

Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch

Take Another Look at Platypus

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The first Capital Region Platypus Census in 2010 produced a pleasing number of reports of platypus sightings from most major waterways in the ACT and surrounding area. Now it is time for another search to check on how this unique mammal is faring 12 months down the track.

The 2011 Census will again be organised by Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch in partnership with the Australian Platypus Conservancy. Waterwatch Co-ordinator Tanya Rucosky Noakes, said that last year's results

confirmed that this very special animal lives in close proximity to people throughout much of the region. In particular, platypus were seen frequently in Queanbeyan near the city centre. Sightings in the Molonglo River, especially near Duntroon, suggested that the species was now also reasonably common close to the heart of Canberra.

Tanya said that the first census was an important step towards establishing a baseline for how platypus populations were faring throughout the region. She hoped that members of the community would contribute just as enthusiastically to this year's census which will be conducted throughout September. This is the prime time of the year for spotting platypus as it is the peak of mating activity. Animals can sometimes be seen even in the middle of the day, although the best times to look are early morning and late afternoon/evening.

For more detailed advice on how to go about looking for platypus, *A Guide to Spotting Platypus and Water-rats in the Wild*, produced by the Australian Platypus Conservancy, can be obtained free of charge by contacting Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch.

Details of all platypus sightings should be forwarded to UM Waterwatch. In addition to current sightings, observations from the past are equally important and should also be reported. The special Capital Region Platypus Census report form printed in September editions of *The Chronicle* can be used. Or, you can simply supply details by telephone or email of when and where the sighting was made, together with your contact details.

As part of Platypus Census month, UM Waterwatch will also be holding free platypus information walks/spotting sessions in Queanbeyan and Cooma.

For further information contact:
[Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch](#)

Tanya Rucosky Noakes





Waterwatch Fridge Door

(All programs are free and open to the public.)

Platypus Walk

3 September 2011 5.00pm
Q Performing Arts Centre. Queanbeyan

Rapid Assessment of Riparian Condition Training

17 September 2011 10.30am -2.30pm
Coppins Crossing

Frogwatch Trainings

All trainings run from 6.00pm until 10.30pm

Seminar 1

20 September Queanbeyan Public School,
David Hunter

Seminar 2

26 September Scottsdale Ben Scheele

Seminar 3

28 September Botanic Gardens Murray Evans

Seminar 4

29 September Botanic Gardens Murray Evans

Frogwatch Field Trips

6 pm until 8.30 pm

Field trip 1 (Starts at 5:30)

26 September: Scottsdale Ben Scheele

Field trip 2

5 October : Mulligans Flat Will Osborne

Field trip 3

6 October: Tidbinbilla Murray Evans

Field trip 4

To be announced Queanbeyan David Hunter

QA/QC Trainings

24 September 10.00am-1.00pm
Frank Norris Park, Cooma NSW

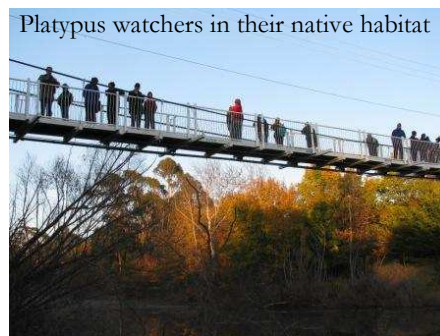
13 November 10.00am-1.00pm
Molonglo Gorge Recreation Area, NSW

Platypus Walks

If you've been looking for a chance to see a platypus and learn more about these fascinating creatures, join Waterwatch Facilitator, Tanya Noakes for a guided walk two of the region's platypus hot spots, at Mittagang Rd. on the Murrumbidgee near Cooma, or deep in the wilds of urban Queanbeyan.

"Platypus are low-key, but not really shy. It's all about learning what to look for, and training our eyes, to see what's secretly going on right under our noses." said Noakes.

The program is free, suitable to all ages and physical abilities, and no booking are required.



Rapid Assessment of Riparian Health Training

All Landcare/Waterwatch members and anyone interested in riparian assessment are invited to attend this combined catchment event.

Leading the training this year will be Fleur Flanery, ACT's Urban Forest Program Manager. Learn to quickly assess riparian health and target works for the strongest benefit of biodiversity as well as take the opportunity to learn about the Urban Forest Renewal Program which will develop a plan and process for the replacement of the aging urban forest.

Places are limited and lunch provided so book early with Tanya Noakes by emailing her at tanya.rucoskynoakes@act.gov.au



What's Happening

Frogwatch Season

Four field trips will be held this year. These field trips are aimed at experienced Frogwatchers, who would like to further develop their identification and monitoring skills. Participants will have the opportunity to investigate important components of frog habitat, and talk with expert ecologists in the field. Each field trip will involve walking as a group to observe a number of sites throughout the evening. Please bring sturdy shoes, a torch and warm clothing and wet weather gear if necessary. RSVP to frogwatch@ginninderralandcare.org.au.

Maximum numbers per field trip: 25. In case of severe weather conditions, participants will be advised of an alternative venue closer to the date.

Tea and coffee will be available. Cost: Free.

This year we are going to offering **four Introduction Seminars**.

This seminar is essential for the first time Frogwatcher or as a refresher for those who have participated in previous years. It will cover all you need to know to participate in the 2011 Frogwatch Census, including

identifying frog species, using Frogwatch Field Data Sheets, undertaking habitat assessments and performing your first frog monitoring activity.

Seminars run from 6.00pm to 8.30pm and will include a short walk outside to practice frog identification skills. Please bring sturdy shoes, a torch, and wet weather gear if necessary.

Please note: all introductory seminars will cover the same information - you only need to attend on one evening. RSVP to frogwatch@ginninderralandcare.org.au



Our youngest Frogwatcher at an intensive training in 2010



Spring is in the air, and with the last nips of winter, it's time

to come out and train up.

Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch now has over 160 certified sites that are monitored by recently trained volunteers. These volunteers and the data they provide are the basis upon which all work and Waterwatch projects are built.

Have you attended a training in the last year? If not, your site is falling off the map!

QA/QC Trainings

Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch is offering two refresher trainings in the region over the spring in Cooma and in the Queanbeyan areas.

Come in, get fresh solutions, test yourself and discuss any issues or concerns about equipment or techniques, and meet other volunteers in your region over a snag from the barbie.

A macroinvertebrate refresher training will start at 10.00am and quality control and assessment training will commence at 11.00am

Please let your coordinator or Tanya Noakes know if you will be attending, so that we can minimize competition for sausage (meaty and vegetarian) resources.

News from the Cooma Region

Dumping Waste: out of sight is not out of mind.

by Antia Brademann



Every year Australians generate 34.2 million tonnes of non hazardous solid waste and just over half of this waste is disposed of in landfill. However, even when placed in landfill, our rubbish doesn't just 'go away'. Instead, landfill waste will remain in the ground for hundreds of years and if not managed properly can have the potential to be uncovered and move off site, produce greenhouse gases such as methane and generate chemical leachate as waste decomposes.

Because of this, modern landfills are a far cry from the 'hole in the ground' of days gone by. Instead they have waterproof liners, are situated carefully in the landscape and are regularly monitored for pollution events that may occur. It is also one of the reasons why dumping waste or creating a landfill on public or private property requires approval by the local council and the Office of Environment and Heritage. Dumping waste, even on your own property needs careful consideration, especially if containing household waste, tyres, paint tins etc. Such waste is probably best disposed of in a designated landfill facility.

One of the most disappointing situation regarding illegal dumping is when waste is dumped on public land. Exposed rubbish starts to become distributed through the bush and washes into waterways. It was in this way that a small household waste dump was discovered on crown land on Stockyard Creek, a semi-permanent stream near Numeralla, in an

area of natural bush enjoyed for walking and riding by local residents. Residents became concerned when an unusual amount of plastic wrapping, household food containers and washed out nappies were being wash down Stockyard Creek. As a result these were at risk of ending up in the adjoining Badja River, a river known for its good water quality and good aquatic habitat.

An investigation of the area found that a household dump had been placed into a side channel of the creek and buried at some previous time. Ironically, the dumper may have thought that the waste infill may act to stabilize the area, but because the creek channel has periodic high flushing flows and the soil is fragile, the dump site had now been partially washed out and rubbish was free to move downstream. This can be a common outcome for waste dumps placed in gullies or active erosion zones in the landscape.

Ever keen to preserve the beautiful area in which they live, Numeralla residents and Landcare members are seeking ways to clean up the site in consultation with the Department of Lands and the local council. Already a working bee has been held to collect the rubbish which had been mobilised in the creek channel, which removed a ute load of rubbish downstream of the site. The effort and cost that will be involved shows how local communities can be affected by dumping, but it will be worth it, because it means that the natural bush, good water quality and aquatic habitat for which the area is known can continue to be enjoyed by all.

News from the Southern ACT

Southern A.C.T. Catchment Group Waterwatch Group Profile: 'P.O.S.M'



Putting in a leaky weir

P.O.S.M (Park carers Of Southern Murrumbidgee) began life in 1991 with founding member Richard Strudwick. They received their first funding in 1992 and by 1993 were also being funded to work on a project to control African Love Grass in the stretch of the Murrumbidgee River corridor between Point Hut Crossing and Pine Island. The group undertakes work familiar to anyone involved in Parkcare, with the usual weeding, seed collecting and planting. A significant difference is quickly noticed, however, when you visit their works on Barney's Gully, an ephemeral creek draining from Gordon to the Murrumbidgee River. A technique central to 'Natural Sequence' practices has seen POSM employ the use of a number of highly engineered 'leaky weirs' along the creek bed. They have also gently 'battered' some undercut erosion points to prevent the continued washing away of the sub soil layer.

Deb Kellock has been an active member of POSM for 9 years and has also taken up the role of conducting water quality monitoring in the gully as well as at a number of other sites along the Murrumbidgee River. She confesses that a number of POSM members are also members of the Natural Sequence Association (NSA), who follow controversial land management practices piloted by Peter Andrews of Hunter Valley fame. Deb says that while many scientists are doubtful and some of Peter Andrews claims may seem outlandish, the evidence is building that it has been a very effective method of erosion control at their sites.

POSM's coordinator, Lauren Carter, said "The leaky weirs have lead to a greater retention of water along the stretches of the gully."

Paul Room is the 'chief engineer' of the weirs, calculating the best design and materials. The materials and appearance may be controversial and unsightly to some. He uses plastic sheeting up against the weir and long star pickets with yellow safety caps to hold hay bails and logs in place. However it works! The water levels are maintained at a minimum level, even after a significant dry spell and this aids the rapid establishment of sediment deposition and vegetation regrowth.

Deb's interest in Waterwatch began after she learned of the plan for the Murrumbidgee to Googong pipeline. She has lived next to the river for many years and like many of us was appalled at how the water quality of had declined in recent times. "I used to regularly swim in the river near where I live, but hadn't for at least 3 years because it was so revolting."

She wondered how on earth removing more water from the Murrumbidgee could be justified. One night she awoke to 'a horrid smell' coming from the river. This was the final straw. Deb located the Waterwatch website and joined the ranks to 'keep an eye one the river'. She now monitors 5 sites in the Upper Murrumbidgee sub-catchment as well as being an active member of the SACTCG committee! Talk about jumping in the deep end. Her enthusiasm and energy is a gust of fresh air.

If you are interested in finding out more about 'P.O.S.M.' or indeed any of our Waterwatch activities please contact Martin Lind, the Waterwatch Coordinator on 6296 6400, or email waterwatch@sactcg.org.au .



Planting natives in Barney's Gully



The Global Amphibian Blitz

The Global Amphibian Blitz, an online information-sharing hub for non-professional naturalists and biologists to track and record sightings of amphibians around the world. This information will then help professional researchers to document and determine where conservation efforts are most needed. It also seems to be a great way for those who care about frogs and other amphibians to connect with each other.

Anyone can become a part of the Global Amphibian Blitz. Visit www.inaturalist.org/projects/global-amphibian-blitz to contribute your observations of amphibians along with the dates and locations where you observed them, anywhere in the world. You can even upload a photo of the species with your observation, or link to a photo on your Flickr or Picassa pages. If you're unsure which species you've seen, mark them as "ID please!" and a team of expert curators will help you with your identification.



Global Amphibian BioBlitz Find every one... 

Field volunteers required: "Can frog populations recover from chytridiomycosis?"

Know your frogs? Want to be involved in local research?

You can be part of an exciting collaboration to investigate whether frog populations can recover from declines caused by chytrid fungus.

Background

Chytrid fungus has caused the decline of hundreds of frog species worldwide. However, anecdotal reports suggest that some frogs may be recovering. The whistling tree frog is one species that is reportedly recovering. To better understand this exciting possibility we need to collect distributional data from around the region.

When and Where?

August and September at various water bodies within the ACT and adjacent areas of NSW.

What do you need?

All you need is your usual Frog Watch gear! Survey sites have been identified and all we need are keen listeners to conduct surveys.

- If helping out on an organised trip is more your thing please contact me.

To register your interest or find out more on what we are aiming to achieve and why it's important contact: Ben Scheele, PhD Scholar at the ANU's Fenner School of Environment and Society ben.scheele@anu.edu.au



Photos: David Hunter

Platypus Page

Platypus Spotting on the Murrumbidgee

By Antia Brademann

The showery conditions did not deter 25 keen people who attended the platypus spotting Walk along the Murrumbidgee River just before dusk on Saturday August 6th. Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch Facilitator, Tanya Rucosky Noakes led the walk and instructed participants on what to look for when spotting platypus. Ms Rucosky Noakes also gave a brief natural history of the platypus prior to the walk.

In terms of location, platypus are generally easiest to spot in places where the water surface is fairly flat and calm, which means that the ripples formed when an animal moves are more conspicuous. Especially at this time of year, a male platypus will sometimes swim along the surface for several hundred metres as he travels in search of breeding females or chases a rival male. This movement creates a long, narrow wake behind the animal, often seen as a distinctive silvery streak in calm water.

More typically, a platypus will be seen diving and surfacing in a leisurely manner as it gathers food. A diving sequence begins with a platypus arching its back briefly as it launches itself downwards. It remains underwater for less than a minute, usually returning to the surface within 20 metres of where it was last seen. The platypus then floats on the surface for about 10-30 seconds, chewing its mouthful of aquatic insects and worms thoroughly before again diving.

While floating on the surface, a platypus paddles gently with its front feet to avoid drifting downstream. This creates a conspicuous “bulls-eye” pattern of ripples, which is generally the first clue that a platypus is active in the area. Because a platypus floats very low in the water, the animal’s body often resembles a piece of floating driftwood (about 40-50 centimetres long) at the centre of the ripples, with two rounded brown bumps marking the top of the head and rump. The concentric ripples strengthen as an animal dives, and then gradually fade away.

Although there are never any guarantees when looking for wildlife, August is a great time of year for people to watch for platypus, as the animals tend to be very active just before the onset of the spring breeding season. Early morning and evening are the best times to look, although Platypus are also sometimes seen right in the middle of the day.

Despite very calm conditions on, the walkers did not spot a platypus on the Murrumbidgee River, upstream of the pumping station, despite confirmed sightings in this area. A quick stop off at the Cooma Creek afterwards though led to more success for the spotters, where a platypus could be heard, but the impending nightfall made visibility difficult.

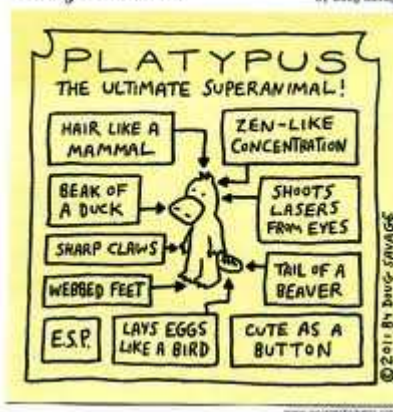
The value in spotting platypus is not only enjoyment, but also in understanding more about the platypus, how many there are and where they are found, so actions to protect and bring back the species can be better focussed. It is for this reason that Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch has partnered with the Australian Platypus Conservancy to collect information about sightings and platypus activity. So if you spot a platypus or have in the past, please forward details to Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch by emailing

tanya.rucoskynoakes@act.gov.au.

Reports of water-rat sightings are also welcome as very little is known about the status of this attractive native rodent.

Savage Chickens

By Doug Savage



Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch

ACT Waterwatch Facilitator

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What is Waterwatch?

Waterwatch is a national community water quality monitoring program that encourages all Australians to become involved and active in the protection and management of their waterways and catchments.

Who is Waterwatch?

Waterwatch involves local community groups such as Landcare, Park Care and Catchment groups, as well as residents, schools and landowners who regularly monitor the water quality of local creeks, wetlands, lakes and rivers.

Why monitor?

Healthy catchments produce healthy ecosystems with happy fish, frogs, birds, plants, macro-invertebrates and people. Waterwatch aims to create awareness of water quality issues by involving all members of the community and by forming partnerships between the Waterwatch group and water authorities, resources management authorities, business and industry.

First step

If you are interested in improving the health of your waterway and meeting or forming a group of like-minded individuals, you should begin by contacting your local Waterwatch Coordinator.

Making a difference

Water quality information collected throughout a catchment provides a picture of the health of your waterways. Waterwatch groups have initiated many positive, community based conservation activities such as creek restoration, willow removal, removing litter from waterways, eradicating weeds, development of habitats, and reducing the use of pesticides and other pollutants.

Waterwatch is proudly supported by:



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Volunteers work for free
but not for nothing!
Our Vision—
Healthy Waterways

ActewAGL



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