



## What's in a Leaf?

by Sonya Nourse

When I first started working with koalas a decade or so ago I had no idea of the awe-inspiring complexity and sophistication of nature in providing a 'supportive habitat' for native wildlife. Like many people I thought that there was a simple and direct relationship between planting habitat trees for koalas and the koala just eating that which was provided.

Whilst solutions don't need to be complex they do need to be 'right', and recently when talking to a research student from Southern Cross University, I was amazed to discover what underpins a palatable food source for many folivorous marsupials and in this case, the Koalas.

Folivores are herbivores that specialise in eating leaves that provide little energy and which often contain a high proportion of hard-to-digest materials and chemical toxins. Consequently they need to eat large amounts of foliage but through regulating the type of leaf consumed they avoid serious harm to their metabolism. As a result they tend to have long digestive tracts and slow metabolisms. Folivory is rare in flying animals because they commonly require high energy for flight (but it is not without exception). Folivorous animals include many mammals but the ones we are most familiar with in Australia include our native possums, koalas, gliders and exotic animals such as primates, giraffes, sloths and hippopotamus.

Threats to koalas from habitat loss are well

documented and it is equally well known that most remaining forests and woodlands have had their structure and tree species composition significantly altered by humans. In response to the urgency of providing and retaining 'appropriate' koala habitat there are many physiological research studies currently being conducted into koala nutrition and the chemical characteristics and nutritional composition of eucalyptus foliage (or leaf).

Foliage as a koala food source provides both a diversity of nutrients (which are attractive) and chemical toxins (which are a feeding deterrent). When browsing for food koalas must therefore adjust their feeding behaviour in their home range of trees across trees of varying concentrations of attractive nutrients and detracting toxins. This composition in the foliage dramatically affects the feeding strategies and decisions of all koalas both captive and wild. To the casual observer it may seem that there are plenty of healthy looking eucalypts available to the koala but if the available food trees are limited and also of poor nutrient leaf, or with high toxin composition then this dramatically reduces the food choices to koalas.

In addition some koalas require extra food to compensate for their environment, physiological condition or age such as lactating mothers, older koalas with worn teeth and those living in cold climates. These koalas have an even greater need for good habitat with palatable trees as they need to select trees that allow them to eat more.

It is easy to see from this information that koalas as dependent folivores cope poorly with disturbances that reduce the availability of food from leaf or increase their foraging effort. A koala's ability to extract nutrition from their food source is already at a premium and disturbance of habitat is sorely felt.

In trying to retain appropriate koala habitat thought must clearly be given not to 'just providing eucalyptus trees' as habitat. Hopefully this developing field of 'nutritional ecology' may provide some important information to the solution of 'appropriate habitat' for many folivorous mammals such as koalas.

Determining what makes good koala habitat may be complex but the answer will provide a simple solution to developing effective koala conservation policy and practices and hopefully assist the survival of the koala as a unique species – the folivorous marsupial.

This and many other topics will be explored at the forthcoming Koala Conference being co-hosted by Friends of the Koala on Friday 22nd May 2009. The Conference will be held in the Whitebrook Theatre, on Southern Cross University's Lismore Campus.

The full program and associated information including fee structure will be announced in the press and on Friends of the Koala's website in early April. We are proud to be hosting this Conference from koala conservation's coal-face. The day will bring together koala rehabilitators, environmental groups, veterinarians, practitioners, the interested public and those politicians, academics and bureaucrats who help determine koala conservation policy. Resolutions for government action will be developed.

Information about koalas and Friends of the Koala (including the forthcoming Koala Conference) is available at: [www.friendsofthekoala.org](http://www.friendsofthekoala.org) or email [info@friendsofthekoala.org](mailto:info@friendsofthekoala.org) or phone Friends of the Koala's (24/7) Rescue Hotline on 6622-1233.

# To plant, or not to plant?

What is the best way to turn that bit of weedy wasteland into a natural paradise? How does planting compare to allowing natural regeneration? EnviTE's latest free workshop on Saturday 4 April, 9am – 12noon at 3221 Kyogle Road, Mount Burrell (opposite Sphinx Rock Cafe) aims to help you answer those questions.

Rhonda James, of Bushland Restoration Services, will lead the workshop by walking participants through two adjacent sections of creek bank that are being regenerated,

one using planting and the other natural regeneration. Participants will be shown how to identify native seedlings and ground covers, and are invited to bring their own plant and weed samples for identification.

The workshop is part of the Upper Tweed River Restorations Projects. EnviTE is a leader in conservation and land management training.

To register or for further information, contact Rhonda James on 0409-244-294, or Maree Thompson at EnviTE on 6621-9588,



This baby crested pigeon, now named 'Pickwick', was found on someone's driveway when he was very small. He's doing much better now in the capable hands of Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers, Max and Sienna from Blue Knob. Max and Sienna have been wildlife carers for 10 years, specialising in caring for pigeons, doves and parrots. They both agree that joining Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers was one of the best decisions they ever made, and would encourage people to give it a try, because our wildlife are more in need of help than ever before.

Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers are looking for volunteers to rescue, transport, or care for sick and injured wildlife, as well as people to man the rescue phone hotline for a few hours each week.

People over 18 years old who are interested in the care and conservation of local wildlife are encouraged to attend the upcoming

training day being organised by the Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers on Sunday 5th April at McLeans Ridges Hall, 9am to 4pm. Cost is \$25, which includes a year's membership.

To book or, for further information, please ring Jo after 9am on 6624-7778.

On average the Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers rescue 1,500 native animals a year and respond to 2,500 calls for advice and information. Many of the animals rescued are victims of increasing development and loss of habitat.

The Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers is a local, independent network of trained volunteers who are licensed to rescue, rehabilitate and release native wildlife.

Established in 1992, the Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers is licensed to care for native animals across one of the largest areas in the state: from Ocean Shores in the north to New Italy in the south, from Byron Bay in the east to Tabulam in the west.

## OBSERVING NATURE



WITH MICHAEL SMITH

### April happenings:

- \* In the first week look for a swarm of tiny moths at night.
- \* Cedar trees in seed.
- \* Guavas ready.
- \* Some local citrus starts to ripen.
- \* Commercial maccas harvested.
- \* Tiny grass ticks bite.
- \* Fireweed in flower.
- \* Camphor laurel seeds everywhere.
- \* Old birds nests fall to the ground.
- \* Generally a rainy month.
- \* Ants pile up dirt (free potting mix).
- \* Groundsel in flower, go get it before the council reminds you.
- \* From now until September koalas are bellowing, fighting and scent-marking.
- \* Orion sets at night and Scorpio rises.
- \* Quolls mate.
- \* Many types of fungus on the ground.
- \* Cycad 'cones' appear.
- \* Puff balls are dried out and release spores.
- \* Prickly pear in fruit.
- \* Lots of ibis arrive to groom your paddocks over the next few months.

Michael Smith has been observing nature's cycles for over 25 years, and shares his knowledge each month in the Nimbin GoodTimes.

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# Hardies' development dead

## Council's flawed DA process now in spotlight

by Ross McDougall,  
Dunoon Community Group

Hardie Holdings have packed up and gone home after seeing the light and withdrawing their development application from Liosmore Council. It is a great relief to us all that this totally inappropriate development did not eventuate.

We would have preferred that Hardie's DA had been rejected outright by council, however this is a positive result which we believe will assist in better outcomes for communities in the future. Recent controversial DAs for McLeans Ridges and Tucki Tucki have also highlighted to council that communities do have a voice and they expect Council's planning documents to be adhered to.

This positive result has finally been achieved after more than two years and an enormous amount of time and effort put in by the few dedicated members of the Dunoon Community Group (DCG) who were entrusted to represent the residents of Dunoon. We have no doubt that without the DCG's involvement, council planning staff would have recommended that the development be approved long ago leaving the residents of Dunoon to live with the consequences of their decision.

It is important to know that our main fight was with Council planning staff rather than Hardie Holdings. Even

though access to staff was very good and they were willing to give us feedback and keep us informed, we could not sway their views on this development. They seemed to have their own agenda in that they had a view of appropriate future development which was seriously at odds with the vision of the Dunoon DCP and what the community wants for itself.

Their attitude was to solve the objections that stood in the way of the development rather than finding the solution to the real problem posed by the DA, which was: what is the best outcome that best meets the needs of both the planning instruments and the community? Recently we found out that Council staff in their pre-lodgement meetings actually encouraged Hardies to put forward this type of development.

From the outset, staff encouraged us to concentrate on the "amenity" issues in our objections and assured us that we could rely on them to "look after the interests of the community" with regard to the technical matters of the sewerage treatment plant (STP) and stormwater treatment plant.

Fortunately we did not follow their advice. It was our pursuit of technical matters including commissioning an independent expert report on the sewerage treatment plant that discredited key claims made by Hardies which appeared to be supported by Council staff. We had

previously requested that council arrange an on-site inspection of either of the two supposedly 'working examples' of the STP mentioned in the DA. They refused, so we took it upon ourselves at our own expense to travel to Brisbane and Noosa on a fact-finding mission. Serious errors of fact were revealed after on-site inspections, talking with the relevant manufacturer, developers and the local Councils involved. These facts were easily checkable so it is inexcusable that Council staff fell well short of a minimum standard of professionalism in assessing this DA.

Council staff then went on to present these serious errors as fact to councillors at a workshop in May 2008. The information we provided, along with a very critical report from Rous Water stating the inadequacy of information provided about the STP, was instrumental in delaying a final report by planning staff to councillors. This, along with other factors, gave Hardies time to reassess their plans and eventually withdraw their application.

The DCG still has much work to do. Since the withdrawal of the Hardie's DA for Dunoon, we have written to the Mayor, Jenny Dowell, relating the positives and negatives we experienced while dealing with this DA and the changes we would like to see made to the process of submitting and accessing a DA. It highlights many issues that need to be addressed within the

planning department. (Read it online at [www.dunoongazette.org](http://www.dunoongazette.org), April-May 09 issue). The Mayor has forwarded our letter to all Councillors and relevant staff. The executive director of development and governance, Brent McAllister, has already instigated a review of Council's planning approach and practices, particularly in respect of DA matters, that will involve an external independent planner. The DCG will be meeting with Mr McAllister to discuss our concerns.

During April, Council will be starting a rewrite of its Community Consultation (Participation) Policy and will be calling for submissions from the public. Keep an eye out on the Council page of *The NR Echo* for further details.

Finally, there are people we must thank – all of the councillors from both the old and new council who took the time to visit the site at Dunoon, listen to our concerns and support our arguments at the two council workshops, in particular, David Tomlinson and Jenny Dowell.

Local residents Nick Markov, Wendy Attrill and Greg Alderson, Hancock Farm Pty Ltd., Mike Berry, Michael Broughton, and indeed myself, and last but not least my lovely wife Paula without whose conviction, the DCG would not have been formed and Hardie's development probably would have gone ahead and ruined the character of our lovely village forever.

## Transport plan no excuse to delay new rail service

by Nick Casmirri

For several years now, stretching back before the closure of the Casino-Murwillumbah railway in 2004, there have been widespread calls for the development of what is described as a 'regional integrated transport plan' for the Northern Rivers.

The intent of such a plan is, generally speaking, to examine the transport needs of local residents and how transport networks can be developed to meet these needs. Whilst any such plan would inevitably touch on the impacts of freight movements and through traffic, the focus would be on local residents and visitors travelling within the region, and on sustainable transport options that may be available.

The creation of a plan of this sort has been long advocated by supporters of the re-opening of the Casino-Murwillumbah railway and its extension to the Gold Coast. We believe that a regular local passenger rail service needs to be connected with buses, cycle-ways, etc in order to maximise people's mobility. We also believe that the Casino-Murwillumbah railway, as an existing piece of infrastructure connecting several major centres in the region, is a logical primary component of any sustainable transport network that could be established within the foreseeable future.

Rail advocates have thus been encouraged to hear support for such a plan from the Northern Region Organisation of Councils (NOROC), and subsequently from Federal MP for Page Janelle Saffin. However, it's becoming increasingly apparent that both may be viewing this transport plan concept as merely a tool to serve their political interests, and that it will become yet another in a long line of delaying tactics used to avoid action to put trains on our tracks.

A recent letter from Ms Saffin to NOROC seems to indicate that any efforts on her part to lobby for the reopening of the rail line will be delayed pending the completion of this plan, and that a somewhat lengthy process might be in the offing. The problem with this is that we all know that the rail line will be a logical major element of any likely future regional sustainable transport networks, and economic stimulus money is available now, so why should there be any delays in lobbying for the rail line?

We already know from feasibility studies and market research that a local commuter rail service and link to the Gold Coast is both achievable and has huge community support. We also wouldn't need an exhaustive and time consuming study to figure out the sorts of connecting bus services and the like that would be needed to support the rail service, nor do we really need to wait for a full regional study to identify many other essential improvements to bus services and cycle-way networks that are urgently needed across the region.

A comprehensive integrated transport plan is of course desirable, but especially given that we have already been calling for one for the past five years, and may have to wait several more for one to be delivered, if ever, it shouldn't be seen as a substitute for immediate actions.

Not that what NOROC and Ms Saffin have in mind seems to resemble a proper regional integrated transport plan anyway. Led by council engineers with little if any public transport expertise, the draft scope looks at the issue from an infrastructure perspective, not a service perspective, and will inevitably lead to a focus on arguably unsustainable road projects.

One transport expert who has read the NOROC document described it as a 'political tool' and 'not a transport plan'.

Ms Saffin and NOROC need to put political interests to one side, and both support a proper long-term transport plan alongside immediate actions to pull our region out of our transport black-hole, like getting started on the local rail services that the community still demands.

## Nimbin Seed Savers

A Seed Saving Network is coming to Nimbin through the Nimbin Environment Centre. It is a community-based venture aimed at preserving both garden and native plant varieties through the efforts of its members.

"With so many keen gardeners and bush regenerators in the area it just seemed like the sensible thing to do," says co-ordinator Gareth Wise from the NEC. "In the past few years I have had many individuals pass on rare varieties of plant seeds for conservation. I am sure this is just the tip of the iceberg,

and a community of enthusiastic growers is a surer way of preserving these precious gems."

The basis of a seed saving network is members bringing in seeds to be distributed among the group, whilst receiving other varieties in return. There are many plants which are quite easy to save seed from, whilst others need that expert touch. Corn varieties for example need to be kept about two kilometres apart to ensure purity. Seed saving groups around the world have been responsible for the conservation of many plants which would otherwise have become lost for all time. Seeds will

also be available for purchase where available.

Gareth's enthusiasm for plants and the environment is well known to many locals through his bush survival workshops, "The Tantric Gardener" nursery stall at the Channon markets, and his ongoing work at the NEC.

"The harsh reality is that one person's enthusiasm is not enough when it comes to plant conservation, it really takes an enthusiastic group," states Gareth.

The Nimbin Seeds Savers Network will operate on Wednesdays from the Nimbin Environment Centre. For more details contact Gareth on 6689-7027 or e-mail: [castlesaburac@yahoo.com](mailto:castlesaburac@yahoo.com)

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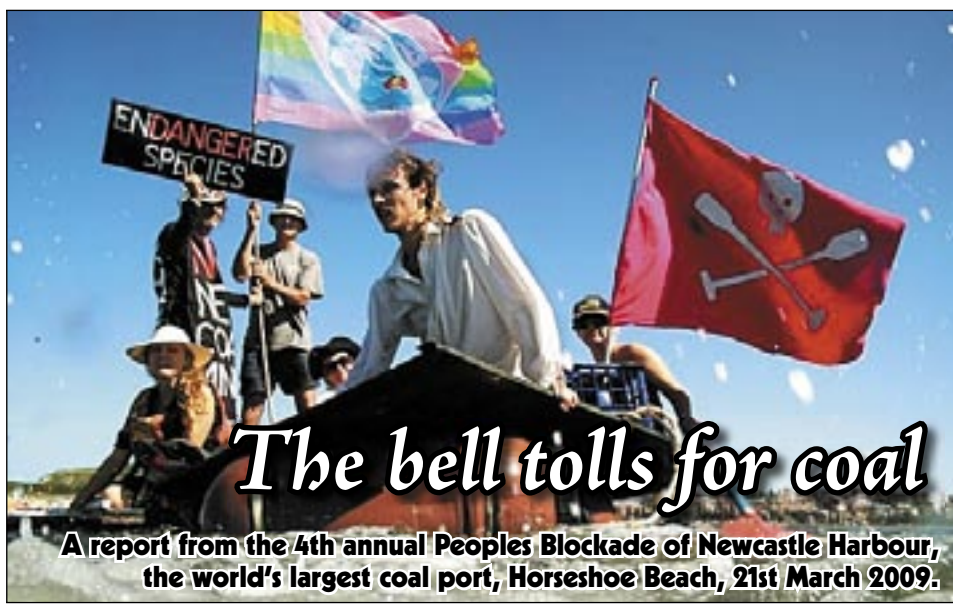
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**A report from the 4th annual Peoples Blockade of Newcastle Harbour, the world's largest coal port, Horseshoe Beach, 21st March 2009.**

by Graeme Dunstan  
Peacebus.com

**H**orseshoe Beach is a popular dog-walking beach for Novocastrians. Watched over by Nobby's Lighthouse, it curves around behind the breakwater to the Harbour mouth. From this beach the huge bulk carriers for coal and grain are grand to behold as they come and go under tug in the channel maybe 300m from the shore.

On Saturday 21 March, the 4th annual People's Blockade of Newcastle Harbour, biggest coal port in the world, transformed Horseshoe Beach into a blaze of colour with a mass of tall orange and sky-blue flags bright in the sun, the glorious flags of Benny Zable a-fluttering in the breeze, proud and beautiful banners rigged high – "Cut carbon! Now or never!", "Stop Newcastle coal

expansion" – and a bright orange line of maybe two hundred kayaks drawn up at the water edge.

There were lots of people too; young people, old people, children and a smattering of green celebrities: Lee Rhiannon MLC, epic kayaker Steve "Cry Me a River" Posselt and Cr Simon Clough from Lismore.

And there were costumes and floating artworks: a sinking Opera House (the immortal "No War" in red on its sail), a melting iceberg with plaintive polar bear, a bunch of worried penguins also with an iceberg and a three decked pirate ship improvised from milk crates, barrels and inner tubes lashed to plywood sheets.

But nary a coal ship to be seen!

From between our flags, the morning sun glistened to us off the ship-free harbour and when the flotilla cast off, it occupied the shipping channel in a swarm

by either. Usually two sets of these work around the clock coming and going hourly dredging the river bed from 2m deep to 16m to prepare for a new coal loader which is intended to double the export capacity of the port.

Victory to the people! The beach, the harbour and the future were ours!

At previous blockades the police had fended off the swarming kayakers to let the coal ships pass. Last year a kayaker had been injured when a police jet ski rode up upon her kayak from behind. Now the cops face a compensation claim for her injured back.

But this year the cops and the Harbour Authority had acted in concert to close the harbour for the time of our blockade rather than risk a confrontation which might echo around the world.

This day the police had two high speed zodiacs and no water skis. A



Photos (l-r): Jeremie Canavesio, Natalie Lowrey, Graham Dunstan.

uncontested by the police.

No dredge barges and tugs came

40 ft cabin cruiser was positioned across the channel between us and the coal loader. To all the world it looked as if it the cops were blockading the harbour.

Stealing our thunder, I thought, and got on the Peacebus.com PA and asked them to move aside, lift their blockade and let us do what we had come to do. No deal. No laughs from them either.

We paddled out to the channel and clustered around the pirate ship which stayed on the harbour for over seven hours with Benny Zable standing on its deck in his costume and holding up a sign reading "Endangered species". In the afternoon when the illusion of seaworthiness began to break up, Benny was to be seen on the sinking deck going down but holding his sign to the last.

What a great day it was; festive with water sports, music, art and good food too. This is what a people's victory looks and feels like: high spirits and happy smiles.

Not that Big Coal is admitting

the fact of our victory. The PR mills of the coal lobby are many, cashed up, Murdoch friendly, and they are nothing if not great deniers. Our story got page 18 in the *Newcastle Herald* for example, a run on ABC Radio and AAP on Sunday but was out of the news by Monday morning.

Blow hard, ye liars!

A different drum is beating, a different wind blowing in our sails. We know we are onto something and the coal criminals must know too in some covert, core and corrosive way.

We have movement, art and joy. Every day we stop the coal ships is a community building victory celebrated in the open amongst uplifting friends.

And every day we stop the coal ships is a day nearer to stopping coal exports forever.

One day at a time and one port at a time.

All praise and gratitude to the Newcastle Rising Tide mob for their dedication, courage and savvy organising.

For the Earth! To the dust!

**N**imbin residents can join an increasing number of green homeowners who are finding out that grid connect solar systems are doing more than helping the fight against climate change.

Grid connect solar systems are saving homeowners hundreds if not thousands of dollars in offsetting their electricity use. As the sun shines, the house first draws electricity from the solar panels and then feeds any excess back into the grid.

Solar Shop Australia's national manager – regional and rural, Mr Richard Inwood, says that it is the right time to look into solar energy.

"With the current \$8000 Federal Government rebate about to change, homeowners should look into ordering a system soon to ensure they maximise savings on the installation," Mr Inwood said.

As an added incentive, the NSW State Government recently committed to introducing a Feed-in Tariff sometime in the near future. This will give owners of grid connect solar systems a payment (of around 2 - 4 times the retail cost of electricity) for every unit of electricity exported back into the grid.



Once the tariff is implemented, homeowners could see the end of having to pay for electricity and even receive an annual payment if the account remains in credit. Exact details of the tariff are yet to be released.

Mr Inwood also said that having your

solar system designed and installed correctly is critical for long-term efficient electricity production.

"Solar Shop Australia is Australia's number one provider of grid connect solar systems having installed 1 in 4 systems last year." Mr

Inwood said.

"We use premium Japanese, German and Australian products which are perfect for the Australian climate and all workmanship and materials guaranteed in writing.

"Internationally renowned environmental organisation, Planet Ark, recognises the work we are doing to help reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and has endorsed Solar Shop Australia," he said.

Solar Shop Australia has largest network of Rural and Regional renewable energy advisors in the country and is pleased to announce Adam Bell as the consultant for Nimbin and surrounding areas.

Adam recently discovered new generation solar products in thin-film amorphous solar panels. This inspired him to join the renewable energy industry.

Adam wanted to align himself with the best solar provider in the industry so he could provide local residents the best solution for the environment and the family budget. Accordingly he joined Solar Shop Australia and is looking forward to working with local residents on their renewable energy needs.

For more details call Solar Shop Australia on 1300-786-769 or visit [www.solarshop.com.au](http://www.solarshop.com.au)

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