

There was plenty to be learned, and more to share, at the ACT Water Matters Conference in **June**. To the surprise of the engineers and many of the planners, the community, rather than the government, shoulders the load of getting reliable data on the many waterways in the region. Right at this time the NRM Council changed the focus of our funding, under direction from the Commonwealth. My focus began to shift to linking in much more with WSUD projects and their hinterlands.

July wasn't really a good month for rain, but what fell on the 20th was on top of me at the dam that marks the beginning of Woolshed Ck. By the end of the month we (Ms O'Reilly and I) had recorded the water quality at each of the significant WSUD projects (young and old) across the city. We had another meeting about setting up a BoB for Googong township, with the developers. We also met all the parties about the planting lists for the Majura Parkway and enhancing the connectivity between the sides of the valley. TAMS and Planning had lists that reflected 'urban landscapes' while MCG and CPR had vegetation lists for the ridges and the creek line that reflected the natural condition. In the end my list prevailed, up the top of the creek.

One important event in **August** was the revival that Mel Hillery arranged in Waterwatching and general catchment observation in the upper Yass valley around Wamboin and Bywong. This is a joint exercise with Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch and Ginninderra CG to link in with Landcare in the

Yass valley. We also got moving with the Sunday Platypus Walks with the support of the Queanbeyan CC and the Queanbeyan Age. Woo O'Reilly is very good with the general public and we had encouraging attendances...even by the platypus in August and September.

The thirteenth of **September** found me with Woo O'Reilly, Jasmine Foxlee, Angela Calleis, Michael Sim and his Mt MuggaMugga gang and the mob from the American Embassy planting grasses and filling erosion trenches with woody debris at East O'Malley Pond. We also had the boys from Marist out there surveying the waterway and the woodland. I backed up Anna at the Queanbeyan Sustainability Fair on both the Friday with the schools and Saturday with the public. The Yass schools also had a day of water and riparian testing, and someone got highly commended at the Landcare awards.

October is frog census month! We started early and so did the frogs...the night of the field trip to Doeberl's Point, Dave Hunter showed how to find Rocky Stream Frogs, even when they weren't supposed to be about for another month! Later I had real adventures going to some of the frog reference sites that hadn't been done for years, like Bradleys Ck and Tin Hut Dam. And even the frogs in town were good...six frog species in the drain that goes under the railway and Norse Rd into Beard!

On top of all the frogs we planted out Woolshed Creek, with new plants...since Fulton Hogan misplaced our local ones...assessed the state of the Queanbeyan and Buttles Ck in town, and participated in parts of the Bioblitz! We (Woo, a volunteer Waterwatcher from Yass and I) also surveyed the macroinvertebrates in the upper Queanbeyan and Molonglo...what a contrast!

By **November** I had finally finished the MCHiP report using the new 'reaches' approach, and cooperated with TAMS on designing more bank restoration in the upper end of Woolshed Creek. Going around the lower catchment with the gang from ANU Green to assess the macroinvertebrates (and all being interviewed by the ABC) was really fun work. The last big thing was the QAQC at Scottsdale...a really great way to celebrate Waterwatching with all the volunteers who could make it!

For all the support and camaraderie from colleagues and the whole Waterwatch and Landcare community: THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH!

Stephen Skinner, Molonglo Catchment Group Catchment Officer.