

14 March 2025

Memo to: Les McCluskey, Urban Ecology Coordinator, City Greening and Leisure, City of Sydney. Email: urbanecology@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

From: Duncan Leys, President, Glebe Society Inc

2025 URBAN ECOLOGY STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Glebe Society's reply to Les McCluskey's questions (6 February 2025)

Note: information in parenthesis, [...], refers to the 2014 Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan.

WHAT IS THE SCOPE OF YOUR ACTIVITY?

From a strategic perspective we recognise the continuing population growth in our suburb, which includes many young families with children living in medium density accommodation. This places heavy demands on the limited community open space available.

The Glebe Society and its Blue Wren Subcommittee will:

1. Work to value, retain and enhance biodiversity in Glebe and Forest Lodge, and its bays and foreshores, for current and future generations.
2. Foster the education of residents, school children, businesses and other parties leading to an increased awareness of the value of native plants and animals in our suburb.
3. Liaise (including lobbying, and the provision of information, perspectives and feed-back) with the City of Sydney, local schools, other organizations and local residents to retain and enhance biodiversity in our suburb.
4. By organising planting days and other events, actively promote the enhancement of biodiversity in our suburbs' parks, school grounds, light rail corridor, and private gardens, with special emphasis on the density, structure and type of plantings needed to provide habitat for small birds.
5. Promote local bushcare volunteer organisations who support the continued establishment and maintenance of biodiversity in our suburbs' parks and other open spaces.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED WITH YOUR GROUP AND ARE THEY MAINLY LOCAL TO THE COS?

The Glebe Society has over 400 members, its Blue Wren Subcommittee has 12 members and there are 21 bushcare volunteers working in our local parks and reserves. Almost everyone lives in Glebe or Forest Lodge.

HOW DO YOU COMMUNICATE WITHIN YOUR GROUP?

The Glebe Society communicates with its members through a monthly Bulletin as well as by updates via email. The Blue Wren Subcommittee meets about bimonthly and also communicates updates via email.

HAVE YOUR ACTIVITIES AND PLANT SELECTION BEEN CONSISTENT WITH THE COS'S BUSHLAND RESTORATION MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-2026 WHEN UNDERTAKING YOUR WORK?

- *Glebe Palmerston Steps – bush restoration site; bushcare volunteers led by Anna Szanto*

The group's activities have been in line with The City's Bushland Restoration Management Plan 2024-2026. The group's activities spring from our objectives, which are to:

- 1) further improve the green corridor that runs through Glebe & Forest Lodge linking up with reserves & pocket parks to create a native plant corridor that runs from the city into the inner west of Sydney
- 2) develop biodiversity & increase bird habitat
- 3) improve air quality by increasing native vegetation
- 4) add to the beauty of our urban surroundings
- 5) build a community of residents who care for the land

During monthly working bees, the weeding of annuals & invasive species is a constant priority. Small plants needing light & space to establish themselves amidst native grasses which are thriving is regularly undertaken.

The removal of Chinese Hackberry (*Celtis cinensis*) seedlings & small plants has been a constant priority, due to well-established Chinese Hackberry trees on adjacent light rail land.

Umbrella Sedge (*Cyperus alternifolius*) plants that are thriving in the lower section of the site are scheduled for removal by The City's contractors & will need to be replaced by plantings indigenous to the area. The removal of a large *Philodendron* on the upper part of the site needs to be considered. Ivy which grows on the adjacent light rail site is frequently cut back as it encroaches into the lower part of the site. There are 2 mature Poplar sp. trees in the upper part of the site which have not been removed as yet.

Litter which includes not only plastics, but pieces of dried concrete & other large household items that are dumped on & around plants are frequently removed.

Locally indigenous vegetation are the only seedlings that have been added to the site. These have been provided by the City of Sydney. Plant watering is done as needed.

The health & safety of volunteers is a priority. The site is steeply sloping & requires special considerations. The gutters on either side of the entire site become extremely slippery during periods of wet weather. Water-blasting by The City's contractors then makes the gutters safer for volunteers to cross.

New volunteers are inducted, & regular reminders are sent to all volunteers about suitable shoes, wearing gloves, sun protections, to bring water to drink & small gardening tools. Chemicals & power tools are not used, & volunteers do not work from heights.

Working bees are postponed during extremely hot weather & during storms.

- *Orphan School Creek – bushcare volunteers led by Judy Christie*

As per the group's discussion with Les McCluskey, Urban Ecology Coordinator on 5 March 2025, and subsequent emailed document to the Urban Ecology Coordinators with background and current activities of the Friends of Orphan School Creek Bushcare, we confirm that current and ongoing plant selection and on-ground activities are consistent with the City's Bushland Restoration Management Plan.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE PARTICULARLY WITH REGARDS TO BLUE WREN POPULATION ENHANCEMENT?

Over the past 13 years, habitat for small insect-eating birds (including the Blue Wren) has been progressively removed from Glebe, Forest Lodge and the adjacent campus of the University of Sydney.

We now have only occasional sightings of wrens in Glebe more recently in the Rozelle Bay foreshore park opposite the Anchorage home units and last year at the western end of the Bay – 'In June 2024, a pair of Wrens were seen by Elizabeth Dark, a member of the Orphan School Creek Bushcare Group, in a mix of lantana, planted acacias and variety of weeds and grasses at the western end of Rozelle Bay. The sighting demonstrates the great importance of even small patches of flora in adding to wildlife corridors that permit small birds to move into and around Glebe and hopefully to permanently return.' With a healthier habitat 'stepping stones' along the corridors maybe the wrens will make it back to our suburb one day.

HAVE YOU NOTICED TRENDS IN WILDLIFE PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OVER TIME?

For the past eleven years, the Blue Wren Subcommittee has been performing an annual spring bird survey – the results represent the most accurate record the Society has of changes in wildlife populations in Glebe and Forest Lodge.

Here are the results of last year’s survey:

Glebe Forest Lodge Annual Spring Bird Survey Report 2024

Date: 3 November 2024

Time: 6.30am-8am

This year’s annual Glebe Forest Lodge bird survey was held on 3 November in dry, overcast conditions. After a week of mostly sunny days with plenty of bird calls, Sunday morning was eerily silent and most groups reported a quiet morning. Nineteen people participated in this year’s spring survey working in eight different groups counting birds in leafy and non-leafy sites across Glebe and Forest Lodge. An additional systematic 2 hectare 20 minute survey for Birdlife Australia’s national database *Birdata* was also conducted at the same time in Federal Park.

The following were the sites surveyed this year; similar to previous years.

1. Harold Park parklands, Tramsheds precinct, ‘The Hill’, Jubilee Oval & Bicentennial Park
2. Federal Park saltmarsh & surrounds, mangroves and Rozelle Bay around past the marina
3. Johnstons Creek corridor from the Wood Street Lands, Orphan School Creek to the Tramsheds
4. Forest Lodge streets including along St Johns Road and nearby streets
5. Pocket Parks – Arthur (Paddy) Gray Reserve; John St Reserve and St James Park, Foley Park and Library precinct
6. Palmerston Ave, Blackwattle Bay walk from Bridge Road up to and including Ferry Road & adjacent parks and reserves
7. Blackwattle Bay Park foreshore walk & Bay from Pope Paul V1 Reserve to Forsythe Street
8. Victoria Park around Lake Northam

Results are summarised below.

Species name	Number	Comment
Australian Brush-turkey	2	Now breeding in Forest Lodge
Australian Magpie	38	Slight increase in numbers with immature birds common. Every group reported at least 1 Magpie seen.
Australian Raven	8	Similar numbers to 2023
Australian White Ibis	12	Slightly fewer birds than usual
Australasian Figbird	5	Scattered around the leafy parks. Heard more commonly than seen.
Crested Pigeon	4	Significant drop in numbers compared to 2023.

Species name	Number	Comment
Channel-billed Cuckoo	3	More than usual seen this year.
Common Myna*	18	Low count, perhaps our sites did not pick up the usual numbers
Dusky Moorhen	18	Five chicks added to this year's count at Lake Northam
Eastern Koel	3	More Koels seen this year, all in the Glebe pocket parks
Feral Pigeon (Rock Dove)*	60	This year outnumbering the Common Myna.
Galah	4	Small flock in Federal Park and nearby
Grey Butcherbird	14	Similar number to 2023. Common in all well-treed parks
Laughing Kookaburra	2	Fewer sightings this year.
Magpie-Lark (Pee-wee)	1	Significant decline in numbers, although 2 birds commonly seen in Johnstons Creek but unlikely to have bred successfully this year.
Little Black Cormorant	8	The most common cormorant near and in water bodies, with a number roosting on structures at high tide
Little Pied Cormorant	2	In the Bay
Masked Lapwing	2	A regular pair
Noisy Miner	95	Fewer birds counted this year but with numerous nests and widespread wherever trees especially Eucalypts
Pacific Black Duck	11	Good numbers in Lake Northam this year.
Pied Currawong	17	Widespread across the suburbs especially in parks with large trees.
Purple Swamphen	5	An increase in numbers
Rainbow Lorikeet	98	The most common bird species seen and reported by all groups. Numbers less than in 2023 but most seen feeding rather than flying around in big flocks as in previous years.
Silver Gull	12	Fewer numbers but juvenile birds also seen.
Spotted Dove*	1	A decreasing species.
Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo	1	Usually 1 or 2 birds seen or heard around the suburbs
Tree Martin	15	Similar numbers to 2023 with evidence of successful breeding again in air vents on a Ross Street building.
Welcome Swallow	50	Seen flying at most sites although may have included a few Tree Martins as well.
Willie Wagtail	3	Breeding success in the mangroves.
White-faced Heron	2	At least 2 herons present and possibly a third moving around the Bay and in the Johnstons Creek canal.
TOTALS: 30 species		Reduced total number of birds but same number of species seen as in 2023.

Species name	Number	Comment
514 birds		

Comments

Despite comprehensively covering most of the key habitat sites in Glebe and Forest Lodge the number of birds counted was less than in previous years. A total of 514 individual birds were seen with 30 different species identified – including 3 introduced species (spotted dove, rock dove and common myna) and both our regular summer cuckoos – the eastern koel and channel-billed cuckoo. The rock dove or feral pigeon, as many know it, seems to outnumbering the local native crested pigeon but the ever-present native noisy miner is most definitely increasing and harassing other native birds like the magpie-lark and even aggressively dive bombing the brush-turkey. As in previous years, the rainbow lorikeet was the most common species seen, but only just edging out the noisy miner.

At least 6 native bird species including grey butcherbird, pied currawong and Australian magpie are breeding in Glebe & Forest Lodge in our leafy parks and streets. The tree martins continue their spring breeding using air vents in a Ross Street building. However, one of the best results of the survey were the 3 willie wagtails (one a juvenile bird), down near the mangroves on Rozelle Bay. The mangroves have now grown sufficiently to provide a dense, protective habitat and critically, seem to be of little interest to the noisy miners. As the foreshores around Rozelle Bay are developed introducing more mangroves may be a way to improve habitat for small native birds and provide much needed habitat ‘stepping stones’. Perhaps even providing some refuge for the return of our icon species the superb fairy-wren.

The increase in waterbirds at Lake Northam is a strong result that may be the result of improving water quality. As it was a high tide survey there were fewer birds seen in the channel but good cormorant numbers in the Bays. The saltmarsh ‘benches’ along the channel are also thickening up and becoming useful habitat for the white-faced heron and possibly species like the buff-banded rail, a shy species occasionally seen.

As a one-off ‘snapshot’ event, the survey will not necessarily identify uncommon species that are sometimes reported locally. For example, in the sunny days before and after the survey an olive-backed oriole was continually calling in the dense canopy along Johnston’s Creek, red wattlebirds proved elusive though heard by others in Forest Lodge and a male king parrot was in an Upper Road street-tree the week before the survey.

After 10 years of annual surveys covering mostly the same sites, with many sites now being surveyed by the same people as well as new people joining the search, we know where to look and what to look for. There is also the opportunity to review sites and adapt our surveys to changing conditions. The survey provides a useful benchmark of local avian diversity and profiles the changes from year to year.

Once again, we had a birdwatchers’ breakfast celebration at Esca to conclude our morning’s activities. Thank you to all volunteers who helped to make a very successful and enjoyable spring morning. A full report of the specific locations and bird numbers is available from the Blue Wren Subcommittee.

Judy Christie
November 2024

WHAT ARE YOUR PRIORITIES AS A GROUP?

Blue Wren Subcommittee – terms of reference 2025

Objectives

To implement the Subcommittee’s policy statement (following) especially through:

- increasing the diversity, abundance and distribution of indigenous fauna and flora;
- promoting a network of wildlife corridors linking key habitat areas;
- involving the local community in habitat creation, enhancement activities and public education on the importance of biodiversity.

Policy statement

From a strategic perspective we recognise the continuing population growth in our suburb, which includes many young families with children living in medium density accommodation. This places heavy demands on the limited community open space available.

The Blue Wren Subcommittee endorses the recommendations of the 2008 report *Superb Fairy Wren Habitat in Glebe and Forest Lodge – a community based conservation project* (also endorsed by the Glebe Society) and will work towards their implementation. In doing so the Subcommittee will:

- Work to value, retain and enhance biodiversity in Glebe and Forest Lodge, and its bays and foreshores, for current and future generations.
- Foster the education of residents, school children, businesses and other parties leading to an increased awareness of the value of native plants and animals in our suburb.
- Liaise (including lobbying, and the provision of information, perspectives and feed-back) with the City of Sydney, local schools, other organizations and local residents to retain and enhance biodiversity in our suburb.
- By organising planting days and other events, actively promote the enhancement of biodiversity in our suburbs’ parks, school grounds, light rail corridor, and private gardens, with special emphasis on the density, structure and type of plantings needed to provide habitat for small birds.
- Promote local bushcare volunteer organisations who support the continued establishment and maintenance of biodiversity in our suburbs’ parks and other open spaces.

Action Plan

We will continue to work towards the implementation of the following reports: *Superb Fair-Wren Habitat in Glebe and Forest Lodge – a community based conservation project* (Sue Stevens, 2008) and *Glebe’s Hill Unravelling Its Biodiversity Secrets and Potential* (Dieter Hochuli, Manuel Lequerica Tamara and Genevieve Heggarty, 2024).

1. We will actively promote the enhancement of biodiversity in our suburbs’ parks, school grounds, light rail corridor and private gardens. We will work towards the conversion of Glebe’s Hill, the fenced-off contaminated land near the Jubilee Park light rail stop, into a “wildlife habitat refuge”. In association with the City of Sydney, Planet Ark and other groups,

2. we will organise/assist events to involve the local and wider communities in the habitat restoration, ideally to coincide with National Tree Day (Sunday, 27 July 2025) and/or World Environment Day (Thursday, 5 June 2025). We will also continue to administer the Craney Small Grants Program, undertake a spring bird survey in October 2025 and hold an annual lecture on an aspect of biodiversity.
3. We will liaise (including lobbying, and the provision of information and feedback) with the City of Sydney, other organisations (including Metro Light Rail and Sydney Water) and residents to retain and enhance biodiversity in our suburb. We will be supporting the work of volunteers from two local bushcare groups (Orphan School Creek, and Palmerston Ave and Surrounds) as well as liaising with bushcare groups in nearby suburbs.
4. We will liaise with the Society's Bulletin editor and Webmaster to advertise and record the Subcommittee's events and to increase awareness of the value of native plants and animals in our suburb.

ISSUES YOU AS A SOCIETY WOULD LIKE TO RAISE

Summary

1. Appointment of additional Urban Ecology staff

While the Society supports the many actions outlined in the current Urban Ecology Action Plan, the failed implementation of some of these actions may have been due to a lack of resourcing, including having additional Council staff supporting the Urban Ecology Coordinator. Contractors only deliver according to their contracts and issues arise; residents may alert Council to issues of urgent weed infestation, tree problems, poor maintenance of parks and so on. The need to have a small team of Council staff as well as contractors under the Coordinator position we believe may improve Urban Ecology and urban biodiversity outcomes for the City and for Glebe and Forest Lodge.

2. John Street Reserve – a demonstration habitat garden

The Glebe Society has been disappointed that the John Street Reserve that was originally planted as a habitat Garden has not been maintained with the expertise of bush regeneration staff. We would like to see this reserve be given priority biodiversity and habitat consideration.

3. Understorey planting

The Society would like greater focus on understorey planting in all parks, and street planting so that every canopy species planted is complemented by a suitable understorey.

4. Removal of noxious weed - *Celtis sinensis* (Chinese/Japanese hackberry)

This species is known as the “Glebe Weed”. It is a huge limiting factor on improving the biodiversity of our suburbs and should be prioritised for removal and ongoing replacement by suitable native species. An education program is needed to inform local residents about the need to remove *Celtis* seedlings from their gardens.

1. Appointment of additional Urban Ecology staff

Recommendation

The City should increase the resourcing for the delivery of the Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan through additional staff appointments. These should be permanent, continuing appointments.

How can biodiversity outcomes be improved in Glebe-Forest Lodge?

A. Introduction

While the Society supported the many actions outlined in the City's 2014 Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan, the failed implementation of some of these actions may have been due to a lack of resourcing, including not providing additional staff to assist the Urban Ecology Coordinator.

The City's contractors only deliver according to their contracts and problems arise - residents may alert the City to issues of urgent weed infestation, tree problems, poor maintenance of parks and so on. The issues, however, may not be covered by the contracts and so the required maintenance work is not performed.

There is a need for the Urban Ecology Coordinator to supervise a small team of City staff, and its contractors, to improve the urban biodiversity outcomes for the City, and for Glebe and Forest Lodge.

B. *Issues:*

- The City is not able to respond in timely fashion to issues the Society has raised in our parks and reserves including those related to weeds, dangerous trees and dumped rubbish. In another example, the City did not promptly remove suckering Casuarinas in Harold Park below a certain height limit despite it being an action in the City's vegetation management plan.
- All on-ground work is carried out in our area by contractors and volunteers. In particular the City's bush regeneration contractors are limited by their actual contracts and getting additional support or covering new areas can involve new work orders etc. which do not happen in a timely fashion.
- On at least two occasions in 2024, the Orphan School Creek Bushcare Group had to deal directly by email and phone with contract managers (tree contractors and Skyline) to try and resolve complaints that had been made. It would have been preferable to communicate directly with actual Council staff. The issues remain to be fully resolved in 2025.

2. **John Street Reserve – a demonstration habitat garden**

Recommendation

John Street Reserve should be replanted with native flora, be fully maintained by the City's bushcare contractors and continue as a demonstration habitat garden.

Background and aims

The demonstration habitat garden was established by the City at John Street Reserve to the acclaim of local residents [See Page 94, 4.2.3, item 2 – A demonstration habitat garden will be created on City managed publicly accessible land.].

The City, however, has failed to maintain the native flora and this biodiversity garden no longer exists as the original native plantings have died. Also, despite requests from residents, the Reserve has received no adequate maintenance from the City's bush regeneration contractors.

The original planting plans for the Reserve should be consulted and the entire area should be replanted with native flora and its future continued maintenance by the City's bushcare contractors should be adequately supervised by the City.

3. **Understory planting**

Recommendation

Understory planting of native flora must be initiated and enhanced to provide habitat for native fauna (small woodland birds, foraging microbats, reptiles and insects).

Background

Recent research in Melbourne has shown that increasing the complexity of understorey vegetation and the percentage of understorey that was native had positive effects on bat, bird and insect communities (<https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/biodiversity-research>).

Many parks in Glebe and Forest Lodge consist only of individual trees and lawn, and completely lack an understory planting – examples include Harold Park and the Johnstons Canal Reserve (upstream from the naturalised section).

Although the City's 2014 Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan emphasised the importance of understory planting of native flora, much still needs to be initiated.

What still needs to be achieved

- The City should undertake plantings of native flora to increase the understorey habitat on their managed land by 20 per cent by 2030.

[See page 73, 3.7.8] - “Most small woodland birds are dependent on dense understorey vegetation comprising a mix of different indigenous shrubs, grasses and groundcover species, which provide the food and shelter they require. Ground level features like fallen logs are also beneficial habitat features. These characteristics are missing from most urban parks, which tend to be characterised instead by trees over mown lawn, mulch or paved surfaces. This type of environment favours many of the larger bird species that have consequently become abundant in Sydney and other urban areas, and several of which are aggressive towards or prey on small birds.”

- In streets, the City needs to explore how native understorey vegetation can be established. It should also develop a palette of understorey, native plant species suitable for the harsh growing conditions of streetscapes that can also support biodiversity and provide a more attractive landscape for the public.
- Establishing understorey beneath existing indigenous trees in our parks and reserves should be prioritised to enhance local biodiversity.

[See page 76 3.7.1 Limited habitat availability] - “It requires a structurally complex habitat comprising a mix of trees with a dense understorey of shrubs, grasses, groundcovers, and/or other features like rock crevices, fallen logs, tree hollows and wetlands.”

- Establish successful undercover to enhance the wildlife habitat corridors that connect the parks and reserves in Glebe and Forest Lodge as well as improving biodiversity and amenity.
- The City and some of its park’s contractors have limited staff knowledge and experience in bush regeneration and biodiversity management techniques which continues to limit the potential for understorey establishment [See page 40, 3.4.1]

4. Removal of noxious weed - *Celtis sinensis* (Chinese/Japanese hackberry)

Recommendation

All *Celtis sinensis* trees should be removed from the City.

Background

Celtis sinensis is known as the “Glebe Weed”. It is an introduced deciduous tree and a declared noxious weed (Noxious Weeds Act 1993). Its seeds are readily spread by birds, fruit bats and water in riparian zones and on germination they quickly grow up to 20m in height in parks, reserves and private gardens. Its fruit is a globose drupe (5 to 7 mm in diameter), which is characterised by a hard, woody, ball-bearing-like stone that are a trip hazard on footpaths and on the tennis courts in St James Park.

Celtis sinensis is a huge limiting factor on improving the biodiversity of our suburbs and should be prioritised for removal. In order to maintain the percentage green cover in the City, *Celtis sinensis* should be replaced with a range of more suitable native tree species, accompanied by native understorey plantings. Also, an education program is needed to inform local residents about the need to remove of *Celtis sinensis* seedlings from their gardens.

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