

YARNUPINGS

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE OFFICE NEWSLETTER ISSUE #3 SEPTEMBER 2023



northern
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STRATHFIELD
COUNCIL





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Welcome to the third issue of Yarnupings for 2023

It is the third issue of Yarnupings and we are jam packed full of articles!

In this issue we see the return of Karen Smiths **Pollination - Importance to Country**, aswell as **The Language Corner** and every green thumb's favourite, **The Bush Binge**.

Phil Hunt takes on a thought provoking journey with his article **Certainty and a Sophisticated Emu**. Then we have volunteer monitor Suzanne Barber's article sharing about her trip to see the **Brewarrina Fish Traps**.

For the first time in a Yarnupings, you will have an opportunity to WIN an AHO gift pack! Have a look at page 14 to see how.

Please enjoy the third edition of Yarnupings for 2023.

The AHO Team— Dave, Phil, Karen, Susan, Kyle.



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On the next page

Picture of serenity is of the Cooks River which Strathfield Council help manage
provided by Susan Whitby



VOLUNTEERS IN FOCUS

By Susan Whitby

How wonderful is this warmer weather! Perfect for heading out to site to complete those twice yearly site monitoring reports.

We recently met up with one of our youngest volunteers, CJ, to go through photographing a site. CJ monitors a gorgeous site, an overhang with midden. This site is quite complex to photograph with different elements and a lot of uneven surfaces.

CJ and I worked together to identify the best position for the scale in the photo, which can be a challenge when the surface is not flat. To make sure the scale is straight in the photo, more often than not, the scale is crooked on the ground. This can be tricky to get the scale straight, but it's worth it in the end. The image is easier to understand when the scale is straight.

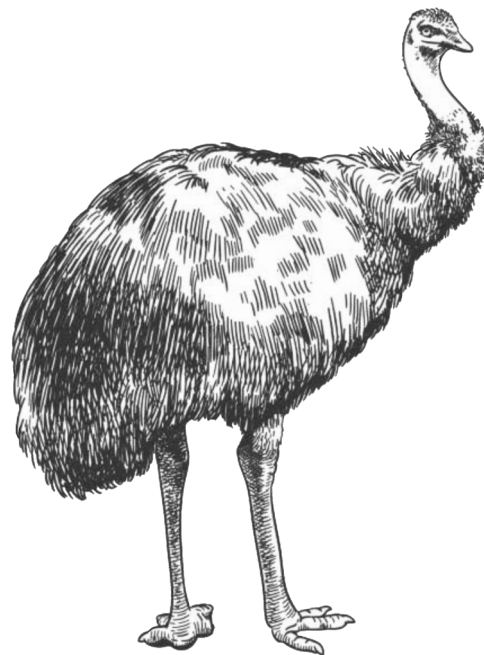
The midden at the site CJ monitors runs down to the waters edge. This also makes it tricky to photograph. We spent some time talking about the midden, where it sits in relation to the overhang and by sitting and yarning and observing, we saw that the midden flows in a particular direction. We followed the midden and came across another exposed patch of the midden, sitting in amongst a number of small fishing boats. This was exciting! So we photographed that and added it to the report.

If you have any queries about the site you monitor, please let us know. We are here to help you get the most out of your volunteering experience.



Certainty and a Sophisticated Emu

By Phil Hunt



Some philosophers consider certainty as the highest form of knowledge. Certainty is something that is without error, a knowledge that is without doubt. Other philosophers think certainty is impossible but find this view to have tendencies leaning towards an absolute (which they are trying to refute!). Is certainty like a mirage, something that appears perfectly valid from a distance, but cannot stand up to close scrutiny? In a sense the search for certainty is a fundamental drive of science. It is also the nature of our minds to try to know things. Yet we can feel certain of something and have no empirical evidence to support our view.

If you have been exposed to the debate about the book *Dark Emu* it might feel like certainty has long gone. The debate has been quite brutal. How can we navigate it? There is a good rule of thumb for debates. Find the two extremes of the argument. Then try the middle ground as a place to start making your own assessment. It is also helpful to step back and look at it on two levels. One on the detail and one on the meaning. Certainty may be flitting somewhere in their vicinity.

Detail is important. This might include facts and figures or specific features of an argument. If an author states something to be true, it needs to check out (unless the work is fictitious). Meaning is also important, lest we lose the forest for the trees, branches and leaves. When approaching a traffic light, it doesn't matter if the topmost light of three shines a bit crimson, it's still best to stop.

When approaching a traffic light, it doesn't matter if the topmost light of three shines a bit crimson, it's still best to stop.

When looking at *Dark Emu* it seems one of the intended meanings of the author, and some of the reason that it has been so celebrated, is to show Indigenous peoples across Australia were more advanced than what many non-Indigenous people considered them to be. It has been a long battle for First Nations people anywhere to convince others that their cultures are important and valuable. This is consistent with a human trait for one group to treat another badly and find reason to do so through flimsy arguments around culture and sophistication. And just what does that actually mean?

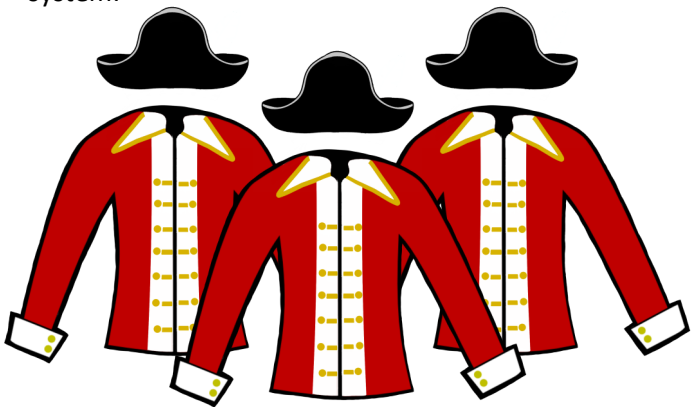
sophisticated

having, revealing, or involving a great deal of worldly experience and knowledge of fashion and culture. Having a good understanding of the way people behave and/or a good knowledge of culture and fashion

intelligent or made in a complicated way and therefore able to do complicated tasks. Developed to a high degree of complexity (of a machine, system, or technique)

Certainty and a Sophisticated Emu

So, one definition is about fashion and culture. Those wearing red coats into battle would surely have thought of themselves as sophisticated in that context. Those not wearing similar attire would presumably be considered less so. Yet the First Fleet accounts have left us with very little revealing information about what the scars, paint and adornments of Sydney clans really meant. Symbols loaded with meaning are lost to those not competent in that knowledge system.



The other definition is more about the ability to do tasks, perhaps with strategy, planning, ingenuity, technological skillfulness. This is the real hunting ground for comparisons to demonstrate the superiority of one above another.

It is difficult to debate this kind of issue fairly when the debate is in the conquerors' language, and with the conquerors' suite of technological, economic and social definitions providing the conceptual framework. *Hunting and gathering* comes from that, so does *farming, cultivation, gardening, Indigenous, civilization, civilized*, even the idea of what it is to be *successful*.

Dark Emu has helped shake Australia from its misunderstanding that Indigenous Australia was unsophisticated in all meanings of the word. Unfortunately, some of the details have been shown to lean too heavily on scanty evidence and this is a flaw.

Another issue is how traditional culture has been framed in making the arguments. It has been put forward that in the pursuit of showing Indigenous cultures to be sophisticated too much emphasis has been directed to farming or agricultural techniques, as by doing so it suggests non-farming lifestyles are inferior. It is quite right to defend non-agricultural cultures, as some of the worst human and ecological atrocities have been committed by farming societies. Farming techniques developed in Europe, the Middle East and Asia have been found unsuited to Australia's ancient and fragile landscapes. It can also be acknowledged that food management strategies suited to small, mobile, Indigenous communities weren't envisaged to feed a global market of billions.

So, who is more correct? Where is the certainty? Maybe both sides are right in different ways. Is it possible then to discuss the issues and find out? The current public debate is not for the faint hearted. Perhaps we can look elsewhere for a reminder that disagreements can actually be helpful. In one Tibetan monastic tradition students regularly challenge each other in ritualized debates. It can involve a ring of monks or nuns on one side yelling and shouting at a stressed looking inquisitor. The real purpose is not to beat them in an argument. It is to help them reveal their misunderstandings about a topic. A very successful debate will go beyond intellectual responses as deeply held, wrong beliefs pop out. When these misunderstandings are exposed to the light they are easier to address. Are our egos up to having our faults exposed?

In the past Indigenous communities around the world were outflanked by the 'guns, germs and steel'¹ tri-fecta that gave invading forces the advantage. The idea that one was superior, more sophisticated, more advanced is simply a misunderstanding of the context. They were and we are *Homo sapiens sapiens*.

Certainty and a Sophisticated Emu

Modern humans. With or without red coats, shoes, paint, blue eyes or brown. We are as smart as the smartest and as dull as our collective ignorance. For a species who can send people into space, can develop the smart phone, can identify the most subtle of illnesses and then medicines to treat them, we are amazing. And yet the planet and all its species suffer from what we have done and continue to do, often in the name of progress and wealth generation. There are lessons we can all learn from the *Dark Emu* debate. In the space between the stars there's quite the sophisticated emu watching quietly.

"I don't know anything with certainty, but seeing the stars makes me dream."

Vincent Van Gogh

References:

1. Jared Diamond (1997) *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*



<https://astrotourismwa.com.au/emu-in-the-sky/>



Brewarrina Fish Traps

By Suzanne Barber

My friend, Jen, and I were going to the Lightning Ridge Opal Festival in late August, so what better start to our trip than visiting the Fish Traps along the way. I was so excited. I had booked the tour well before we had our meeting at the AHO, and to my delight, I sat next to the photos on the wall of the Traps. Excitedly I told Susan and we were both enthusiastic at the prospect. (She was off to Uluru, so not too bad a trip for her either!)

We arrived at the Brewarrina Aboriginal Cultural Museum (pronounced Bree - warrina or shortened to Bree, also known as Baiame's Ngunnhu, Nonah, or Nyemba Fish Traps) around lunchtime to find an ABC outside broadcast crew there. Dan Bouchier, presenter on The Elders, The Drum, Insiders etc and his crew, were sitting outside chatting to Bradley, the guide for our tour. We were the only 2 visitors, so we had a very private viewing.

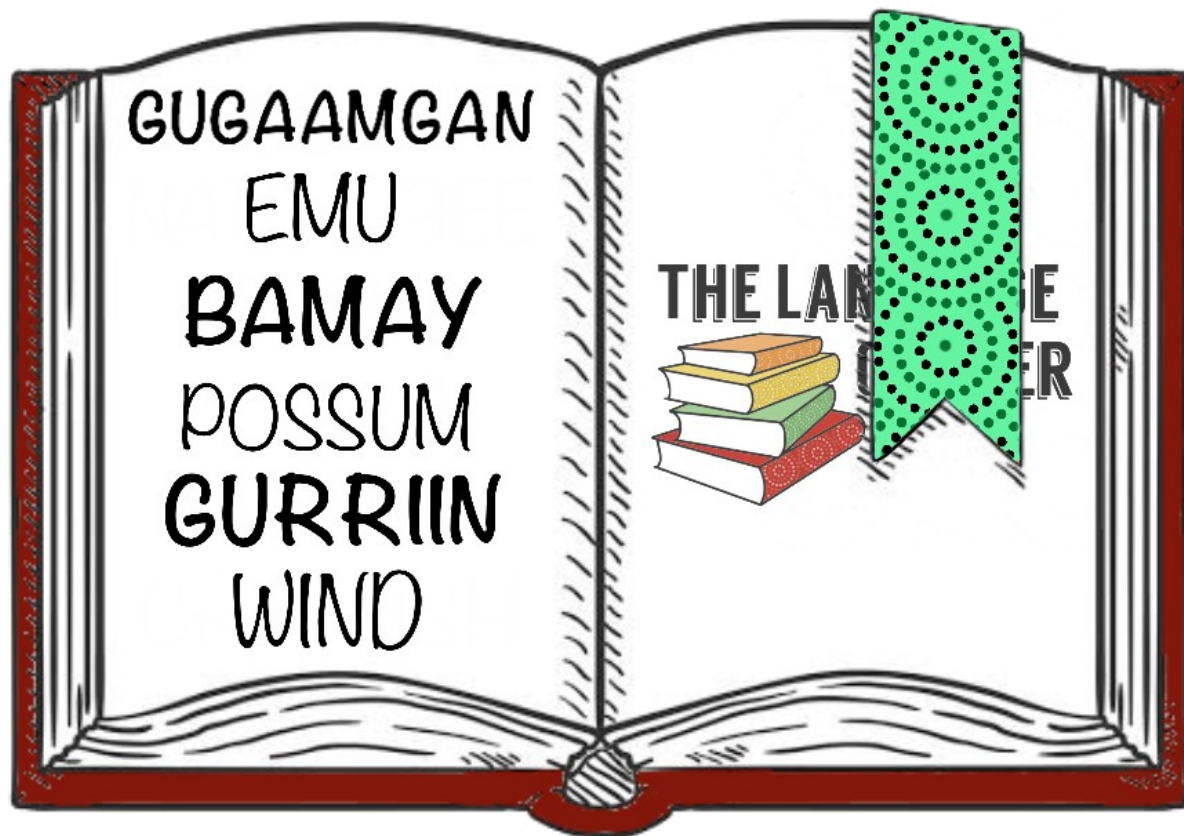
After saying hello, (check out Four Corners 11th September for the aired story), we then entered the museum, where we are told the history of the Traps, how the Traps worked and local history around the area affecting the Aboriginal people, who lived there over thousands of years. The Traps are known to be one of the oldest human made structures anywhere in the world. The Traps have many C-shaped dry-stone rock weirs, built to trap fish swimming downstream and others to store fish for later eating. The ingenious C shaped design meant the Traps worked in all seasons and water levels. The Traps have had changes made around them over the years, most notably in the 1970's when a weir was built and altered the flow and operation of the Traps. True to cultural responsibilities, local Aboriginal people care for and maintain the Traps. Brad said not much maintenance is required – after over 40,000 they are pretty well set and unmoving I guess! We were shown the level the last few floods brought the river up to. It was really incomprehensible as to the height the Barwon River rose to, but still the traps lay where they were placed all those thousands of years ago.

Bradley also told us of the history with the first white settlers and the tragedies that occurred in the area. So hard and sad to hear and see photos, artefacts and the pain felt by everyone still today. The Traps, however, as Bradley stated, were a meeting place and if it wasn't for the Traps, we wouldn't have met Bradley and been able to hear the stories and share the story of our trip to the Traps with you.

if you are travelling up that way, it is well worth booking a tour. They have 4 times most days and operate 6 days a week, generally.



GUMBAYNGGIRR



The September issue of The Language Corner provides three words from the Gumbaynggir language. Gumbaynggir country is on the Mid North Coast of NSW. The area is from the Nambucca River in the south to the Clarence River in the north. The Gumbaynggir language is well travelled around NSW with many Gumbaynggir people now living and using language in different cities and towns.

Gugaamgan — Emu

Bamay — Possum

Gurriin — Wind

- NSW AECG LANGUAGES APP



Pollination - Importance to Country Part 2

By Karen Smith

Sugar Glider - Djubi

Sugar Gliders love to eat all things sweet: flowering native plants, tree sap (such as the sugary sap of eucalyptus trees), insects and have also been observed eating bird eggs. They are important pollinators, are nocturnal, seeing well in the dark with their large black eyes, travelling from plant to plant carrying and transferring pollen on their bodies.

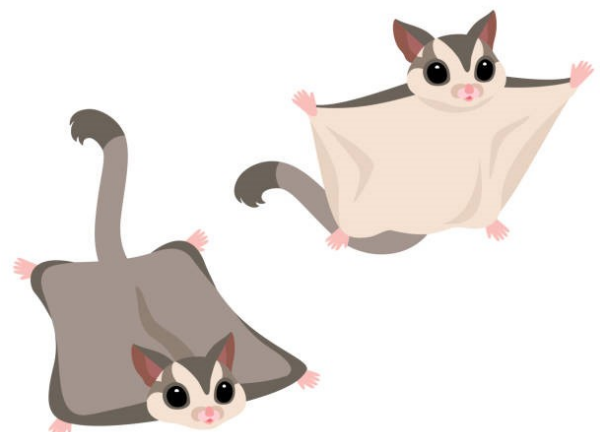
From nose to tip of tail they are between 24-30 cm long and weigh about 108 gms. They have adapted back feet and have a skin membrane that stretches from the little fingers to the back legs. Using these membranes as sails, they glide from plant to plant. They have even been seen carrying food back to their young by using the twin membranes as a shopping bag. They can glide about 50 metres and use their long tail as a rudder to change direction and stabilise landing.

Making warm leafy nests in tree hollows, Sugar Gliders live socially in family groups. They can have two litters of babies with the young being looked after by several adults and male and females engage in care. They often give birth to twins who live in the pouch for just over two months.

When food is scarce and conditions are cold, Sugar Gliders enter a state of torpor, reducing physical activity, slowing breathing and oxygen consumption. They wrap themselves in a ball. This can occur daily for an average of 13 hours and depends on light levels and climate conditions.

Habitat destruction and fragmentation are of particular concern to the species as this results in the decline of the number of available hollows. The Sugar Glider species was hard hit by the 2019/2020 bushfires, resulting in large-scale degradation of habitat.

Other threats include feral predators, such as cats and foxes, as well as the use of barbed-wire fences that can trap the animal's gliding membrane.



Pollination - Importance to Country

Feather Tail glider - Wubin

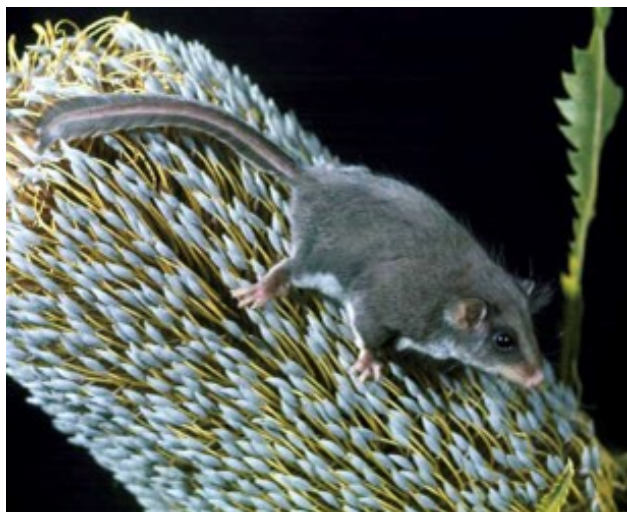
This tiny native mammal has a remarkable tail. It is the only mammal to have a feather like tail. The tail is around 7 – 8 cm long and is flat with stiff fringed hair growing along its sides. The tail helps with gliding steering, anchoring and braking. The feather tail glider has a membrane from elbow to knee, looking like a falling leaf and gliding from 14 to 28 metres, 5 times an hour. Spreading and feeding on insects, pollen and nectar. Wubin lives 15 metres up in the treetops to avoid predators, spreading pollen from tree-to-tree as they travel.

They have frog like hairy pads on their toes which allows them to run along branches up trees and even up panes of glass. Being so tiny, Wubin has trouble staying warm when it is cold and enters torpor, slowing its breathing and becoming unresponsive.

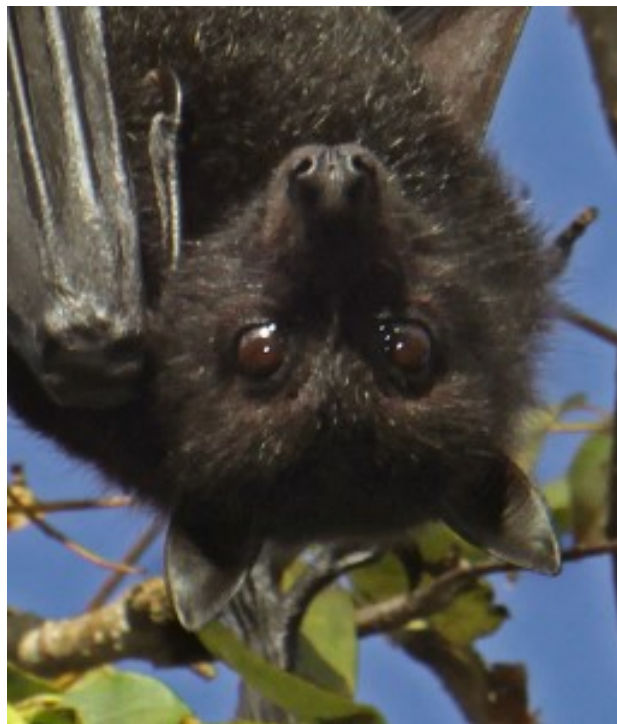
They tend to live in communal groups of between 5 to 30 individuals building or repurposing nests and line the 6 – 8 cm spherical nests with leaves, feathers and shredded bark.

Threats to this tiny mammal include:

Predation by feral species, including dogs, cats, and foxes, habitat loss and fragmentation.



Flying- Foxes – Fruit Bats - Wirambi



Flying-foxes (known as fruit bats) are the largest members of the bat family.

Black Flying Foxes are one of the largest bat species in the world, with a wingspan of more than 1 metre. Common to the coastal and near coastal areas of northern Australia from Shark Bay in Western Australia to Lismore in New South Wales.

Flying-foxes are nomadic mammals that travel across large areas of Australia. They feed on native blossoms and fruits, fruiting plants in gardens and orchards: spread seed and pollinate native plants.

They are vital to the health and regeneration of Australian native forests because they can transport pollen over vast distances and large bats are also able to disperse larger seeds.

Pollination - Importance to Country

Grey Headed Flying Fox—Ngununy



The grey-headed flying-fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) is easily recognisable by its rusty reddish-coloured collar, grey head and hairy legs. Adults have an average wingspan up to 1 metre and can weigh up to 1 kilogram. Their habitat is located within 200km of the eastern coast of Australia, from Bundaberg in Queensland to Melbourne in Victoria.

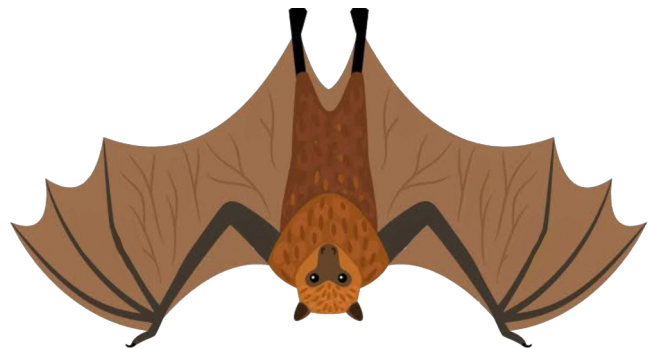
It is also the most vulnerable species because it competes with humans for prime coastal habitat along the south-east Queensland, NSW and Victorian coasts.

Little Red Flying-Fox

The little red flying-fox (*Pteropus scapulatus*) with a weight of 300–600 grams is the smallest Australian flying-fox. Little reds will often fly much further inland than other flying-foxes.

Little-red flying-foxes are the most widespread species of megabat in Australia. They occupy a broad range of habitats found in northern and eastern Australia including Queensland, Northern Territory, Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria.

They are important seed dispersers for rainforest plants and like all flying – foxes can spread thousands of seeds over 50 kilometres a night.

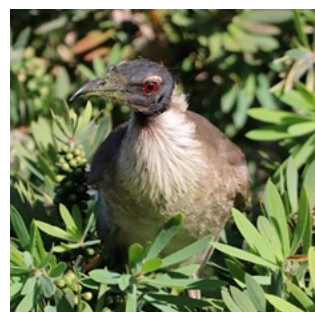


Pollination - Importance to Country

Birds

Many birds are pollinators. Pollen brushes against the bird's forehead throat and breast and is spread to other flowers as it feeds.

Honey Eaters, Wattle Birds, Friar Birds, Rainbow & Musk Lorrikeet and other Lorrikeets, Spine Bills, Sunbirds and many other birds.



1. Eastern Spinebill – I. Duncan 2. Blue faced Honey Eater – A. Ross 3. Little Friar Bird – I. Duncan, 4. Olive backed Sun- Bird - B. Hensen, 5. Musk Lorrikeet – V. Collins

Cassowaries

The southern cassowary (*Casuarius casuarius johnsonii*) is the largest fruit-eating bird in the world, spreading the seeds of rainforest trees. Sometimes the seeds are so large (up to 6 cm in diameter) that no other animal can swallow and disperse them and can do this over longer distances than the other dispersers of large seeds.

Cassowaries are known to feed on the fruits of more than 240 plant species, consume invertebrates, plants, fungi, and carrion, as well as small vertebrates when available.

Threats to southern cassowaries

Land clearing, loss, modification and fragmentation of habitat in the Wet Tropics population on the Atherton Tableland and the coastal lowland and floodplains.

Habitat degradation — invasion of weeds. Vehicle strikes, dog attacks - juveniles most vulnerable,

Human interactions — hand-feeding cassowaries has many implications.

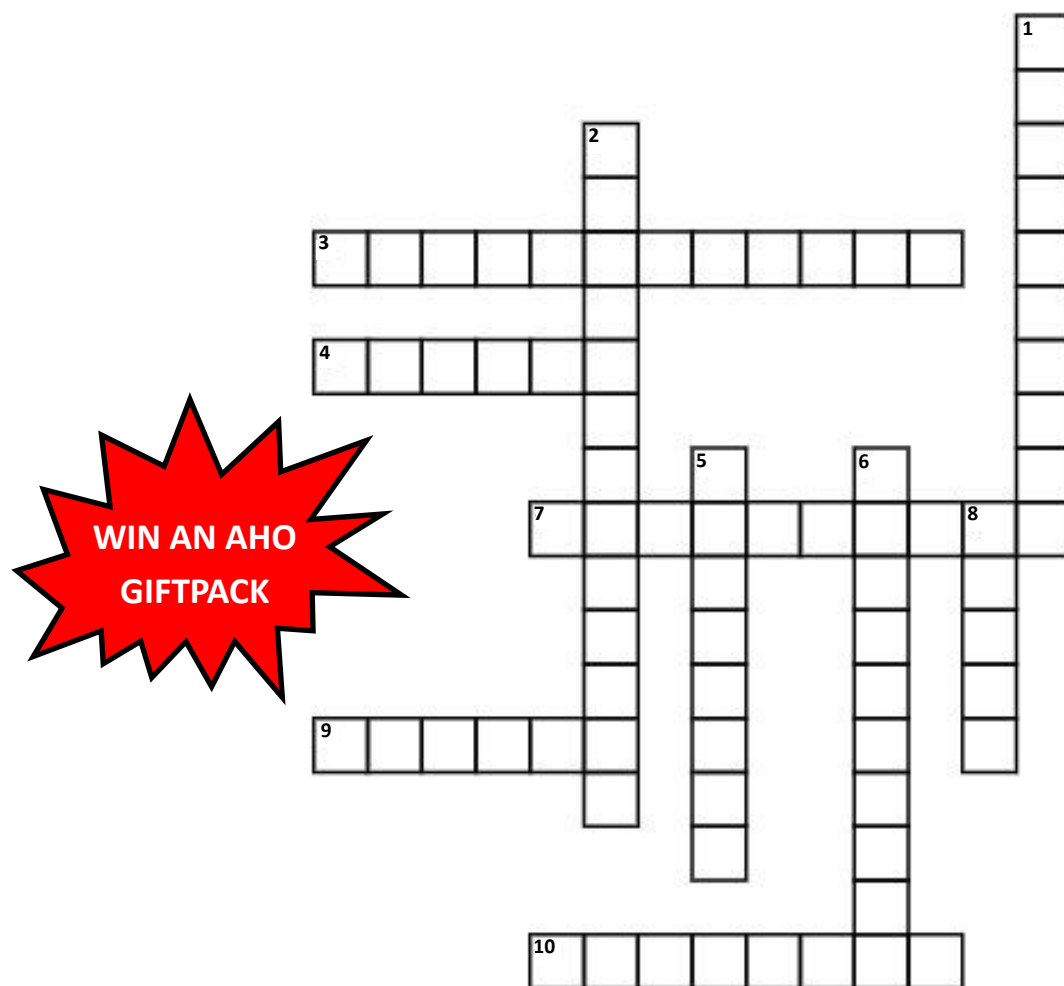
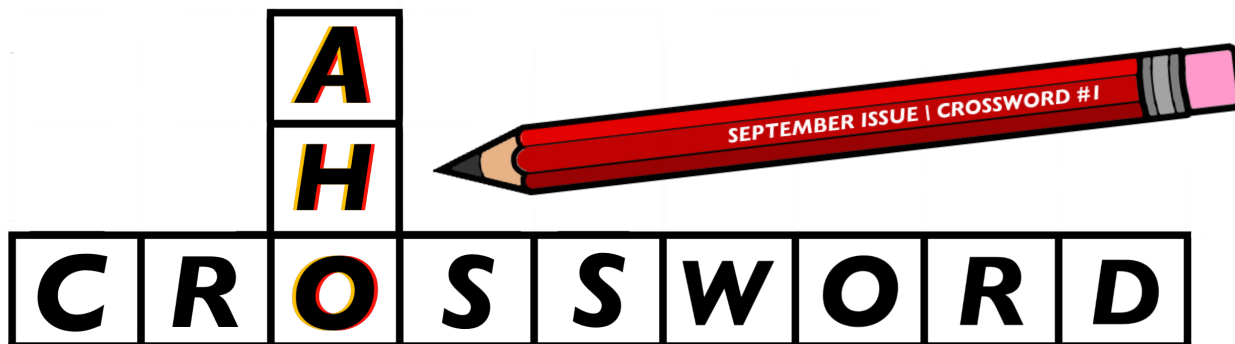
Pigs — compete with cassowaries for food, eat their eggs and modify habitat.

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/news/seven-reasons-to-love-our-flying-foxes>

<https://www.australianwildlife.org/wildlife/sugar-glider/>

<https://wildlife.org.au/news-resources/educational-resources/species-profiles/birds/southern-cassowary/>

<https://sydneybats.org.au/flying-foxes>



Down:

1. Aboriginal sites found on stone outcrops
2. AFL star who retired in 2023
5. Tool made from turban shells
6. Aboriginal Country the AHO museum is located on
8. How items were swapped between clans

Across:

3. Creator of the Aboriginal flag
4. An Aboriginal word meaning very good, great and fantastic
7. AHO's first Manager
9. Traditional name for the Didgeridoo
10. Common Art type found in rock shelters

First reader to send in the correctly filled out crossword will win an AHO gift pack

Send to aho@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au

Subject: AHO Crossword #1



Lane Cove Community Nursery



Council's Community Nursery Supervisor Alice Clementson & volunteer

One of the best things about local government is that it is about the local community. Local connections, local knowledge, local commitment. In a big city with a transient population and sometimes increasingly global outlook, Sydney can come across as a bit unfriendly at times. How do you make a connection? The old Sesame Street song comes to mind: *'who are the people of your neighborhood, of your neighborhood, of your neighborhood?'* Who indeed! Well, you can ask them yourselves, when you volunteer for the Lane Cove Community Nursery in Lane Cove West!



Lane Cove Community Nursery



We were asked to check out a possible Aboriginal stone tool found there (we're still working on the answer to that) and were delighted to find much, much more! The tiny bit of bushland has been lovingly restored and regenerated over the years and it looks fabulous. There is also a great assortment of bush tucker plants and Mark, one of the volunteers, is a font of knowledge. He solved one question Phil had about a plant he'd spotted in a reserve elsewhere (see photo).

"The Nursery is open for volunteers to assist with propagation and other nursery activities on Fridays, and also the first Saturday of the month when there are no workshops running. The nursery produces plants for distribution around the Council area and to help other programs", the nursery supervisor Alice Clementson explained.



The track through the grounds

Remember: Some Helpful Rules for nibbling new things – don't try unless you can fully identify the fruit, the leaves, the whole plant. Leave things in the bush for those that live in the bush. Grow some at home (or take some plants as gifts for those who have bigger yards and invite yourself back over at harvest time!).

These programs are so important because of the pressure to remove trees and vegetation in the urban area for development and the minimalist 'low maintenance' yards that are still fashionable. The advantages of having more urban vegetation are sometimes lost in the dust of another rebuild.

Weekdays: Volunteers meet every Friday between 10.30am and 3.30pm

Weekend workshops and activities: 1st Saturday of the month, 9:00am - 12:00pm



Sambucus australasica - native elderberry at the nursery



Phil's Q solved - native elderberry (*Polyscia sambucifolia*)

