

# URBAN HABITAT RESTORATION

## overview of the project

The *Urban Habitat Restoration* project, undertaken by Hornsby Shire Council, educated the community about endangered ecological plant communities in the Hornsby Shire and encouraged residents to participate in the conservation of these communities. The Hornsby area has significant remnants of endangered Blue Gum High Forest, Sydney Turpentine Ironbark and Sydney Shale Transition Forest. This project expanded the local Bushcare program with the formation of ten new groups and forty new volunteers being engaged. This has allowed conservation work on eight new sites in the Shire. A further four sites, identified as containing significant remnant bushland, were restored and conserved by professional bush regenerators.

A series of 'Gardens for Wildlife' workshops were conducted which were attended by 170 local residents. These workshops were aimed at individuals who had little or no previous involvement in environmental activities or programs. The workshops covered information on environmentally friendly practices at home, restoration of remnant bushland and conservation of local wildlife and endangered ecological communities of the Hornsby Shire. Thirty site visits were carried out for residents that attended these workshops. The site visits provided participants with specific advice on how to restore and manage their land for conservation outcomes.

## how the project was carried out

To ensure this project ran smoothly, a comprehensive study of similar 'backyard education' projects across Australia was undertaken to determine what methods were effective and what could realistically be achieved. Surveys of local community perceptions of wildlife were also conducted to ensure that the project met the needs of the community groups that were being targeted.

A mapping program identified significant remnants of endangered bushland communities on public and private land. This identified areas for rehabilitation, seed collection and provided information for future monitoring. Residents that had remnant patches of endangered ecological communities were approached via letter box drops inviting them to attend Bushcare open days, workshops and demonstrations.



Gardens for Wildlife workshop

'Gardens for Wildlife' workshops targeted residents in areas containing endangered ecological communities and who also have gardens. Initially 240 properties were targeted with a package that contained information on habitat

restoration, native plants, locally threatened plant communities and sustainability. The workshops were also publicised in libraries and the Council office. Educational materials were developed to support the workshops, including fact sheets and brochures. The main aim of these workshops was to teach the community to identify and restore endangered plant communities.

A brochure titled *Create a Native Garden* was produced for all residents of Hornsby Shire. The brochure included photographs and descriptions of native plants found in the Shire and their habitat value. Over 3000 plants were distributed to the public and information provided on local flora and fauna through a series of open days at Council's community nursery.

## outcomes now and in the future

This project successfully restored 12 areas of significant remnant bushland with over 7,000 trees planted. As a result of the open days and letter box drops, 40 new volunteers have joined existing Bushcare groups or formed new groups. Community members have also established links with other local environmental groups such as Streamwatch, Land For Wildlife and Sydney Metro Wildlife Service.

The new vegetation map has updated the existing information for the Shire. It allows Council to better identify significant areas of remnant endangered ecological plant communities that need to be conserved on both public and private land. Evaluation of the "Gardens for Wildlife" workshops showed that the program successfully educated 170 residents to assist them in making positive environmental changes and becoming active in restoring native habitat on their own land or in public areas.

## benefits, challenges & lessons learned

Through the efforts of the Bushcare volunteers the project was able to conserve and enhance local plant communities on public and private land. As the restored areas mature they will provide additional habitat and food sources for a range of fauna in the area.

The 'Gardens for Wildlife' workshops significantly improved the public's awareness of endangered plant communities. However it was found that the general public's ability to identify and restore these communities was beyond the capacity of many people and this objective was not fully met by this program. Council will continue to focus on these issues using the publications prepared for the workshops and presenting further information at local community forums and nursery open days.