

Thoughts on Bushcare volunteering



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Sutherland Shire Environmental Citizen of the Year 2025

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Outline

- A/typical volunteer
- What works well – the basics and extras
- Issues
- Improving recruiting
- Improving retention
- The future

A/typical volunteer?

- Parents
- Australian Plants Society
- Bushcare and Nursery
- Training: Cert 2 CLM, Cert 4 Hort
- Honours: Sutherland Council and APS



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What works well at Sutherland

The basics

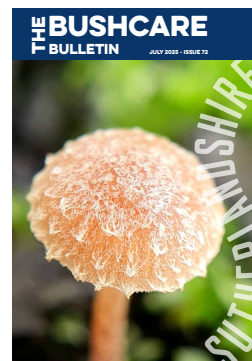
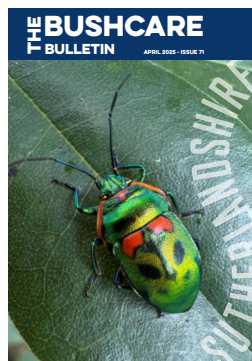
- regular sessions with well prepared and informed staff, tools and bags
- providing PPE to volunteers: hat, shirt and gloves
- providing morning tea (hot drink, biscuits!)
- communicating about changes, weather and cancellations
- being safe, welcoming and inclusive



What works well at Sutherland

Extras

- Autumn and Spring gatherings with speakers, Xmas BBQ
- Related events: walks, birds, training, seed collecting
- Quarterly *Bushcare Bulletin* with great information
- Council Nursery – for full lifecycle



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Issues

- Planning and purpose – could be clearer
- Conservation vs high visual impact
- Spraying (vs role of volunteers)
- Planting: natural regen best but plant on edges and degraded areas
- Signage and information



Improving recruitment 1

Recognise different reasons for volunteering and promote those benefits

- Live nearby: property values, amenity, fire
- Social: get out of house, meet other people
- Environment: do something for the environment
- Volunteering: do something, anything
- Physical health: cheaper than gym
- Mental health: benefits of being in nature
- Training or studying in bush regen or related: get a job
- New residents: learn about area and nature
- Duke of Edinburgh scheme

Role of location?

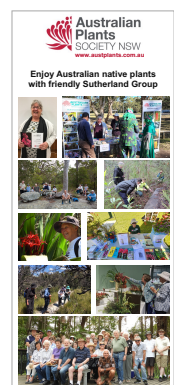
- Near vs far volunteers
- One site vs multi-site enthusiasts



Improving recruitment 2

- Provide before and after photos of sites = “you can make a difference”
- Focus on people – site signs, brochures and website
- Encourage “Bring a friend or neighbour”
- Provide information about what to expect on first day eg video on website and social media
- Provide clear information inc site locations
- Choose right site for you, have “starter sites”
- Convert from one-off events: quarterly Bushwhackers at different sites
- Be visible – on the ground and digital

<p>BUSHCARE WORKDAYS</p> <p>Workdays can be cancelled at short notice. (BvL) etc after the time denotes the first initial of the Bushcare Officer responsible for the group.</p> <p>1ST SATURDAY Gunnamatta Park 8.30am (GL) Wanda Beach, Cronulla 8.30am (ST) Alcheringa Reserve, Miranda 12.30pm (ST) Tea Tree Place, Kirrawee 1.00pm (GL)</p> <p>2ND SATURDAY Lucas Heights Conservation Area, 6.00am (US) Mairdowie, Loftus 8.30am (GL) Frya St, Kareela 8.30am (ST) Struen Marie Reserve, Kareela 10.30am (ST) Yarra Vista Court, Yarrawarrah 1.00pm (ST)</p> <p>3RD SATURDAY Burnsway Park, Caringbah 8.30 am (GL) Hall Drive Reserve, Menai 8.30am (ST) Beaufort Park, Caringbah 1.00pm (GL) Corinth Road, Heathcote 12.30pm (ST)</p>	<p>1ST MONDAY Whitton Street, Heathcote 8.30am (BvL) Taren Point Shoreland, Taren Point 9.00am (ST) Columbine Close, Loftus 1.00pm (BvL) Brigalow Place, Engadine 1.00pm (ST)</p> <p>2ND MONDAY Delta St, Sutherland 9.00am (BH) Koolangara Res, Bonnet Bay 9.00am (ST)</p> <p>3RD MONDAY Hakea Street, Yarrawarrah, 8.30am (BvL) Port Hacking Rd Res, Sylvania 9.00am (ST) Australia Rd, Barden Ridge 9.00am (BH) Nelson Street, Engadine 1.00pm (BvL)</p> <p>4TH MONDAY Young Street Reserve, Sylvania 9.00am (ST)</p> <p>1ST TUESDAY Myra Creek, Loftus 8.30am (BvL) Dunoon Place Reserve, Bangor 9.00am (BH) Menai Conservation Park, Menai 9.00am (ST) Upper Forbes Creek, Engadine 1.00pm (BvL) Surrey Place, Kirrawee 1.00pm (BH)</p> <p>2ND TUESDAY Caravan Head Res, Oyster Bay 9.00am (BvL) Lill Pill Point Reserve 9.00am (BH) Forbes Creek South, Engadine 1.00pm (BvL)</p>	<p>4TH WEDNESDAY Forest & Corolla Roads, Kirrawee 9.00am (BvL) Newcombe Street, Malabar 9.00am (GL) Wentford Reserve, Caringbah 9.00am (BH)</p> <p>1ST THURSDAY Joseph Banks Native Plant Reserve 9.00am (GL) Louden Avenue, Illawong 9.00am (BvL) John McKinn Park, Cronulla 9.00am (BH)</p> <p>2ND THURSDAY Kareela Golf Course 7.30am (GL) Parr Menai 8.30am (BvL) Native pollinator Garden 9.00am (BH)</p> <p>3RD THURSDAY Eighth Avenue, Loftus 8.30am (BvL) Savilles Creek Reserve, Kirrawee 9.00am (GL)</p> <p>4TH THURSDAY Kareela Golf Course 7.30am (GL) Drysdale Place, Kareela 9.00am (BH)</p> <p>1ST FRIDAY Coonong Creek Reserve, Oymes 8.30am (GL) Ewey Creek, Miranda 8.30am (BvL)</p> <p>2ND FRIDAY Ninth Avenue Reserve, Loftus 9.00am (BvL)</p>
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Improving recruitment 3

Consider new approaches to volunteers:

- Existing social groups eg Probus
- Bushwalkers – already care about the bush
- Sports groups – to work near sports fields when events are on
- Schools – to work on nearby sites as alternative to sport
- Scouts – to work on bush near club houses
- Grandparents and kids
- TAFE and uni students seeking practical experience and knowledge
- Frustrated gardeners in units – to work in bush
- Walkers and dog owners – for sites near walkways and dog parks

Keep recruiting active retirees

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Improving retention

- Recognise different reasons for volunteering and meet those needs
- Ensure good first-session experience, and follow up
- “Right site for each person”: promote different types of sites
 - flat vs steep, dry vs wet, open vs shady
 - primary weeding vs hand weeding
- Promote a group of sites in an area:
if miss one session, can go elsewhere
- Work with site neighbours for common plan,
eg institutions like education, transport, other parts of Council
- Recognise value of experienced volunteers: can work without staff
- Develop Bushcare Ambassadors

The future

Email me:
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- Challenging but AI-proof!
- Changing demographics and aging population – staff and volunteers:
 - more people in volunteering age group, but more things to do
 - regular monthly commitment difficult – promote flexibility and one-offs
 - health and safety – be aware of changing abilities
 - using limited staff efficiently
- Work with partners and site neighbours
- Bushcare Plus: Greencare, Treecare, TreeKeeper to care for other public green spaces including street trees and gardens



30 years of Sutherland Shire Bushcare: One volunteer's story

As an APS member in the 1990s, I had heard several other members, including Aileen Phipps, talk about volunteering for Bushcare. Around 2003, I wanted to do something practical with native plants, and decided to join a new Bushcare group which met on Sunday afternoon near Sutherland Leisure Centre, with Bushcare Officer Brad van Luyt. It was a small patch but in a highly visible spot. Luckily, there was no stormwater, so no new weeds. Due to the location, we always started with rubbish pick up. We created huge piles of lantana and pittosporums, and eventually even had a pile burn. Over time, the weeds and number of volunteers dwindled to just me, and the Bushcare Officer was reallocated to other sites.

I completed Certificate 2 in Conservation and Land Management through TAFE online, and later did Certificate 4 in Horticulture. In 2012, I was a one-person "group" at a small patch of land at the far end of my street, but the neighbours don't always have the same values. Then I started volunteering at a site adjoining Bonnet Bay Public School, funded under Council's Greenweb program where I met our very own Dan Clarke as the "Bushcare Officer". We started on Sundays, then moved to Fridays. Then Dan became busy with his other work and a contractor was appointed.

Over the years, I have also volunteered at Joseph Banks Reserve at the APS session on the first Sunday, and at the first Thursday Bushcare session since 2012 with Jason Salmon. After a period working on Sundays, looking round for a new site, I joined the Bushcare group at Hall Drive at Menai when Sabrina Thompson re-started it in mid 2020 on the third Saturday morning. I've also worked at Forestgrove at Menai. As part of the 30th anniversary activities in May, I worked at Koolangarra Reserve at Bonnet Bay on the second Monday morning, with Sabrina and Bushcare legend Michael Harrington, and broke my favourite weeding knife.

My Bushcare activities have varied from primary weeding of cutting down lantana and pittosporums, hacking out clumps of asparagus fern, pulling vines out of trees to hand weeding of Erharta (and lots of other grassy and shrubby weeds). Bushcare officers are always on hand to explain the best approach for each weed, and help ID the weeds from the natives. The number of times I keep asking about mock olive (*Notelaea*) – yes, it is a native! Some activities have more immediate visual impact, while others take longer to reveal the benefit of reducing weedy seedbanks.

What I have learned – the good news

- Regular attention can make a difference over time.
- Regeneration does occur, but sometimes planting is necessary for particularly degraded areas.
- Edges and paths, or anywhere with human contact, require the most attention.
- Moisture has a huge impact on weed growth – whether from stormwater runoff or rain.
- Each session, there's always something interesting to notice or learn about, whether it is a new species, flower, fruit, insect or animal (or unusual bit of rubbish).
- A tea break is important to have a chat and catch-up, and Bushcare officers know how to keep chocolate biscuits cool in summer!



Michael Harrington and Rhonda
(Photo supplied)

- It's important to get away from screens and enjoy our natural environments.

The not so good news

- Not everyone is necessarily working towards the same outcomes on sites. At Bonnet Bay, loads of mulch were dumped on site, and demountable buildings placed on top of new plantings, then an "asset protection zone" around the new buildings required brutal clearance of the understorey. Rubbish (litter and dumped material) on sites shows that not everyone values bushland.
- Spraying is important to control weeds, but needs to be done carefully to avoid collateral damage and huge areas of bare soil with no growth.
- PPE is vital, but gloves always wear out on my weeding finger, and while hats protect from skin cancer they increase the chances of hitting your head on a branch.
- You can never have too many white bags, but great if the designated litter bag could be a different colour.



Jason Salmon and Rhonda on a Bushcare flyer (photo supplied)

Final thoughts

- Bushcare sites throughout the Shire vary in the types of weeds and Bushcare activity. Find a site that suits you, in what you like to do, and in the time it is on (weekday, weekend, morning or afternoon). You can join the email lists for several groups in your vicinity so if you can't make the same date every month, there's still something you can do.
- Volunteers do make a difference, and we need more of them.

Find out more about Sutherland Council Bushcare, including the quarterly *Bushcare Bulletin* with a list of sites at: <https://www.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/bushcare>

Rhonda Daniels

The platypus have landed

After a little bit of a false start, the platypus release into the royal was undertaken. Here is a link to an article [in the St George and Sutherland Leader](#).

A detailed ABC TV news story is available [here](#).

For more platypus stories, try the [The Platypus Guardian](#)

Right: Platypus release in RNP (Ph: R. Freeman, UNSW)



In flower at Joseph Banks Reserve



While scrambling around weeding in the Sunny garden suddenly a shrub with banksia flowers caught my eye, but not our local *B. ericifolia* and *B. spinulosa* which are looking fantastic right now with their orange and golden spikes. This was [Banksia praemorsa](#). It has 3 reddish flower spikes – one at about 1 m high and the other 2 lower down, and more developing.

It is one of the hardier banksias from WA for our humid summers. I think I may even have bought and planted this, but don't remember it flowering before. Maybe it is liking our drier conditions? Then again, it is hidden behind a *Hakea nitida* (also from WA) which is just about to burst into flower, and a *Grevillea semperflorens*, several metres into the garden bed between the path south of the pond and the western fence. The common name of cut-leaf banksia and the species name (meaning bitten off) refer to the appearance of the ends of the leaves. Unfortunately, it was difficult to get a good photo in the heavy shade! (see left)

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