

Private Land Conservation Matters Event Overview –

Waulinbakh Tour – Wednesday 30th October 2024

Perfect weather conditions prevailed during our Tour of the wonderful Waulinbakh Sanctuary in Stroud on Wednesday 30th October. This 3970Ha property is a recent addition to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy managed properties, after long-standing AWC supporters, Jane and Andrew Clifford purchased the property in 2022.

41 local landholders, many of whom have their own wildlife sanctuaries in various forms of voluntary Conservation Agreement, gathered at the Waulinbakh Sanctuary, located in Stroud. The aim of the day was to learn more about the history of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy and how they are monitoring and managing the rich biodiversity contained within Waulinbakh; and to meet likeminded landholders, connect with staff from the Biodiversity Conservation Trust, Landcare, MidCoast Council, Local Land Services and of course, the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. The group was split into two, with half of the cohort being ferried up into the hills by sturdy 4WD, whilst the other half remained back at the affectionately named “Opera House” – the original dwelling built to house workers at the same time as the Sydney Opera House was being built.

At the ‘Opera House’, Elly Gearing gave a compelling overview of the history of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, it’s extensive conservation estate and their management operations across the mainland, framing their mission beautifully in the context of local extinctions and current threats to Australian biodiversity, and their stories of success in biodiversity conservation. The conservation model delivered by AWC is inclusive and comprehensive – their ability to collaborate with Indigenous Landowners, Pastoral Estates and other landholders was inspirational.



We also heard from AWC Ecologist, Andy Howe, who has been monitoring fauna and compiling an inventory of species across the Waulinbakh estate. Monitoring of fauna has included the use of camera traps, thermal drone surveys, live trapping, song meters, eDNA sampling and spotlighting. Scientists were out on site while we were at the Sanctuary, collecting eDNA in a new trial based on airborne DNA traps. This data will inform species diversity in a way not possible by traditional monitoring methods. The current inventory of species includes 179 native vertebrate species, 20 of which are listed on the NSW Threatened Species List (8 Federally Listed as Threatened). This range of biodiversity ranks Waulinbakh 5th in the vast estate managed by AWC – and is expected to increase as more data is collected and assessed.



A short walk down to the creek before lunch gave people a chance to see feral animal management in action where cat and camera traps had been placed. We also had a brief discussion about the role of the Biodiversity Conservation Trust, and the various conservation agreement options that are available for landholders in our region.



After a delicious lunch, we swapped activities, and my group journeyed up the hill with our diligent 4WD crew – Josh and Sarah (AWC); Daniel (LLS); Rye (BCT); Jonathon (MC2T Landcare) and Mat (MCC). We only just had enough seats, and it was a bit squeezey, but the trip was well worth it. We stopped to check out weed control with AWC volunteers who were tackling dense thickets of Lantana with the [SplatterGun](#) technique. We also checked another cat trap and heard from Sarah and Josh about the different methods they are trialling to remove cats from the environment, including some innovative and high-tech methods such as the [Felixer](#) Trap. We stopped at the top of the range to enjoy the magnificent views over the Mill Creek Valley to the west, the Waulinbakh ranges to the east and a gorgeous stand of Xanthorrhoea to the north before travelling back down the hill and heading home.



It was a great day out in a beautiful and highly significant property that is finally being managed in accordance with its very special and valuable biodiversity by the team at the Australian Wildlife Conservancy.

A big thanks to all the staff from the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, the Biodiversity Conservation Trust, MidCoast Council, Local Land Services and of course, MidCoast2Tops Landcare who made the day an enjoyable and educational experience for everyone.



PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION MATTERS

Landcare NSW and the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust are working together to raise awareness and support private land conservation efforts across the state.

