

BUILDING BRIDGES TO BOOROWA

overview of the project

Building Bridges to Boorowa is a successful volunteer program that has become an annual event for North Sydney Council. Since September 2000, Bushcare volunteers from North Sydney have been working alongside Landcare volunteers from Boorowa in planting local trees, shrubs and groundcovers to create native wildlife corridors. The aim of the planting is to provide habitat for the endangered Superb Parrot while also reducing the effects of soil erosion and soil salinity.

Funding from the Environmental Trust allowed North Sydney Council to expand this program during 2005–07. Over 130 volunteers from 19 Council areas in Sydney travelled to Boorowa during the three year project, with an average of 6700 local plants being planted each year. The weekend trips provided city volunteers with first hand experience of the environmental issues that country Landcare volunteers are tackling.



Superb Parrots are listed as a threatened species

how the project was carried out

Volunteers travelled to Boorowa on one weekend a year, with the trips including a day of tree planting, a formal thank you dinner and a tour of the district to view the progress of previous planting sites. During 2005–07 the program was expanded from previous years allowing up to 50 volunteers to take part on each trip.



Volunteers planting on the 2006 trip

The trips were conducted in September, with North Sydney Council promoting the project through Bushcare networks from April each year. Much of the groundwork including selecting sites, obtaining plants, and preparing sites (fencing, weeding, spraying)

was carried out by a local Committee chaired by Boorowa Council. By mid-August, participants were confirmed, accommodation booked and information kits posted to volunteers.

An important aspect of the weekend trips were the catchment tours in which participants were able to view wildlife corridors planted in previous years and other local rehabilitation projects, both successful and unsuccessful. These tours were led by staff from the Central West Catchment Management Authority or members of the Boorowa Community Landcare Group.

outcomes now and in the future

A total of 133 volunteers from 19 Council areas participated in the program from 2005–07. Approximately 52 ha of land was fenced and over 20,000 indigenous trees and shrubs were planted across six sites.

Earlier plantings (2000–02) are now providing foraging habitat and temporary shelter for Red-rumped Parrots and Eastern

Rosellas, and in 2007 two flocks of Superb Parrots were seen foraging in open country adjacent to plantings carried out in 2000. These encouraging signs suggest that the habitat corridors will provide a resource for the Superb Parrot as they mature. This will hopefully contribute to the long-term recovery of Superb Parrot populations.

The post-trip evaluation survey has consistently shown participants find the weekend to be a valuable experience and they come home with a greater understanding of the environmental problems facing rural areas. This has resulted in some volunteers from other parts of Sydney lobbying their respective Councils to initiate a similar partnership program. Hornsby and Willoughby Councils are now evaluating their ability to facilitate a similar program.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

The biggest challenge is to manage the trips efficiently and achieve the project aims within a very compact timeframe. Council staff have learnt a lot about managing time and volunteers to make the weekend trips as efficient and enjoyable as possible. In 2007, the two day format was expanded to three days. Many volunteers provided positive feedback on this change and Council has now decided to retain the three day structure, which was found to be more enjoyable but just as effective as the two day itinerary.

Organisers have also learnt that it is more efficient to move volunteers from site to site as one group, rather than split them into smaller groups working at different sites. This means less time lost waiting for transport to move groups around.

Building Bridges to Boorowa is a great example of a partnership program that is achieving on-ground outcomes while raising the awareness of city residents about the issues faced by those in regional New South Wales, and fostering personal city-country relationships.