

# Background and overview of the Glebe Society's Innovation and Ideas Grant

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Lord Mayor, Councillor Jarrett, members and friends of the Glebe Society and the University of Sydney

## Introduction

Twenty-three years ago, local residents Helen Randerson and Jeanette Knox reported in the Society's Bulletin that our suburbs Superb Fairy Wrens and other small bird population was in decline. By 2003 there was a minor remaining breeding population of wrens, commonly known as blue wrens, around St James Avenue and Hereford Street in Glebe. Local residents, including Norma Hawkins, Fiona Campbell, Jan Craney, Roberta Johnston and Judy Christie, knew that if small birds, including the blue wrens, were to remain in our suburb it would be essential to preserve their habitat.

And so, the Blue Wren Subcommittee of the Glebe Society was formed, and a \$10,000 grant from the City of Sydney was awarded to the Society to study the current population of wrens. Sue Stevens, a consultant ecologist, was employed and her final report published in 2008 was entitled Superb Fairy Wren Habitat in Glebe and Forest Lodge – a community-based conservation project. The landmark report set out the habitat needs of wrens and the importance of providing wildlife corridors so that birds could easily move between Glebe's parks and household gardens.

Unfortunately, since that time changes in habitat suitability and other factors such as the increase in aggressive bird species like Noisy Miners have meant that across Glebe and Forest Lodge blue wrens are now rarely seen.

A positive outcome of Sue Stevens' report, however, has been a renewed interest in our local pocket parks and the formation of bushcare volunteer groups - at last count, 28 volunteers are regularly planting new native flora and maintaining our parks. The Blue Wren Subcommittee provides an umbrella organization in supporting the work of these volunteers and has also been very fortunate to have received over \$20,000 in donations. This generosity has enabled the Society to fund competitive biodiversity grants to support teaching and learning in our suburbs' 22 preschools and schools, and to also fund an annual biodiversity lecture to inform us about a topical issue, usually related to native fauna.

Now let's consider Glebe's Hill.

As we know from Max Solling, the site was originally a rubbish tip and the land is contaminated – that explains why it is surrounded by a cyclone fence and is not accessible to the public. The Blue Wren Subcommittee discussed what native fauna and flora may be present on The Hill, given that its 0.6 Ha of crown land is isolated and protected.

We decided to apply for an Innovation and Ideas Grant from the City of Sydney entitled "Glebe's Hill - unravelling its biodiversity secrets and potential". Our application stated: "Do the wild and weedy patches still remaining in the City hold biodiversity secrets and how can they best be utilised in our dense urban matrix?"

The Society is delighted to report that the City awarded the Grant with a budget of \$40,000. Over the year, it will provide a unique collaboration between the local community, represented by the Glebe Society, and the University of Sydney's Integrative Ecology Group led by Professor Dieter Hochuli. Dieter will be talking about how expert wildlife researchers will determine the current values of the site, including the presence (or absence) of mammals, birds, bats, reptiles, insects and related vegetation. The result will be an increased understanding of the biodiversity of The Hill.

What is the long-term future for Glebe's Hill? The Gadigal and Wangal people cared for The Hill for thousands of years until the colonisers first took it over more than 200 years ago - turning it into a rubbish tip - and then it became a parking lot for the Harold Park trots and dogs.

The Hill is currently subject to an unresolved Aboriginal Land Claim. As time progresses, the management of Glebe's Hill could be transferred to our Indigenous colleagues.

Whatever the outcome, it is hoped that the findings of this Project can help inform any potential use of the site and whether it's long-term future could be as a protected nature refuge with controlled public access. We would also hope that The Hill in the future could be given an Aboriginal name in recognition of its traditional owners and their stories about Glebe's history.