

NORTHERN exposure

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inside:

**From the
Biodiversity
Coordinator** 2

**Westbury Town
Common** 3

**Tasmanian
Wetlands Project** 4

**Effective Weed
Control** 5

News in Brief 6

Out & About 7

**About Us
and Contacts** 8

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Myrtle forest – Photo: Adrian James

From the Biodiversity Coordinator

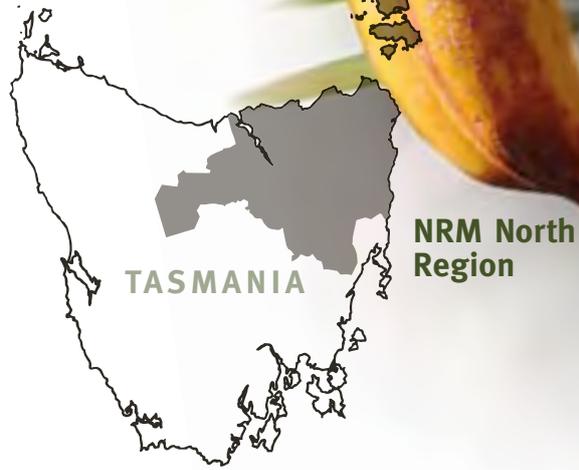
Our recent staff trip to Pelion Hut in the heart of Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park certainly reminded everyone of the amazing biodiversity our region has to offer as we ascended from tall eucalypt forest to alpine heathland, through rainforest and eventually up to where cushion-bushes nestle amongst dolerite paving on the slopes of Mt Ossa.

But even in a region comprising 65 per cent native vegetation, we face many challenges in maintaining healthy ecosystems and habitats and existing pressures will only be exacerbated in a changing climate.

I have recently started in the role of NRM North's Biodiversity Coordinator and I am working on two projects which are funded through the Australian Government's Biodiversity Fund. The projects are assisting us to work with two quite different sets of landowners throughout the region to enhance and buffer our native biodiversity in the face of changes to both land use and climate.

The Biodiversity in an Irrigated Landscape Project will support landholders in areas of irrigation development to protect and connect remnant native vegetation on their properties. The vision is of a productive landscape in which patches of revegetation provide 'stepping stones' linking larger areas of established native habitat. Many landowners are seeing this as an ideal time to undertake revegetation as they are changing their farm layout to accommodate irrigation development and can incorporate native plantings into this layout. They also recognise the land management and production benefits in terms of shelter, runoff management and integrated pest management.

At the other end of the rural landholder spectrum are smallholders, a rapidly-growing sector which encompasses hobby farms, bush blocks, rural lifestyle landholders and specialty agricultural and horticultural enterprises. These landholders and their land uses are incredibly diverse, but there are some commonalities: our research indicates that small landholders in northern Tasmania have owned their property for an average of only five years, which means they are likely to be new to their local community and



many are new to rural land management. However, small landholders are typically eager to learn about and look after the natural and aesthetic values of their property and they provide an important link between urban and rural communities through their family and friends networks and off-farm employment.

This points to a need for support, information and training tailored to smallholders, which is exactly what NRM North has embarked on this year with a recent project piloting a Property Management Planning workshop and manual for smallholders. Acknowledging the diversity of smallholder needs and their time-availability, these resources are now being refined and will be offered as either a self-assessment or workshop format. Field days and events encompassing topics ranging from pasture management to chook-keeping are also planned and the new Biodiversity on Smallholdings Project will support landowners to protect and enhance native habitat on their properties and undertake small-scale revegetation projects.

Both Biodiversity Fund projects have strong links to our existing programs. The activities are not new but they do take into account changing human demographics and place greater emphasis on planning on-ground works which will enhance the ability of our native biodiversity to adapt and persist in a changing climate.



Kate Thorn
Biodiversity Coordinator
NRM NORTH

Westbury Town Common

“The project is a great opportunity to secure homes for our local plants and animals.”

The heritage listed Westbury Town Common is gradually reverting to a biodiversity haven that is readily accessible. Though it retains the character of an open space multi-use area, its natural function as a wetland is being enhanced by site sensitive restoration activities.

Many people are surprised to find that Westbury is home to a number of threatened species, many of which live at or utilise the Town Common. When walking a dog, as many do, it is the relaxing vista and open space that captures the attention but looking a little closer is rewarding.

There are three threatened plant species along the brook and the billabongs are alive with green and gold frogs. Bandicoots, bettongs and platypus are residents, whilst owls and goshawks often drop by to hunt in the mix of native vegetation and mown parklands.

In recognition that some strategic rejuvenation work would secure and enhance native species habitat, a concept plan for the Town Common was produced in 2007 through support from NRM North, Meander Valley Council and Tasmanian Alkaloids.

Di Robinson, Chair of Westbury Working Together and the Town Common Sub-committee, said there had been a staged implementation of this vision.

“The project is a great opportunity to secure homes for our local plants and animals.”

Activity funding and support has been secured through the council, Bendigo Bank and on two occasions by Australian Government NRM programs. Works to date include staged removal of willow and planting of paperbark to provide a flood accessible wetland walk experience; buffer planting on the southern boundary; beds of local native plants around the car park and extensive riparian buffer planting.

A riparian meadow planting is to be undertaken next year around the main billabong that will begin reinstating stretches of historical grasses and sedges. Careful improvements to drainage and assured environmental brook flow are recent bonuses for the area’s aquatic habitats.

All work activities are planned with council staff so as to ensure that the current maintenance onus is either not impacted, or is reduced. Plant species mixtures and placement are carefully considered in the context of overall habitat value.

Broad community involvement is important, especially from within the town. However, extra help at busy times is welcome and a recent Conservation Volunteers Australia team organised by NRM North did some excellent work with planting and maintenance.

Mrs Robinson was pleased with their efforts and attitude.

“They not only did a great service for our community, but team members really showed that they cared about local biodiversity,” she said.

Meander NRM Facilitator, Stuart Brownlea, has been involved in the project since the start and said he was pleased with the progress.

“You can see habitats taking shape and making a legacy that is very NRM in character. This could provide an enviable drawcard for residents and visitors to experience healthy biodiversity on the edge of a rural town.”

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Tasmanian Wetlands Project

Globally, the interest in wetlands is increasing as their value for ecosystem services and recreational purposes steadily increases. The RAMSAR convention has in place protection and enhancement measures to assist in looking after our important wetlands. Research into wetland ecosystems is necessary if our wetlands are to be protected from further degradation, or restored to their former ecosystem health.

This study into Tasmanian wetlands started in July 2011. It is a collaboration with NRM North and the University of Canberra. It is being implemented as a PhD by Toni Furlonge from the NRM North Launceston office. Toni has been working with river and wetland health assessments with NRM North for six years.

The project team consists of Andrew Baldwin from NRM North, Dr Fiona Dyer, chair supervisor from the Institute of Applied Ecology at the University of Canberra, Professor Jenny Davis from the Monash University and Professor Peter Davies from the University of Tasmania.

Ms Furlonge said that by the end of 2012, around 82 wetlands in Tasmania would have been sampled for surface water quality and macroinvertebrate samples collected.

“We are investigating things like water temperature, dissolved oxygen, electrical conductivity, turbidity, pH, total nitrogen and total phosphorous,” Ms Furlonge said.

“Macroinvertebrate samples will be identified to family/genus/species level during the first half of 2013.

“The data will be analysed to find any correlations with wetland types, using both GIS and statistical analysis to build Reference Condition Approach models for wetland health assessments in Tasmania.”

Below is a summary of the data analysis to date and the significant results that have been obtained.

Analysis was undertaken for three years of

macroinvertebrate data from two wetland types in north east Tasmania, to determine what factors influenced the macroinvertebrate taxa assemblages when sampled using a rapid bioassessment sampling technique.

This was done as the pilot study for developing macroinvertebrate Reference Condition Approach models for wetland health assessments in Tasmania.

The 2008 to autumn 2011 dataset was collected as part of NRM North's Coastal and Marine project with the assistance of the IAE University of Canberra contributing from spring 2011 onwards.

Four factors were evaluated for each wetland:

- 1) the effect of temporal variation on macroinvertebrate taxa;
- 2) the effect of seasonal variation on macroinvertebrate taxa;
- 3) the habitat variation of macroinvertebrate taxa over four habitats within each wetland type; and
- 4) the difference in macroinvertebrate assemblage between the two wetland types.

Analysis of the data has shown that the wetland type has a substantially greater effect on the macroinvertebrate assemblage than does the year, the season or the type of habitat, when using a rapid bioassessment sampling technique.

The field work was primarily performed by Toni Furlonge and Debbie Searle with assistance from Emma Williams, Craig Searle, Andrew Baldwin and Grant Scurr. Debbie Searle and John Gooderham assisted with the identification of some macroinvertebrates to genus and species levels. Trefor Reynoldson provided statistical and project guidance.

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Effective Weed Control

Biodiversity is defined as the diversity among and within plant and animal species in an environment. It has been claimed that after land clearing, the next biggest threat to biodiversity is invasive species. Weeds have a huge negative impact on the environment and the productive capacity of agricultural land.

In Tasmania, there are approximately 860 exotic plant species that have naturalised. That is, they are established, reproducing freely and competing with the native vegetation of the area. This figure represents about 30 per cent of Tasmania's total number of vascular plants (native and naturalised).

NRM North's Weeds Coordinator, Greg Stewart, said without a continued effort to manage the numerous weed species present in Tasmania, the threat posed by these invasive plants would only increase.

"It would be fair to say that any weed control is better than no weed control, however, weed control works are the most effective when implemented at the correct stage of plant growth, so as to maximise the results and minimise the effort and cost involved," Mr Stewart said.

"As a rule of thumb, it is best to undertake weed control activities when the plants are actively growing. For most species, this is generally spring and summer, but some weed species are best dealt with during the colder months.

Treatment of Bridal Creeper, Serrated Tussock (pictured below) and broadleaf weeds such as Capeweed, Ragwort and Thistles are such examples. It is also recommended to hand-pull seedlings and small plants, prior to them flowering and setting seed. It is vital, so as to reduce the chance of spread, that weedy plants are not allowed to produce seed.



Another group of weeds that sometimes tends to be overlooked by the public is aquatic weeds. Parrot's Feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*) which originates from South America, has recently been discovered in two dams in north-eastern Tasmania.

"Although this plant looks similar to some of the native *Myriophyllum* species it is highly invasive and given time, will dominate and form dense masses of vegetation within the water body."



It is important that people are familiar with the different weeds so that they can be detected early and treatment undertaken before they become well established.

NRM North has recently conducted weed identification and management training for council workers and various community groups.

"Education and awareness is the single most important factor in improving effective weed management across Tasmania. NRM North can provide assistance to identify unknown plants that appear weedy and offer advice on appropriate control measures for invasive plant species," Mr Stewart said.

For more information contact:

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News in brief...



Tasmania's three regional natural resource management groups joined their interstate counterparts in October to celebrate a massive achievement: some 14 million hectares of land under improved management.

Australia has 56 regional groups working together to care for our natural resources - the soil, water and coasts that ensure our food security and economic strength.

The achievements of NRM bodies throughout Australia

could only ever be possible with communities working together to take better care of their land.

Across the three NRM regions, more than 7,000 people have been engaged in practice change and

this includes activities like removing weeds and planting native vegetation to improve biodiversity.

We have also engaged more than 3,000 school children through hands-on programs.

The statistics also show more than 57,000 hectares of land in Tasmania is under improved management for healthier food and fibre production.

Business Awards

Seventeen businesses in northern Tasmania were recognised at the Launceston Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards in September.

NRM North sponsored the Best Environmental Practice award which was won by Daisy Fresh Professional Dry Cleaners.

NRM North congratulates the winners:

- BUSINESS OF THE YEAR
AutoRent Hertz
- HALL OF FAME
Max Buchanan
- BEST ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICE
Daisy Fresh Professional Dry Cleaners
- BUILDING COMMUNITIES
Learning Services (North) RADAR Program
- BUSINESS MENTORING AND RENEWAL
illuminate SDF
- COMMUNITY SERVICE
Whitelion
- EXCELLENCE IN CUSTOMER SERVICE
The Running Company Launceston

- EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACES
Veolia Environmental Services
- EXPORT
Veolia Environmental Services
- INNOVATION
AutoRent Hertz
- LARGE HOSPITALITY BUSINESS
The Harding Group
- EXCELLENCE IN MARKETING
Country Club Tasmania
- OUTSTANDING EVENT
Give Me Five For Kids Telethon - Southern Cross TV
- OUTSTANDING VISITOR EXPERIENCE
Bridestowe Estate
- PROFESSIONAL SERVICES
Westpac Launceston
- SMALL HOSPITALITY BUSINESS
This Cafe
- SUCCESSFUL START UP
Little White Boutique

Festivale 2013

Australian restaurateur and bestselling author Stephanie Alexander will be a special guest at Festivale next year.

Stephanie Alexander will take part in a lunch at Pierre's Restaurant, a morning of children's activities at the Harvest Farmers' Market and will judge Festivale's Best Stall Award.

The events have been made possible through support from NRM North, Festivale, Allan's Garden Centre and Harvest Launceston.

The activities for children at the Harvest Farmers' Market will promote the benefits of growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing fresh seasonal produce.

Children will participate in a Kitchen Garden Produce Hunt where they will be encouraged to explore the garden and hunt for herbs, fruit and vegetables.

They will then decorate a biodegradable pot and plant a broad bean seed.

Tickets for lunch with Stephanie Alexander at Pierre's on Friday, February 8th sold out in a day.

There is a waiting list. For more information call 6331 6835 or email functions@pierres.net.au



Photo courtesy Mark Chew

Out & About

Dorset Sub-Region



Beasts, Bush and Bugs



A new publication about the natural resources of the Dorset municipality was launched at Scottsdale in November.

Beasts, Bush and Bugs – A Field Guide for Northeast Tasmania provides useful information about the plants, animals and soils of the Dorset municipality.

The guide has information about local trees, shrubs, herbs, grasses and fungi as well as animals like the Forester Kangaroo, the Long nosed Potoroo and the Velvet Furred Swamp Rat.

It will be useful for natural resource managers but is also a good read for those who just have an interest in the local flora and fauna.

The author of the field guide is Steve Cronin and additional material and editing was provided by Anna Povey and Jay Wilson.

NRM North provided funding to assist with the development of the publication.

Hard copies and CDs are available at the Dorset Council chambers.

Out & About

Tamar Sub-Region



Boneseed Blitz

A number of groups have teamed up to tackle Boneseed on the West Tamar Highway between Riverside and Exeter.

Representatives from DPIPWE, DIER, NRM North, Tamar NRM and West Tamar Council traversed 15 kilometres of the highway carrying chainsaws, handsaws, loppers and bottles of Glyphosate.

In addition to the on-ground action, 250 landowners on properties adjacent to the highway

have been contacted by DPIPWE and provided with information on Boneseed, including its legal status and how to best deal with infestations.

Boneseed is a Weed of National Significance (WoNS) that is Listed as 'Zone A' in the Tamar region; Launceston, West Tamar and George Town municipalities.

This means that the weed has been targeted for eradication and landowners have a legal obligation to

treat Boneseed infestations on their properties.





Natural Resource Management
in Northern Tasmania

NRM North is responsible for planning, delivery and implementation of integrated natural resource management (NRM) in northern Tasmania. We take a holistic approach to managing the environment through identifying regional priorities and developing integrated NRM plans that are based on sound scientific data. NRM North was established in 2003 through a community-driven process in response to the Tasmanian Government's Natural Resource Management Framework and its enabling legislation, the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Act, 2002.

Our role is to:

- Develop programs that recognise the need to balance the environmental, economic and social needs of the community.
- Provide leadership to ensure that sound management of the region's natural resources continues.
- Promote partnerships with all stakeholders to determine appropriate investment and cost sharing strategies.

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Australian Government



Tasmania
Endure the possibilities



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Working with you to care for the natural resources of our island home.