

Plant Cuttings – July 2024

Invasive buffel grass declared a weed in the Northern Territory – ABC News, 5 July 2024

The Northern Territory government has today declared buffel a weed, pledging to tackle the spread of the controversial grass in Central Australia.

But while some stakeholders say it's a "day to celebrate", others argue it's been a "farce of a process" which has sidelined the local pastoral industry.

The grass species is highly valued by some NT pastoralists, as it provides fast-growing cattle fodder and can help reduce dust and soil erosion.

But environmental and Indigenous groups have long warned it exacerbates grass fires, reduces biodiversity and impacts Aboriginal cultural practices.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-05/invasive-buffel-grass-declared-weed-in-northern-territory/104061496>

Killers in the suburbs - Background Briefing (ABC), 6 July 2024

You know the old philosophical question, if a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?

It's a conundrum for the residents of Willowie Road, Castle Cove.

In July last year, 265 trees were illegally killed — some of them poisoned, others cut by hand or chainsaw — and all just metres from people's homes.

The thing is, no one who lives along this picturesque strip — where the mansions meet native bush and spectacular Sydney water views — heard or saw a thing.

At the time, the crime caused an outcry and made international headlines.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-06/trees-killed-vandalism-crime-sydney-castle-cove-council/104041534>

Audio version: <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/backgroundbriefing/notorious-05-killers-in-the-suburbs/104064906>

VIDEO: Fighting Fire with Fire: Combining traditional and modern burning techniques - ABC Landline, 7 July 2024

Traditional owners of K'Gari, the Butchulla people, are working with authorities to incorporate cultural burning practices into modern fire management on the heritage listed island.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/programs/landline/2024-07-07/fighting-fire-with-fire:-combining-traditional-and/104068928>

Retail giant Bunnings under fire for stocking invasive weeds that threaten Australian ecosystems – ABC Rural, 15 July 2024

Major Australian nurseries, including retail giant Bunnings, are selling plants listed by governments and their own industry body as invasive weeds.

The Invasive Species Council says escaped garden plants have already contributed to at least four Australian extinctions, and are costing the agriculture industry over \$4.3 billion to manage each year.

One of the local groups fighting the spread of escaped garden plants is Mallee Conservation, which manages a 490-hectare environmental reserve in north-west Victoria.

Mallee Conservation president Fiona Murdoch said the invasive ground cover gazania — imported from South Africa and popular among gardeners for its pretty flowers — is causing a "massive problem" as it spreads in the Mallee and Wimmera.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2024-07-15/bunnings-criticised-for-stocking-invasive-weed-species-vic/104084222>

Idiotfruit and tree kangaroos: here's why the ancient rainforests of Queensland's Wet Tropics are so distinctive – The Conversation, 15 July 2024

In Queensland's northern reaches lie the Wet Tropics, spanning about 450 kilometres between Townsville and Cooktown. These mountainous rainforests are a relic of the ancient continent of Gondwana, dating back million of years when Australia and parts of Antarctica were covered in rainforest.

While much of the rest of Australia has dried out, the Wet Tropics have stayed wet. It's here you find green-eyed treefrogs, wompoo fruit-doves and striped possums with elongated fourth digits, for digging out grubs. It's a particular hotspot of endemic and unique plant species too, including the colourfully named idiotfruit tree.

Why is the region so distinctive? It has many different niches for species, from cool mountaintops down to hot and humid lowland rainforest. As a result of its unique evolutionary history, the Wet Tropics are a biodiversity hotspot, hosting an array of species found nowhere else on Earth.

<https://theconversation.com/idiotfruit-and-tree-kangaroos-heres-why-the-ancient-rainforests-of-queenslands-wet-tropics-are-so-distinctive-228195>

Nursery founder played role in Coast environmental movement – Sunshine Coast News, 16 July 2024

Friends and family gathered recently at Fairhill Native Botanic Gardens and Nursery to remember one of its founders, Barbara Hansa.

Barbara, described by a friend as a true pioneer of the native plant industry and conservation on the Sunshine Coast, passed away last month. With her husband Alex, Barbara started Fairhill nursery on former farmland at Ninderry in 1975.

It was one of the first Australian native plant nurseries in Queensland and most stock was propagated from seed. The land had been cleared so they planted a native garden that grew to 4ha, and over time expanded the nursery, adding a gallery that supported local artists and a bookshop.

<https://www.sunshinecoastnews.com.au/2024/07/16/tributes-for-a-force-in-native-plants-and-conservation/>

Mining groups lobbied PM to weaken environment reforms, documents show – The Sydney Morning Herald, 17 July 2024

Mining giants including Hancock Prospecting and Rio Tinto lobbied the Albanese government to weaken national environmental reforms, warning the government's "nature positive plan" could cost billions of dollars in lost investment and tens of thousands of jobs in Western Australia alone.

Documents released under freedom of information laws show a consortium of mining interests – including Hancock Prospecting boss Garry Korte and Simon Trott, the chief executive of Rio Tinto's iron ore division – wrote to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in March, asking him to personally intervene in the environment laws' drafting process.

They also sought early consultation on the complete reforms package before legislation is introduced into parliament.

Several of the signatories – who describe themselves as members of the WA state government and industry peak bodies – requested their names and organisations be redacted from the documents released publicly.

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/mining-groups-lobbied-pm-to-weaken-environment-laws-documents-show-20240717-p5jud3.html>

'Unpick the damage that's been done': Inside NSW plan to rein in rampant land-clearing – The Sydney Morning Herald, 17 July 2024

The NSW government will lay out its plan to unscramble the controversial biodiversity offsets scheme and rein in rampant land-clearing on private land, setting the scene for a political fight over the rights of landowners.

NSW Environment Minister Penny Sharpe said the response to be released on Wednesday "starts to unpick the damage ... done since 2016", when the former government introduced the offsets scheme and loosened restrictions on land-clearing.

"Biodiversity loss is as important and critical as action on climate change, and reversing it is really important," Sharpe said

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/unpick-the-damage-that-s-been-done-inside-nsw-plan-to-rein-in-rampant-land-clearing-20240716-p5ju2q.html>

Seed dispersal by Martu peoples promotes the distribution of native plants in arid Australia – Nature, 17 July 2024

Commensal relationships between wild plants and their dispersers play a key ecological and evolutionary role in community structure and function. While non-human dispersers are often considered critical to plant recruitment, human dispersers have received much less attention, especially when it comes to non-domesticated plants. Australia, as a continent historically characterized by economies reliant on non-domesticated plants, is thus a key system for exploring the ecological role of people as seed dispersers in the absence of agriculture.

Here, we utilize a controlled observation research design, employing ecological surveys and ethnographic observations to examine how seed dispersal and landscape burning by Martu Aboriginal people affects the distribution of three preferred plants and one (edible, but non-preferred) control species. Using an information theoretic approach, we find that the three preferred plants show evidence of human dispersal, with the strongest evidence supporting anthropogenic dispersal for the wild bush tomato, *Solanum diversiflorum*.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-024-50300-5>

Strong progress – from a low base: here’s what’s in NSW’s biodiversity reforms – The Conversation, 19 July 2024

The laws designed to protect the environment in New South Wales are completely ineffective, according to the scathing Henry Review in 2023.

In response, the state government this week announced a major overhaul of the Biodiversity Conservation Act, introduced in 2016. The Minns government has committed to introducing 49 of 58 recommendations made by the review, either in full or in part.

First up will be reform of biodiversity offsets – the easily gamed and largely ineffective requirement for developers to offset their destruction of vital habitat with gains elsewhere.

The state government is also promising to align reformed biodiversity laws with national and international goals, and set goals and targets to tackle threats, bring species back from the brink, and conserve landscapes at scale.

<https://theconversation.com/strong-progress-from-a-low-base-heres-whats-in-nsws-biodiversity-reforms-234917>

Botanists vote to remove racist reference from plants’ scientific names – The Guardian, 21 July 2024

Scientists have voted to eliminate the names of certain plants that are deemed to be racially offensive. The decision to remove a label that contains such a slur was taken last week after a gruelling six-day session attended by more than 100 researchers, as part of the International Botanical Congress, which officially opens on Sunday in Madrid.

The effect of the vote will be that all plants, fungi and algae names that contain the word *caffra*, which originates in insults made against Black people, will be replaced by the word

affra to denote their African origins. More than 200 species will be affected, including the coast coral tree, which will be known as *Erythrina affra* instead of *Erythrina caffra*.

The scientists attending the nomenclature session also agreed to create a special committee which would rule on names given to newly discovered plants, fungi and algae. These are usually named by those who first describe them in the scientific literature. However, the names could now be overruled by the committee if they are deemed to be derogatory to a group or race.

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/article/2024/jul/20/botanists-remove-racist-references-plants-scientific-names>

Royal National Park a haven for native species, environmental stocktake shows – The Sydney Morning Herald, 22 July 2024

The biggest ecological survey to date of Royal and Heathcote national parks has revealed the area is a haven for threatened species, including two mammals previously not detected in the parks. But the ecosystem just south of Sydney has lost six mammal species since European arrival, as feral foxes and deer wreak havoc.

The NSW government will release the EcoHealth Scorecard on Monday, covering the Royal National Park and the neighbouring Garawarra State Conservation Area and Heathcote National Park. It is the first of eight ecological studies for the state and part of what Environment Minister Penny Sharpe called “a big investment in science” to improve the management of national parks.

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/royal-national-park-a-haven-for-native-species-environmental-stocktake-shows-20240719-p5juzs.html>

Threatened native plant species the key to unlocking a climate-resilient future, even if not 'cute and cuddly' – ABC Rural, 23 July 2024

From hiking through crocodile-infested habitats to traversing mountains and flying a helicopter to the side of a cliff, it would be easy to think Brendan Espe was trying to be the next Bear Grylls. But he isn't in the game of extreme adventure like the British TV presenter. Instead, he is looking for the rare plants that he believes could help humanity survive climate change. An environmental officer for James Cook University, Mr Espe curates the living collection of plants and animals on the Townsville campus, with a particular focus on endangered species.

In an unassuming building in Canberra, millions of native seeds sourced by people like Mr Espe are carefully stored to stay viable for hundreds of years. National Seed Bank manager Lydia Guja said it was a vital resource for the continuation of many species, as well as identifying those that could adapt to climate change.

Australia has more than 20,000 native plant species, 90 per cent of which are found nowhere else in the world. But the Australian Network for Plant Conservation — a national not-for-profit group that promotes plant conservation — said flora often struggled to attract the same attention as their endangered animal counterparts.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2024-07-23/james-cook-university-brendan-espe-australian-tropical-herbarium/104046546>

Australia's major food companies failing nature, report finds – The Guardian, 23 July 2024

Major food companies in Australia are roundly failing to set adequate targets to reduce their impact on nature and most are not assessing how their supply chains are hitting the environment, according to a first-of-its-kind report from conservationists.

The Future of Food report from the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) assessed 20 major food companies across 37 different indicators, from deforestation and pollution to transparency and governance.

Targets to halt damage to nature were “severely lacking”, the report said, and none of the five biggest beef buyers had deforestation targets in line with international best practice.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/article/2024/jul/23/australias-major-food-companies-failing-nature-report-finbds>

'Rogue' government agency Forestry Corporation of NSW accused of more illegal logging – ABC News, 24 July 2024

A New South Wales government agency has racked up more than \$1.1 million in penalties for more than a dozen instances of unlawful activity in fewer than five years, including seven criminal convictions.

It also faces three more criminal prosecutions that could result in up to \$12 million in additional penalties, if found guilty, and is under investigation for a further 18 potentially-illegal actions.

That agency is the state government-owned logging company, Forestry Corporation of NSW.

And now a community group has uncovered fresh evidence of illegal logging that experts say is driving endangered species towards extinction, allegations the NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) said it had added to its list of investigations.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-24/nsw-government-forestry-corporation-illegal-logging-allegations/104126534>

Concerns raised about scale of response to shot-hole borer devastating Perth trees – ABC Perth, 24 July 2024

Scientists and local councils are concerned efforts to contain the polyphagous shot-hole borer devastating Perth's tree canopy are not going far enough after it was revealed that the lab that tests monitoring traps has been on hold since mid-June.

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), is two years into a \$41 million, three-year national response to the borer in an effort to limit it to the Perth area and ultimately eradicate it before it reaches agricultural areas. The testing lab was shut down after asbestos was found in the South Perth DPIRD laboratory and staff had to evacuate the building.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-24/concerns-raised-about-scale-of-response-to-shot-hole-borer/104132150>

Yes, Australia's environment is on a depressing path – but \$7 billion a year would transform it – The Conversation, 24 July 2024

The condition of Australia's environment continues to decline. Many Australians wonder if it's possible to reverse this depressing trajectory – and our landmark assessment released today shows the answer is yes.

Our report, launched today by the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, demonstrates how repairing Australia's landscapes is not only achievable and affordable, it's in the national interest.

Using the best available science and expert advice, we identified 24 actions worth A\$7.3 billion each year over 30 years, which could repair much of the past two centuries of degradation.

For context, the investment amounts to about 0.3% of Australia's gross domestic product. It's also far less than the estimated \$33 billion a year Australians spend on their pets.

<https://theconversation.com/yes-australias-environment-is-on-a-depressing-path-but-7-billion-a-year-would-transform-it-235305>

Scientists suss out secrets of Kosciuszko's extremely rare terrace formations – About Regional, 24 July 2024

Formations resembling a series of rice paddies on a slope that's far from tropical has scientists poring over the high plains of the northern part of Kosciuszko National Park.

What's raised their interest is an extremely rare geographic phenomenon called contour terrace formations (CTFs) which – apart from being at Kosciuszko and the high plains and plateaux in Victoria and Tasmania – occurs only in some extremely remote locations in the Southern Hemisphere.

Contour terrace formations are a repeating pattern of shallow ponds separated by low, narrow levees, but how they form and why they matter is what scientists from the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) Soil and Landscape Assessment Team are trying to understand.

<https://aboutregional.com.au/scientists-suss-out-secrets-of-kosciuszkos-extremely-rare-terrace-formations/456224/>

Australia's environment could be fixed and threatened species saved for just 0.3% of GDP, experts say – The Guardian, 24 July 2024

Saving Australia's threatened wildlife, repairing degraded land and restoring ailing river systems is possible and would cost just 0.3% of Australia's GDP, according to a new blueprint produced by more than 60 experts.

For the first time scientists, governance and business leaders have produced a dollar estimate of what it would take to fix Australia's environment. They set out 24 actions which, if followed, could "avoid most extinctions and recover almost all threatened species", repair the productive base of agricultural soils and fix over-allocated and fragmented river systems. The dollar figure – \$7.3bn annually for the next 30 years – is less than two-thirds of the federal government's reported annual expenditure on fossil fuel subsidies.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/jul/24/australia-environment-endangered-species-fixed-gdp>

Major class action thrown out as Federal Court finds insufficient evidence to prove weedkiller Roundup causes cancer – ABC News, 25 July 2024

There is insufficient evidence to prove the controversial weedkiller Roundup causes cancer, the Federal Court has ruled.

Roundup's parent companies Monsanto and Bayer were taken to court in a major class action, with hundreds of Australians claiming their exposure to the product's active ingredient, glyphosate, caused non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

After hearing evidence in a lengthy trial, Justice Michael Lee said on the balance of probabilities, the plaintiffs failed to prove that the products caused cancer. Justice Lee acknowledged there were mixed views in the scientific community about the risks of Roundup, and said further research could provide a more definitive answer.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-25/federal-court-herbicide-roundup-cancer/104142688>

How the Miyawaki method of creating tiny forests could be the solution to Perth's tree canopy issues – ABC News, 28 July 2024

Tiny forests are sprouting up around Australia in spaces as small as just a few square metres. Because of the way they're created, these forests can mature in 10 to 20 years — instead of 100 — potentially bringing big benefits to our suburbs where tree canopy is dwindling.

Perth ecologist Dr Grey Coupland has been researching the concept, and sees huge potential.

"I thought this is actually a really, really useful method for rapid urban greening," she said.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-28/tiny-forests-miyawaki-method-solving-perths-tree-canopy-problem/104098600>

A 'scare campaign' over national parks? The fight over the future of Victoria's forests – the Guardian, 28 July 2024

Conservationists say the push to protect forests and endangered species with a giant national park has become mired in 'disinformation'.

On a wet, winter's day, it's hard to even see the top of the eucalypt tree through the heavy blanket of mist. Sarah Rees, a conservationist and local resident, has dubbed it "the Guardian", as it overlooks Black Beard, one of the largest trees in Victoria.

Mountain ash – or *Eucalyptus regnans* – are among the tallest flowering plants in the world, reaching more than 20 storeys high and the maximum age of 550 years. But only about 1.6% of the 137,000 hectares of mountain ash forest in the Central Highlands are considered old trees.

But there is a renewed sense of hope for the forest after the state Labor government's decision to end native logging at the end of 2023, six years earlier than planned.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/article/2024/jul/28/victoria-great-forest-national-park-plan-disinformation>

Events and Opportunities

Ecological Society of Australia – Ecological Impact Award

Recognising applied ecological research projects and collaborations between researchers and practitioners (people engaged in managing, planning and/or researching the natural environment).

The prize includes funded attendance for 2 at the ESA annual conference (up to \$5000 value), and the opportunity to give a joint plenary.

Applications close **31 July**

<https://www.ecolsoc.org.au/grants-awards/ecological-impact-award/>

Evening with the Minister: Strengthening our Nature Laws - National webinar with Australia's Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek – 7 August 2024

This national event is hosted by the State and Territory Conservation Councils of Australia, representing numerous local environmental organisations and thousands of members.

Register here: <https://environmentvictoria.org.au/2024/07/05/evening-with-the-minister-strengthening-our-nature-laws/>

11th Australian Stream Management Conference and Awards Gala – Victor Harbor SA, 11-14 August 2024

The 11th Australian Stream Management Conference and Awards Gala provides an exciting opportunity to share the knowledge and practice within waterway management in Australia and celebrate these incredible achievements. Held in the beautiful Victor Harbor in South Australia, the ASM Conference and Awards Gala will come together for the first time. The hope is that we can braid Australia's numerous threads of waterway knowledge together to revive our river basins for a brighter future.

<https://www.11asm.org.au/>

Annual Dieback Information Group (DIG) Conference – Perth WA, 20-21 August 2024

This conference will bring together the latest in scientific knowledge, best land management practices and industry innovation in the Phytophthora science and management space.

This year's theme "Seeing the Forest for the Trees" - has been selected to recognise the importance of holistic management for Australia's forest ecosystems, and the pivotal role that environmental biosecurity and disease hygiene play in the health of these landscapes.

The Conference Day 1 is available in person and online with optional field trips on Day 2.

<https://www.dwg.org.au/dig-2024/>

Australian Association of Friends of Botanic Gardens (AAFBG) 2024 Conference – Sunshine Coast QLD, 23-26 August 2024

Join us as we tackle the big issues and explore solutions:

- to create rewarding relationships
- to work well with volunteers
- to identify opportunities within a changing climate
- to employ technology that enhances our message and effectiveness.

<https://friendsbotanicgardens.org/2024-conference>

23rd Australasian Weeds Conference – Brisbane QLD, 25-29 August 2024

Invasive Species Queensland (formerly the Weed Society of Queensland) is excited to collaborate with the Council of Australasian Weed Societies (CAWS) in hosting the 23rd Australasian Weeds Conference (AWC). Join us from August 25 to 29, 2024 at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre for this significant national event.

<https://icebergevents.eventsair.com/awc24/>

Australasian Soilborne Diseases Symposium 2024 – Kingscliff NSW, 26-30 August 2024

The Australasian Soilborne Diseases Symposium is a unique, biennial event that brings together leading researchers, practitioners and primary producers to discuss the latest trends in the diagnosis, prevention, and management of soilborne plant diseases.

The ASDS has been promoting the latest soil health and integrated disease management advances to the world since 2001.

<https://www.asds-apps.com/>

3rd Australian Biosecurity Symposium – Gold Coast QLD, 27-29 August 2024

Building upon the groundbreaking ideas and enriching conversations that marked the success of the 1st and 2nd Australian Biosecurity Symposiums, #BioSym2024 is set to delve even deeper into the future landscape of Australian Biosecurity. This is your chance to be a part of shaping that future. Seize the opportunity to connect with key decision-makers, trailblazing innovators, influential voices, and dedicated researchers within the realm of Australian biosecurity. Mark your calendar, because this is an event you won't want to miss!

<https://www.biosym.com.au/>

8th International Orchid Conservation Congress – Perth WA, 3-6 September 2024 (post-congress fieldtrip 8-10 September)

Welcome to the 8th International Orchid Conservation Congress (IOCC).

A Minute to Midnight theme reflects the global rates of biodiversity decline. Never before in human history have so many wild species been faced with habitat loss and decline. Orchids have not been spared, and IOCC8 is dedicated to understanding the threats and the solutions that are needed to arrest the decline of orchids. Speakers will present a range of relevant topics with the field trip visiting the global biodiversity hotspot of Southwest Australia.

<https://iocc8.com/>

ANPSA Biennial Conference: Gardens for Life – Melbourne VIC, 30 September – 4 October 2024

Australian Plants Society Victoria (APS Vic) will host the biennial national conference of the Australian Native Plants Society (Australia) (ANPSA). The Conference is being held in excellent facilities at The Round in Nunawading, near Melbourne. Registrations are now open.

<https://www.anpsa2024conference.com/>

New Zealand Plant Conservation Network (NZPCN) 2024 Conference - Whangārei NZ, 6-9 October 2024

Early bird registration discount extended to 31 July!

The New Zealand Plant Conservation Network is excited to announce its next conference for 6–9 October 2024, at Forum North, 7 Rust Avenue, Whangārei 0110. We will be reflecting on the past, present and future of plant conservation in Aotearoa New Zealand with our theme

“Ka mua, ka muri – walking backwards into the future”. With this we will be able to celebrate 21 years of NZPCN, and hundreds of years of plant conservation in Aotearoa, and reflect on how all that has happened informs the future.

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/nzpcn/events/conference-2024/>

Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) Private Land Conservation Conference 2024 – Sydney NSW, 10-11 October 2024

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance’s annual Private Land Conservation conference (PLC24) is the country’s premier land conservation event. The Conference is a critical forum for discussions and insights into scaling nature investment, reversing environmental decline, and meeting global and national biodiversity commitments. The Conference will run adjacently to the Global Nature Positive Summit being hosted by Australia.

<https://www.alcaconference.org.au/>

Territory Natural Resource Management Conference – Darwin NT, 19-21 November 2024

The Territory Natural Resource Management Conference is the NT's leading conference on natural resource management expertise, on-ground activities and community engagement.

The three-day conference provides critical professional development and engagement opportunities through tailored and inclusive workshop sessions, a diverse range of informative and thought-provoking presentations, engaging poster presentations and interactive exhibitions.

<https://www.tnrmconference.org.au/>

ESA 2024 – Melbourne VIC, 9-13 December 2024

The conference will showcase the science of ecology in Australia – across all its varied forms – and be an opportunity to explore the connection between science theory, science research, science policy and science on-ground outcomes.

The conference of the Ecological Society of Australia (ESA 2024) will be an in-person conference but a limited number of online options will be offered, including live-streamed plenaries, some live-streamed symposia and some of the presentations being made available online after the conference.

<https://esa2024.org.au/>