

IDENTIFICATION AND TAGGING OF BUSH FOODS

overview of the project

The *Identification and Tagging of Bush Foods* project was conducted by Purfleet Taree Local Aboriginal Land Council. It focussed on identifying and naming Aboriginal bush foods and medicines and other useful plants that were of cultural significance including art and craft, making weapons or ceremonial purposes. The project was undertaken on the 30 acre property 'Turark' at Wallabi Point on the mid North Coast. The plants identified have traditionally been utilised by the local Biripi and Worimi Nations.

By identifying and tagging the bush foods the project has enhanced the cultural value for day visitors to the site, educated Aboriginal youth in understanding indigenous plants and has provided a source of information on local indigenous plants. The identification of the plant species that are native to the area and that have historically been used by the Aboriginal community has resulted in the collection of seed for future propagation. This will allow the re-establishment of plants that had previously been found on the site, but are no longer there.

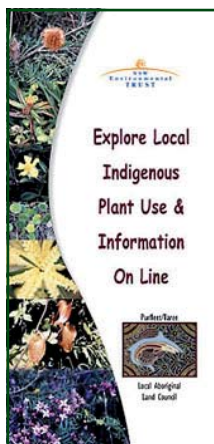


The Aboriginal bushfoods webpage

how the project was carried out

A comprehensive biodiversity study was conducted at the site, which involved the collection of 250 native species, recording of scientific and cultural information, and taking a photographic record of each species. This information was compiled on a CD-ROM which was made available to the public. Seed was also collected from some of the indigenous bush food species to be used for future propagation and planting at the site.

Twelve members of the local Indigenous community were trained in how to carry out biodiversity surveys under the supervision of an ethno-botanist. An ethno-botanist studies the relationships between plants uses and people. With their new found knowledge the local indigenous community assisted in the identification of native plant species in the area and the revegetation of previously cleared areas using locally indigenous plants that they had propagated from seed.



A brochure advertising the online plant information

outcomes now and in the future

The CD-ROM provides an educational resource for both the local Aboriginal community and the broader community on the identification and uses of indigenous plants, and ensures the preservation of this knowledge for future generations. By identifying the indigenous bush foods that should occur in the area and discovering which species exist at the site, they can be protected. The project has also allowed plant species that are no longer found at the site to be identified and reintroduced to the area. A nursery is currently under construction to propagate seed from existing bush foods of the area and to grow species from off-site for re-establishment.

This has been a successful project that has had many positive outcomes for the local Aboriginal community and the wider community, by promoting environmental awareness of local native plant species and their traditional uses, as well as showcasing Aboriginal cultural practices. The skills that this community have gained during the project are assisting them to mentor other land councils in the area on how to undertake this type of work.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

By providing training in plant identification and regeneration techniques this project has assisted the young local Aboriginal community to reconnect with their culture and the environment, as well as providing them with employment opportunities. Four people trained by this project have found full-time employment as bush regenerators while another has set up an ecotourism business.

The group found that a comprehensive biodiversity survey took longer than expected. This was due to the variation in flowering and fruiting times for each species, the availability of a photographer and suitable weather for photographing plants.

A major challenge for this project was the initial engagement of the local Aboriginal community with the project. Initially the community feared their knowledge and information would be misused, and lacked confidence in their literacy and numeracy skills. Through appropriate interaction that was sympathetic to the cultural issues of this group, links between the local indigenous community, the local council and the broader community have been established.

To make this information more accessible it has been transferred to the internet following a further small grant from the Environmental Trust. The site is available at www.ptlalc.com.au