

COOKS RIVER VALLEY ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21



Sacred kingfisher with mudcrab

Photo courtesy David Noble

COOKS RIVER VALLEY



association

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CRVA progress report

Ann Leahy & Jennifer Newman

We begin our Annual Report acknowledging Country. Flowing east, the Cooks River Valley traverses Wangal, Gadigal and Gameygal Country. The river catchment and flow has nourished generations since the beginning of time, and has flourished with the care taken by those who have lived with the river. Today, we work together to refresh and revitalise the Cooks River, mindful of our non-human



residents who return to Country in increasing numbers in return for the physical, social and spiritual nourishment we receive from the River and its' surrounds.

Once again, we have experienced a severely restricted year due to COVID-19 and Delta variant restrictions hitting hard along the Cooks River valley. Major events such as our Candles on the River celebration, and many weeding and maintenance bees were cancelled or disrupted. However, in the periods where it was safe to venture beyond the front door, much was achieved this year.

As you will read in the following pages, the grant allocation for the Community Environment Program was finalized this year, resulting in big and exciting changes to the related Mudcrabs sites. The Burnett St site is now looking fabulous, this is a difficult steeped site with natural rock faces, now complete with mulched walkways at various levels and established native plantings. As I write under our strictest lockdown yet, our only refuge must be with walking distance, and the lovely nooks and crannies in this site are occupied by people reading, contemplating or taking a quick break from their restricted routines. Thanks to the grant allocation, there are now over ten tons of crushed sandstone capping on th expanded site which look fantastic.

The newly established clearing and planting of the narrow strip joining the Foord Avenue and Ewen Park Mudcrabs sites has been completed and is growing quickly. I'm sure this will act as a wildlife corridor between the two sites, providing habitat, shelter and food for native birds and reptiles. Enormous thanks go to the unstoppable Gareth Wreford for securing this grant and to all the wonderful volunteers who turned out to work on these new extensions. All of the community are now benefitting from these and all the other Mudcrabs sites along the river, and I always hear appreciative comments when walking past our sites.

Canterbury Bankstown Council did a wonderful job installing the new Lang Road footbridge, which is extremely attractive and very well designed, as well as the excellent new landscaping and earth paths on the southern side of the river leading towards the Foord Avenue bridge. This landscaped area planted by the council has now become a new Mudcrabs site, overseen by Brent Jones and Peter Munro. Justine Langford, who has stepped down from the CRVA executive to represent the Greens in forthcoming Inner West Council elections, did a marvellous job of uniting all the various advocacy groups along the river into the Cooks River Valley Community Collective. It was great to finally get together in the CRVCC meetings to discuss our common aims and what we can do to improve the river and riparian zones.

Huge thanks go to all our dedicated coordinators and volunteers working along the river, as well as to our executive members carrying out necessary administrative tasks. We hope we can get out and about soon to see you on the river.

Grants

Gareth Wreford

Community Environment Program (CEP) \$20,000

The CEP grant was Commonwealth Government funding received with thanks to Linda Burney for the Barton electorate. The grant had several components:

- **Burnett St Reserve:** Burnett St reserve was the major focus of the grant which was used to clear an established patch of woody weeds, mulch and plant out with the intention to create a rainforest pocket. Bushcare contractors Econurture were engaged to undertake the bulk of the work which included chain-sawing and poisoning established woody weeds then carting multiple tons of sandstone capping onto to the site in preparation for planting. The site has now been planted out with a wide range of canopy and midstory rainforest plants. Further work on site will include monitoring weed regrowth and establishing groundcover and understory planting.
- **Foord Ave / Ewen Park:** Work on this site was to join up the existing Foord Ave bushcare work and the new Canterbury Bankstown Council raingarden with the existing Ewen Park bushcare site. Over 1,000 native grasses and understorey species were planted along the riparian zone of the Cooks River to both create habitat and maintain sight lines of the river.
- **Boat Harbour:** The intention was to join up Boat Harbour with the Sugar Mill site around the Canterbury Pumping station. Unfortunately, contractors associated with the High Pressure Oil Pipeline that runs though Boat Harbour decided to undertake extensive clearing of vegetation. As a result, work on this site will not progress until the Pipeline issue is resolved. See the Advocacy section of this report for further information.



CEP Grant work: Before and after Foord Avenue/ Ewen Park

- Gough Whitlam Reserve: With the support of Canterbury Bankstown Council twelve nesting boxes will be installed to target identified local species - 5 treecreeper/small parrot, 3 microbat (triple chamber), 2 kookaburra/duck, 1 sugar glider box (adding to the 1 already installed) and an additional microbat box design.

Volunteering \$4,000

The volunteering grant of \$4,000 is Commonwealth Government funding received with thanks to Linda Burney for the Barton electorate. The grant had several components:

- \$1,000 on landscaping / gardening equipment which
- was used to purchase a wheelbarrow, tools and gloves that have been distributed to Mudcrabs site coordinators.
- \$1,000 on first aid equipment which will be distributed to Mudcrabs site coordinators as COVID-19 restrictions allow.
- \$2,000 on volunteer training: Two 'Bushcare Beginners' courses were run by Econurture at Rosedale reserve for 20 participants. Participant feedback on the courses was overwhelmingly positive and a credit to both the trainer Damon Bassett from Econurture and the support provided by Russ Cail, Rosedale Reserve Mudcrabs site coordinator. We hope to see the bushcare training participants at future Mudcrabs working bees.

Based on the success of the volunteer training the CRVA has submitted a follow up funding application for 2021-22 to run further 'Bushcare Beginners' courses.

Canterbury Bankstown Council (CBC) \$1,000

The Canterbury Bankstown Council grant of \$1,000 towards volunteer equipment was used to provide tools and gloves that have been distributed to Mudcrabs site coordinators.

Inner West Council \$5,500 Brain on Nature

The Inner West council grant for the production of a podcast by the Brain on Nature team is in progress, to be completed by December 2021.



CEP Grant – Foord Ave / Ewen Park – working bee

Advocacy

High Pressure Oil Pipeline

There is a High Pressure Oil Pipeline (actually three pipes – two of them actively transporting aviation fuel to and from Sydney Airport) that runs the length of the Cooks River and keen Cooks River watchers will recall that in 2016 about 1,000 trees were tagged by a pipeline contractor for assessment and potential removal as they were within the pipeline easement. The easement is eight metres either side of the pipeline so



Damaged plants over pipeline

clearing it would have a massive impact on vegetation along the river and as a result of community and political pressure in 2016 no further action was taken to clear vegetation. In 2021 Viva Energy, the company responsible for the pipeline, engaged a maintenance contractor, Freysinnet Civil Engineering. Without any consultation, this contractor removed a swathe of vegetation from Mudcrabs' bushcare sites at Boat Harbour and Foord Avenue, Hurlstone Park. When we protested, the CRVA received correspondence from the company, asserting its right to clear a 16 metre easement – eight metres on either side of the pipeline – removing all vegetation higher than grasses. This would destroy many of the bushcare sites our volunteers maintain and cause serious harm to the riverine environment of the Cooks River. What seems extraordinary is that there are many hundreds of mature trees well within the pipeline easement that the maintenance contractors have not touched yet they saw fit to clear native grasses and shrubs, that do not have roots deep or invasive enough to affect the pipeline, in Hurlstone Park.

In response the CRVA / Mudcrabs engaged local Councils and state Members of Parliament. To date both the Inner West Council and Canterbury Bankstown Council have passed Council motions and written to Viva Energy, local MPs Sophie Cotsis and Jo Haylen have written to Matt Kean, NSW Minister for the Environment, and Sophie Cotsis started a parliamentary petition. The petition received over 1,000 signatures and has been presented in the Legislative Assembly for a response from the NSW Government. The ePetition text is:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly, this petition brings to the attention of the House the clearing of vegetation along the Cooks River Pipeline Route. The undersigned residents of the communities along the Cooks River request the Minister for Energy and the Environment intervene on our behalf to prevent any further destruction of vegetation by maintenance contractors of the high pressure oil pipelines that run along the river. The threatened clearance of 8 metres either side of the pipelines, would mean the loss of more than 1000 established trees and new native vegetation planted since 2005 by volunteers. High quality green space is of vital importance to the increasingly populous community served by the Cooks River foreshore paths, cycleways and playgrounds, which are all heavily used. The enhanced appearance and increased shade provided by these trees is highly valued, as is the increase in birds and other fauna, for which habitat is now available. Volunteers and the many users of the Cooks River foreshore alike, are horrified by the prospect of the loss of a precious community and environmental resource that contributes incalculably to community amenity and wellbeing.

In addition the two Councils are looking to renew and clarify their Memorandum of Understanding with the pipeline to ensure there is a vegetation management plan and communication about future maintenance needs and planting over the pipeline. While work continues at Foord Ave, for now the Boat Harbour site is not an active Mudcrabs site until the pipeline issue is resolved. See p17 below for a photo of the Mudcrabs protesting against the clearing of vegetation. In the meantime we continue to liaise with our local and state politicians and look forward to a response from the Minister for the Environment. For further information see:
<https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/about/news/media-releases/2021-media-releases/council-demands-cooks-river-trees-be-saved-from-destruction>

Sydenham Bankstown Alliance (SBA)

The CRVA continued to support the SBA in its efforts to stop the Metro South West development proposal along the Sydenham to Bankstown corridor. For further information see: <https://www.sydbankalliance.com/>

Canterbury Racecourse Action Group (CRAG)

The CRVA continued our participation in the CRAG. Two major issues during the year were supporting the rejection of yet another development application from the Australian Turf Club to sell off part of the Racecourse site and supporting a private members bill from local member of parliament Sophie Cotsis, supported by Jo Haylen, to place a moratorium on the sale of the overall Racecourse site. For further information see:
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Community-Organization/Canterbury-Racecourse-Action-Group-CRAG-942077892635098/>
<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/bills/Pages/bill-details.aspx?pk=3840>
https://www.johaylen.com/canterbury_park_racecourse_sale_and_redevelopment_moratorium_bill_2021



Pelican on the sugar mill boom, beak cleaning?



King parrot at Gough Whitlam park, courtesy David Noble

Burnett Street Reserve bushcare site, Hurlstone Park

Gareth Wreford

Burnett St Reserve is a large and diverse south facing and heavily terraced site. In 2020-21 the majority of working bees were unfortunately cancelled due to rain and COVID-19. The various lockdowns and multiple cancelled holiday plans did mean I was able to spend blocks of time on site and keep revegetation work progressing. The terraced sections make it reasonably easy to see and track progress. Over a twelve-month period it is amazing to see how quickly native grasses can establish and hopefully provide shelter for the midstory plants as they get going.

One of the benefits of having time on site is the opportunity to better observe and understand the local wildlife. The site has resident pied butcherbirds, noisy miners and magpies, regular currawongs, occasional Eastern Rosellas (feeding on Dandelion seeds) and infrequent King Parrots (feeding on Pittosporum). I'm yet to see any wrens (possibly related to the butcherbirds, magpies and currawongs?) though there are resident population in Hurlstone Park backyards. The site has groundcovers and canopy with little in the way of midstory shrubs and bushes attractive to smaller birds which I hope will change over the coming years. The increasing number of native grasses and groundcovers do appear to be attracting larger quantities of grass blues, yellow butterflies and the occasional dart. Native bees are also starting to return after several large Abielias were removed. In addition, the site has a healthy population of blue tongue lizards that seem able to dodge the neighbourhood cats and dogs. School holidays and lockdown generally see an increase in wear and tear yet in their own way this is a sign of success in creating an outdoor space that people want to use. Rubbish in the form of takeaway food and drink containers, smokers, plant removal and dog poo all remain challenges though overall the site is making good progress.

The major project for the year was expanding the site East along Burnett St to create a rainforest pocket courtesy of a Community Environment Program grant – see separate grant report for more details. Thanks also to Canterbury Bankstown Council for ongoing advice and support.



*Lipotriches Bees roosting on Vanilla Lily
(Arthropodium milleflorum)*



Pregnant Blue Tongue Lizard



*Grass Dart (Ocybadistes Walkeri?) resting on
Hedgehog Grass (Echinopogon)*

Burnett St Reserve – before and after photos



Top of Duntroon St steps March 2020 and March 2021



Pathway and terrace March 2020 and March 2021



New Community Environment Program funded Rainforest pocket before and after July 2020 and June 2021

Foord Avenue bushcare site, Hurlstone Park

Liz Millen & Doug Benson

This year has been a strange mix of stasis and progress – stasis of course in the form of cancelled working bees due to COVID restrictions, but exciting progress in the initiation of a newly planted corridor linking the sites at Foord Avenue and Ewen Park, with the help of a grant from the Commonwealth Community Environment Program, through Linda Burney’s Barton electorate office. The grant was \$20k for work across multiple Mudcrab sites. Canterbury Bankstown Council provided in kind support in the form of mulch and some tubestock. Thanks to Gareth Wreford for co-ordinating the grant application and plant buying.

Much of our work in the last few months has focused on this new area, which is next to the river on the eastern side of the footbridge. We have planted dozens of small shrubs and grasses with the aim of growing habitat while maintaining the view along the river at that point, where there are few mangroves.

This year has seen quite a bit of rain, which has really helped to get the new planting established, as well as filling out the broader site after our losses during the drought. As I write, the daisy bushes are a mass of sparkling flowers, wattles are just coming into flower, and hakeas and grevilleas are also flowering, attracting native bees and blue wrens. Olive backed orioles are now well established all year round; large flocks of cockatoos and corellas feed on wattle seeds, and yellow tailed black cockatoos on the hakea seeds. We’ve also had occasional sightings of king parrots, golden whistlers and Eastern rosellas. Many thanks to all our volunteers who have contributed hours of their time to keep the weeds under control, as well as planting out new areas for all to enjoy. With the hugely increased foot traffic along the river as a result of COVID restrictions on other activities, it’s been great to hear the many compliments from passers-by, and to gather some new recruits.



Fungus on pittosporum tree

I’ve included some photos of the many ‘hidden treasures’ in the Foord Avenue site, such as the native Rough Maidenhair ferns, fungal growths and smaller flowering grevillea.



Cockatoo feeding on a wattle



Grevillia sericea



Rough maidenhar ferns



Foord Ave / Ewen Park Planting day

Sugar Mill bushcare site, Hurlstone Park

Ben Denham

During the first half of 2021 our work on the Sugar Mill site continued with weeding, mulching and planting. I have had conversations with Peter Goss, from Canterbury Bankstown Council, who came to visit the site in March and who organised plants for our working bee at the beginning of May. During that working bee we planted 100 tube stock and we are endeavoring to keep better records of this planting and to this end have created a spreadsheet that you can view here:



Sugar mill site, winter 2021

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1RoZgZeniCtrnppNhtbMa8gwTyvjuC-_ebNn3SUxyH9g/edit?usp=sharing

In the working bee following our planting session we put cardboard and mulch around all of the new plantings. We have been pleased to see that most of the new plantings are doing well. We have had 8 or 9 people, on average, attend each of the 6 working bees that we have had this year.

Overall the site is progressing well. The western end of the site is now well established, with weeds well controlled. As you head east towards the footbridge there are still areas where weeds predominate. These areas will be the focus of future efforts. The narrow section between the cycle path and the river is now well established.

Rosedale Reserve bushcare site, Croydon Park

Russell Cail

Our program at Rosedale was, once again, severely disrupted by restrictions due to COVID-19. Never-the-less we had quite a successful year in the end thanks to the untiring work of our volunteers and some assistance from a grant program. One positive in the last 12 months was the increased rainfall which meant that we did not have to devote as much time to watering but this was offset somewhat by the fact that the weeds also grew at a prodigious rate and a lot of our time was occupied with weeding (all the major “players” madeira vine, turkey rhubarb, farmer’s friends, cestrum were present). At least our frog ponds were full, and the frogs sounded very happy.

Our aim, as always, was to introduce as much native plant variability to the site as possible, consistent with what plants were thought to exist there before white settlement, in the expectation that this variability will encourage the return of other wildlife.

Early last year we were pleased to learn that the organization, Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) was successful in receiving funding from the *Communities Environment Program* for a project for the “Cooks River Restoration at Rosedale Reserve.” Unfortunately, this project was severely disrupted by the COVID-19 virus. We eventually got started in August last year, however, due to COVID restrictions, there was only one person employed for two mornings a week and one other every second week. The program went for about 7 weeks and despite the greatly reduced hours we were able to achieve our primary objective in clearing 70-80% of the phragmites (*P. australis*) on the site. Over the years they have spread across a wide area of the site and have been a major headache due to the large number of weeds they harbour, sight unseen as it were, until it is too late and the weeds are out of control!

The cleared areas were then mulched with the able assistance of our own volunteers. About 60% of these mulched areas have now been planted out during our regular working bees.

In one flat area, close to the river (see photo at below), we have planted a mixture of rushes (*Juncus usitatus* and *Ficina nodosa*) and native sedge (*Carex appressa*). Along the fence we planted wonga wonga vine (*Pandorea pandorana*). These plants have really flourished.



Planting along the fence line, left to right, Farah, Russell and Simin

In other areas, primarily on the slopes with better drainage, we have planted a mix of *Kunzea ambigua*, *Callistemon citrinus*, tea trees (*Leptospermum trinervium* & *squarosum*) and some *Melaleuca nodosa*. We hope that these will form an excellent mix of habitat as they get older.

Unfortunately our annual Christmas get together at Rosedale had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 concerns.

Our plan for the rest of 2021 (apart from weeding) is to plant more rushes and grasses - typically *Poa affinis*, barbed wire grass (*Cymbopogon refractus*) Kangaroo grass (*Themeda australis*), *Dichelachne crinata*, to create a mixed sward to encourage more insects and other fauna to provide food for smaller birds, etc

In April and May this year we were pleased to host two "Bushcare for Beginners" training workshops. These were organised by Gareth Wreford and run by Damon Bassett (from Econurture). Each session ran for about 4 hours in the morning and they were very well received.

We will also continue our bird watching program.

The Rosedale Group would like to thank Peter Goss from Canterbury Bankstown Council and the CRVA for their help, advice and provision of plants. Joy and I would also like to thank all our dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers who do such great work.

In the last 12 months, despite COVID-19 lock-downs and cancellations due to bad weather, our volunteers put in about 200 hours at our regular working bees, together with a further >200 hours spent during the week by some volunteers. We collected 90 bags of weeds plus we created several very large piles of weeds (which had not gone to seed) which we hope will mulch down completely.



Planting on the slopes to provide mixed habitats, early 2021



Area near the footbridge to be planted with grasses, early 2021

Gough Whitlam salt marsh site, Tempe

Russell Cail

The Gough Whitlam Saltmarsh was constructed by Canterbury Council in 2007. Saltmarshes are an important and endangered ecological community that form on the landward side of mangroves, and provide valuable habitat for fish, crabs and birds.

The Mudcrabs meet on the first Saturday of the month to remove weeds, mulch and plant trees, shrubs and grasses which are thought to have originally existed in the area. Over the past 12 months we concentrated on the “islands” closest to the river, which are dominated by tall, mature casuarinas. The environment on these “islands” is very harsh. The trees suck the moisture out of the soil, and the salty winds which sweep across them, seriously impact the growing conditions.



The first of the 'islands' most downstream

We have progressively mulched and planted these areas with a variety of plants such as coastal tea trees (*Leptospermum laevigatum*), coastal banksias (*Banksia integrifolia*), native rosemary (*Westringia fruticosa*), Australian pig face (*Carpobrotus glaucescens*), *Correa alba* and sea berry salt bush (*Raghadia candolleana*) and coastal *Lomandra spp.* It is hoped that, through a combination of dense planting of shrubs to create an understorey and forming wind breaks with a layered system of branches and sticks, we will protect both the plants in the early stages of growth and provide a habitat for lizards, insects, fungi, etc.

So far, the plan seems to be working quite well despite the interruption to our normal schedule by COVID-19. The area is now fairly self-sustaining, with minimal weeding and intervention needed. The health of the marsh continues to be excellent with a typical mix of salt marsh species predominately; samphire (*Sarcocornia quinqueflora*), austral seablite (*Sueda australis*), streaked arrow grass (*Triglochin striatum*) and marine couch (*Sporobolus virginicus*). It is also home to lots of invertebrates (crabs and snails) which are attracting many wading birds.

We will continue mulching specific areas and planting more plants on the “islands” as well as concentrating on improving the biological diversity on the margins beside the footpath and the road. We would like to thank Peter Goss who is our regular contact at Canterbury Bankstown Council and who has provided the plants and much appreciated advice. The photos show the “islands” on which we have been attempting to establish a dense understorey and protective environment for flora and fauna. They are slowly developing as hoped, despite the harsh conditions as noted above.



The second (middle) island



The third furthest upstream "island"

Ewen Park bushcare site, Hurlstone Park

Keith Foulcher and Ann Leahy

In August 2020, we were saddened by the death of one of our founders, Sue Bishop. Sue was a dear friend, and we all miss her vivacious personality and her infectious laugh. A gathering was held on the site later in the year to remember Sue, and a red flowering gum tree was planted in her memory.



Keith and Sue as we remember her in 2015

Now after 12 years of volunteers' efforts, the Ewen Park bush site is in a mature state, and many passers-by think that it's just a naturally occurring bushland area by the river. Keith's weekly maintenance sessions continue to keep things in good order on a day-to-day basis. During the COVID shut-down the river banks and surrounds became the new haven for nearby suburbs, and with record numbers of walkers, kids looking for playgrounds and bike riders, the site developed new tracks that damaged some planted areas, so we have established a number of large 'area under repair' and re-mulched existing paths to help define established walking tracks and protect bush-garden areas.

Weeding bees have again been added to the Mudcrabs calendar and we have had some wonderful young volunteers come regularly. Much work has taken place in the area between the Foord Avenue site and the Ewen Park site which are almost joined now, barring a dedicated grassy so as to maintain an open area with clear views of the river. As this grows it will create a wildlife corridor next to the river which will provide more sheltered habitat for local birds. We thank Peter Goss from Canterbury Bankstown Council for his continued encouragement and support of this site, and for donations of seedlings, stakes and other materials.



Western end of the site, July 2021



Emma, John, Hasmukh and Kevin help make new paths

Wave Rock bushcare site, Marrickville

Peter Munro

Wave Rock bushcare site is situated in Marrickville golf course, next to the Cooks River. The site features an impressive sandstone outcrop resembling a wave. It is a difficult site, with sloping terrain and poor soil. This site had been identified in Doug Benson's book (*The Missing Jigsaw Pieces*) as a potential heathland revegetation site. The Mudcrabs began work on the Wave Rock site in October 2013 and a dedicated group of volunteers has worked on the site every month for the last 8 years, with great results.

Wave Rock when we began in 2013

In July this year the Mudcrabs handed the site back to the Inner West Council to manage. The Mudcrabs volunteers who have worked on the site for all those years have stated their intention to continue work on the site under the new arrangement, myself included. I am confident that the site will continue to develop and flourish as a fine example of sandstone heath vegetation.

Wave Rock 2021

Can I express my appreciation and thanks to the many Wave Rock volunteers for their enthusiasm, effort and dedication to caring for country over the last 8 years. Also a big thank you to the staff of Marrickville golf course and Inner West Council for their assistance and support.



Wave rock when we began in 2013



Wave rock in 2021

The Cooks River Valley Community Collective (CRVCC)

Justine Langford

The Cooks River Valley Community Collective (CRVCC) is for representatives of local groups based in the Cooks River Valley Catchment to share concerns, hopes and dreams for our precious and beautiful local environment and river. At the meetings groups provide updates on their activities and we look for opportunities to work together to tackle the problems.

The CRVCC meets quarterly. We have had three meetings so far, the first being in October 2020. Representatives from various local community groups attend, including Wolli Creek Preservation Society, River Canoe Club, The Mullets, Earlwood Environmental League, the Mudcrabs, Marrickville Golf Club, Save Canterbury Racecourse Action Group, CRVA and more. Meetings were held at the River Canoe Club, via Zoom and at the Marrickville Golf Club.

In the first meeting we ran a workshop to identify and prioritise key issues and concerns for the Cooks River Catchment, as outlined below. Out of that workshop we developed a Manifesto for the Cooks River Valley Community Collective, focussing on five key areas, including water quality, biodiversity, recreation, education and history.

River clean-ups at Close Street

Ranjith Evas, coordinator

A relatively low number of COVID cases since our last Annual Report enabled the Mudcrabs to continue with some of our activities along the river. But the recent spikes in cases of the Delta variant have again stopped our events from July 2021. Throughout the period prior to the recent increase in COVID infections, we had increasing numbers of volunteers turn up for our events.

Monthly clean-ups at Close Street managed to remove significant amounts of plastic rubbish from the Cooks River. The statistics for volunteer numbers and amounts of plastic removed are listed in the table below.

Date	# volunteers	# bags
12/09/20	27	25
10/10/20	13	20
21/11/20	13	10
09/01/21	12	15
06/02/21	33	35
07/03/21	54	20
10/04/21	22	12
01/05/21	16	10
05/06/21	12	12
03/07/21	cancelled	
07/08/21	cancelled	
Total	202	159



Close St Clean Up



Close St Clean Up

River clean-ups at Canterbury Racecourse

Alison Gibbs, coordinator

We held four successful river clean-ups at our Canterbury Racecourse site in the year to June 2021, attracting 68 volunteers and removing 109 bags of rubbish and sundry large items from the 600m stretch of mangroves between Broughton Street, Canterbury and Lees Park.

The slightly lower bag count may be due in part to the reduced bulk of PET plastic rubbish at this site, but also the fact that we are now consolidating much of the rubbish collected into the large flour bags at the end of the clean-up, reducing waste and freeing up the smaller bags for rinsing and reuse. The new gates have made access to parts of the site much easier this year, although there is still need for an additional gate at the Lees Park end.

Our laminated signage was a new initiative with notices displayed along the fence in the week prior to the clean-up, and thank-you notices in the week following,

drawing the community's attention to the fabulous efforts of our Mudcrabs volunteers.

Thank you to everyone who has turned up to help this year, and special thanks to our trolley bike riders, Andrew Graf and Moz Le, who make the cleaning of this site less arduous for us all.

Alison Gibbs and Talia Smith
Site Coordinators



Alison on registration duty



Mangroves clean up



Clean Up Australia Day

Other Mudcrabs activities

Ranjith Evas, coordinator for the Mudcrabs

Cycling tour

The first cycling tour of all Mudcrabs bushcare and clean-up sites was organised on 7 December 2020. Peter Munro explained the history of our volunteering group at our various sites at stops in the tour. The cycling tour started at our site at Gough Whitlam Park, Tempe and finished at Rosedale Reserve, Croydon Park.



Cooks River Cycling Tour

Oil pipeline protest

During January 2021, a subcontractor employed by the oil pipeline company destroyed a lot of plants at the Boat Harbour site. The types of grasses and bushes planted along this section were not harming the buried pipeline as they have shallow roots. Our volunteers gathered in protest at the site on 7 February to let the pipeline company know that we were not happy about this. Interventions by local elected representatives, The Cooks River Valley Association, our volunteers and the general public have stopped further destruction of plants for now.



Protesting damage by pipeline contractors

Cooks River walk

A trial run of a Cooks River walk was organised on 15 May 2021, to showcase the fantastic work of our volunteers. We walked from Rosedale Reserve to Gough Whitlam Park in five hours. Peter Munro, John Butcher and Mike Aldridge accompanied the walkers and gave us a good description of the early history of the Mudcrabs. If the COVID outbreak situation improves, the next walk will be scheduled in the spring of this year to celebrate the work of our volunteers.



Cooks River Walk

Changes to email communications

Our group emailing had previously been done using Gmail, and there were frequent problematic issues involved in keeping it running smoothly. Google often blocked our emails suspecting spam, and it was preventing effective communication with our volunteers. Luckily, Peter Munro and Chris Rapp were able to solve this by moving our emailing platform to Mailerlite. Kudos to both of you for resolving the email problems, and also to The Cooks River Valley Association for assisting with funding for this solution.

Thanks for your support

I'd like to thank the students from PLC school for joining us for clean-up during their school holidays. The staff from Canterbury Bankstown Council (Peter Goss and Brodie Smith) deserve our appreciation for their services to our volunteering group. The Cooks River Valley Association has provided us with funding and insurance support over the years. Thank you for the ongoing support for our activities along the river. Finally, our dedicated volunteers and site coordinators who turn up at our sites are our biggest asset. The riverside refuge during this pandemic for our community was made better by decades of work by our volunteers. I hope to see you back along the river as soon as we have a respite from current high COVID numbers.



Large numbers flocked to the river as a refuge during lockdown



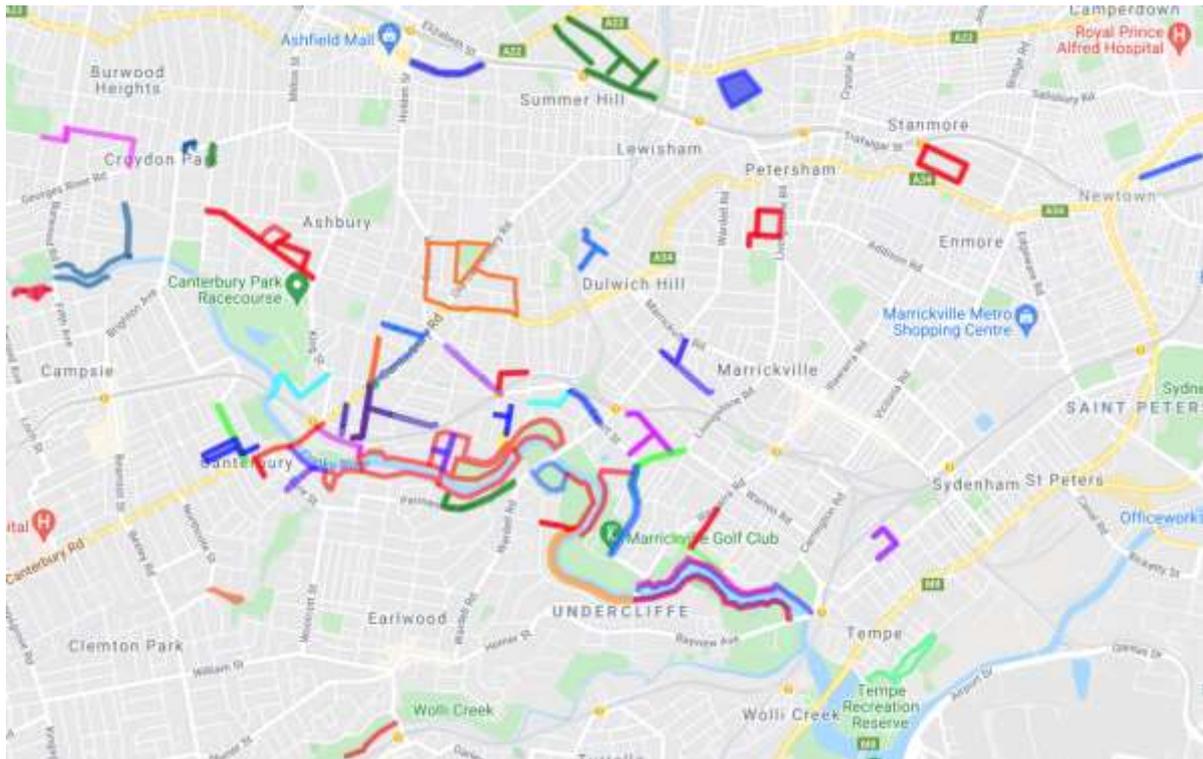
Echidna spotted at cup and saucer creek

The Crab Walkers

Martin Puchert, coordinator

The crab walking project continues to attract enthusiastic volunteers or “Crab Walkers” wanting to make a positive difference to the Cooks River. The concept is to collect litter from local streets and other public areas before it can get into the stormwater system and pollute the river.

Each volunteer nominates a place to collect litter and they keep returning the same place to clean up whenever they can. Every bit helps and the combined effort of a network of people doing this has a big impact. Volunteers also record the amount of litter they collect and report it at the end of each month.



Current Crab Walking Routes

The group also started developing a rubbish survey technique intended to map the rate of littering and identify problem areas. The goal is to develop a simple process that can be performed quickly by a large number of volunteers anywhere in the world without special equipment. In the first trial, a group of Crab Walkers measured the rubbish that built up over seven days in a selection of stormwater gutters in St Peters, Dulwich Hill, Earlwood, Marrickville and Tempe. Feedback from participants has led to the survey technique being improved and further trials are planned.



Examples of rubbish found during a trial of a seven day survey of gutters

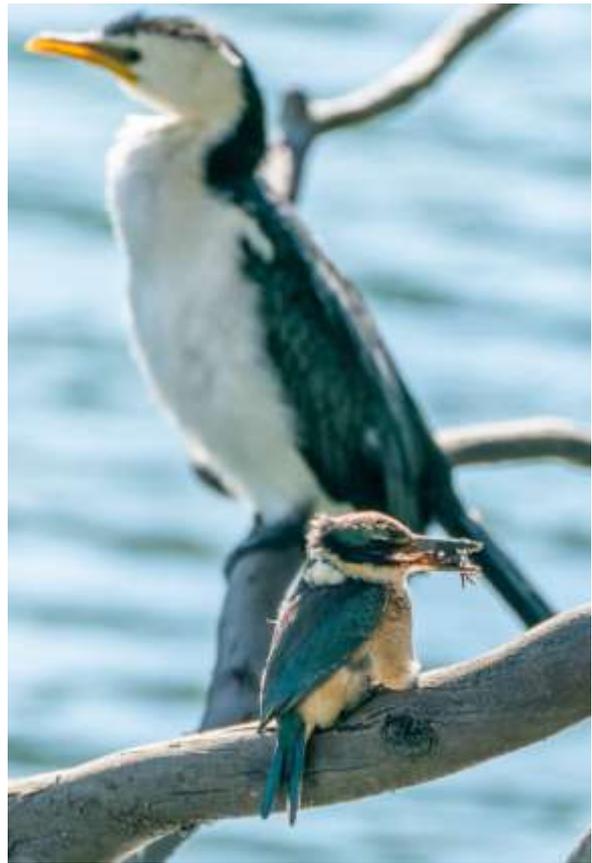
The Mudlarks

Jennifer Kent

The Mudlarks had another successful year of surveying Cooks River birds along the Wave Rock and Boat Harbour Routes. We had an average of sixteen participants for each survey, with a core group of twelve.

The range of bird species was consistently higher along the Boat Harbour route, reflecting the level of diverse habitat. The Cup and Saucer Wetlands has become a safe nursery for aquatic birds, with many chicks on show. On two occasions over 40 species were observed including Golden Whistlers, a Leaden Flycatcher and an Eastern Spinebill. Due to the more open vegetation along the Wave Rock route, fewer small birds were seen. The main ones seen were Welcome Swallows and Martins, although we did observe many Fig Birds. The temporary closure of Dibble Avenue Water Hole limited the scope of this survey this year. It was encouraging to consistently hear more bird song near the Wave Rock bush care site, especially the Olive-backed Oriel.

Long-billed Corella, a white-plumed Honeyeater, Eastern Rosellas and Musk Lorikeets were some of the highlights. The sharing of knowledge and comradery among participants has made these surveys very informative and enjoyable. Thank you to all those who attended the Mudlarks surveys over the past 12 months.



*Sacred kingfisher with mudcrab, pied cormorant, July 2021
Courtesy David Noble*



White faced heron July 2021, courtesy David Noble



Golden Whistler, July 2021 courtesy David Noble

The Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Plan (CRCCMP)

Peter Munro
CRVA representative (CRCCMP)

The Cooks River Coastal Catchment Management Plan (CRCCMP) is a wide ranging and potentially highly significant initiative of the Cooks River Alliance of Councils (Inner West, Canterbury Bankstown, Strathfield & Bayside Councils). After successfully broadening the normal coastal zone applicable to this State program to include the whole of the Cooks River catchment area, the CRCCMP continues to progress.



An innovative and wide-ranging scorecard system that will more meaningfully assess river health and guide appropriate remedial actions and initiatives, is now complete. This new scorecard process will be launched in August 2021. Keep an eye out for it.

The CRCCMP will soon launch a Wetlands Citizen Science Program. Keep an eye out for this project if you would like to be involved.

The Alliance is close to securing funding that will allow Stages 2 – 4 of the Plan to be completed over the next 3 to 4 years

Once finalised, CRCCMP will include:

- a list of issues facing the Cooks River catchment, including updated flood risk, updated coastal hazards risks, heritage register & a plan for bank stabilization & sheet steel piling removal
- actions to be implemented to enhance the values of the Cooks River
- assessment of actions for technical feasibility, economic viability, and community acceptability
- responsibilities of different Councils, State Government agencies and other stakeholders for implementation of agreed actions
- a business plan with costs and priorities for implementing each management action
- a coastal zone emergency action plan, for dealing with coastal hazards in the Cooks River catchment
- maps showing the area covered by the CRCCMP and the relevant coastal management areas

The eight working groups (Community & Stakeholders Engagement; Biodiversity; Assets & Governance; Stormwater & Flooding; Climate Change & Coastal Hazards; Heritage; Aboriginal; Project Management) continue to meet regularly.

Once this Program is completed, specific funding through the State Government can be accessed to action priorities like replacing sheet steel pilings from the River's edge with naturalised riverbanks.

The Cooks River Alliance has successfully engaged many stakeholders in the preparation of this Program and will be looking for significant community engagement and consultation in its continued development over the coming year. More information can be found on the Cooks River Alliance website: <https://cooksriver.org.au/>

CRVA financial report

Balance sheet

Assets	
ING account	11,292.53
CBA account	7,281.77
TOTAL ASSETS	18,574.30
Liabilities	
Unspent Inner West Council grant	3,000.00
Commitment to IT upgrades	2,600.00
Overdue insurance payment	450.00
TOTAL LIABILITIES	6,050.00
Net assets	12,524.30

Income and Expenditure

Operational Income	
Bank interest	17.46
Membership fees	1,355.00
Donations	1,715.00
Administrative component of Commonwealth CEP grant	2,000.00
Other income	299.93
Total operational income	5,387.39
Income from Grants	
Commonwealth Community Environment Program	20,000.00
Inner West Council 2020 Environment Grant	5,500.00
Total income from grants	25,500.00
TOTAL INCOME	30,887.39
Operational Expenditure	
Support of affiliated groups	1,060.98
Post box and stationery	141.00
Other expenses	304.32
Total operational expenditure	1,506.30
Expenditure on Grants	
CBC Community Grant	444.77
Commonwealth Community Environment Program	20,000.00
Commonwealth Community Volunteers Grant	4,000.00
Inner West Council 2020 Environment Grant	2,500.00
Total expenditure from grants	26,944.77
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	28,451.07
Operational surplus	3,881.09
Grants deficit	1,444.77
TOTAL SURPLUS	2,436.32

Notes to the financial report

- Our overall financial situation remains stable and healthy.
- We have completed three externally funded projects this financial year. This has been mainly through the efforts of Gareth Wreford who has put a lot of time and effort into managing these grants. Peter Munro has also contributed to this effort. One other grant (from Inner West Council) is still underway.
- Our income has been bolstered considerably by an administrative component of \$2,000 included in a grant of \$22,000. There was also a larger than normal amount in donations. Some of these were made in connection with the passing of long-term CRVA member Sue Bishop.
- Our expenditures have been limited because we have not spent money on organising events because of COVID-19 restrictions.
- Grants shows a deficit because money spent this year was partly from unspent money that we had held over from the last financial year.
- It will continue to be important to fundraise through donations or other means to supplement income through membership fees.



Chris Shanley - CRVA Hon Treasurer
21 July 2021

CRVA committee for 2020-21

President	Ann Leahy
Vice-president	Jennifer Newman
Secretary	Julie Corkery
Treasurer	Chris Shanley
Public officer	Chris Shanley
Publicity officer	Ann Leahy
Mudcrabs officer	Ranjith Evas
Crabwalking coordinator	Martin Puchert
Committee members	Gareth Wreford Jamie Honan



Tawny Frogmouth at Boat Harbour