

Urban Landcare Award

This award will be made to a group or individual delivering projects or initiatives that inspire and involve an urban population in Landcare. Projects may be anything from on-ground works to campaigns but must have demonstrable natural resource management outcomes connected with the city.

Project Summary

The Friends of Mount Majura, Mount Ainslie Weeders and Watson Woodland Working Group operate in a band of connected Nature Reserves adjacent to some of the ACT's oldest suburbs. Over the years the groups have worked together on a range of projects to manage the Reserves and to engage the local community with the reserves. The groups run a variety of walks and talks aimed at the general public as a way of educating the local community about the variety of life in the reserves.

The groups have also been strong lobbyists of government to ensure the protection and enhancement of our local environment. A recent example is their successful lobbying in regards to the North Watson development where they were able to modify the proposal to protect the adjacent reserves, including encouraging Village Building Co to protect the local wildlife by promoting a cat containment policy.

The groups have also worked together on a range of on-ground project from National Tree Day Plantings to Clean Up Australia Day programs. A great example of their ability to work together and with government agencies is their rabbit warren mapping project. The groups initially trained each other in the use of GPS units before working with the MCG and PCS to provide assistance with training volunteers. They then mapped warrens across the three sites and recorded the data in a format that could be used by PCS to assist in their control programs. This integrated approach was very successful and has become a model for how Landcare can assist rabbit control programs in the ACT.

"The Friends of Mount Majura, Mount Ainslie Weeders and Watson Woodlands Working Group are a great example of what can be achieved when Urban Landcare Groups work together with each other and government. The groups share resources, volunteers and knowledge to ensure their on-ground works compliments each other and that their local communities are engaged with the wonderful Reserves on their doorsteps." Andy Westcott, Catchment Coordinator, Molonglo Catchment Group.

1. Creating greater awareness and understanding of important natural resource and environmental issues amongst an urban community.

The three groups nominated work closely together to share knowledge, resources and enthusiasm amongst each other. The centrally-located Friends of Mount Majura is a vibrant Landcare group which runs walks through the nature reserve to give residents a chance to observe the fascinating range of Mount Majura's wildlife and flora. These walks are extremely well attended and are a fantastic way to link the urban community with the ecosystems of the nature reserves. The three groups also combine for a series of walks on World Environment Day with each group hosting a walk in their area, followed by the combined planting on Mount Majura.

The groups also hold monthly working bees which are open to the community including, in partnership with a wide range of groups, a very popular national tree day planting which typically attracts in excess of 100 people. Activities like these give the community an opportunity to learn about the reserves through active participation.

The three groups have all worked to promote a greater understanding of the importance of these areas to their communities. The groups grapple with issues arising from an urban environment such as garden plantings going bush, illegal dumping of garden debris, walking dogs off leash, domestic cats not adequately confined roaming the reserve, multitude of short-cuts and informal tracks causing erosion, pest birds associated with urban areas; and a lack of resources for key government departments resulting in inadequate management. The groups have worked together over many years to share knowledge of the impacts of these issues with the surrounding communities in an effort to see them minimised.

2. Generated partnerships support and community involvement projects.

The three groups work across a connected area of Nature Reserves adjacent to urban development. They identified early, that three groups working together is better than each group working independently when it comes to Landcare. They worked closely together over many years to share knowledge, resources and to promote each other's events. The groups are responsible for some outstanding projects which bring together partnerships with the ACT Government, Molonglo Catchment Group, North Canberra Community Council and many more to run National Tree Day planting and conduct research through projects such as *Explaining Change*, a project assessing the impact of herbivores on the reserve. The groups have worked together on a range of activities, some of these are:

- Clean up Australia Day programs every year since 2008
- Restoring the old Ainslie tip site with help from everyone from ADFA cadets to school children;
- Joint community and local school National Tree Day plantings since 2008 that have involved hundreds of volunteers;
- Yearly working party on a common area; and
- Programs to mitigate the impacts of development on the northwest of Mount Majura.

For many years, Watson Woodland Working Group have been trialling a range of techniques to improve the success of revegetation projects, rabbit management and even vandal prevention. Their partnership with the other groups has seen the successful methods spread across the nature reserves and improve the success of the groups' work.

At the last ACT Landcare Awards, the Rabbit Mapping program undertaken by these three groups was nominated for an award. The project involved training volunteers in the use of GPS units and then mapping warrens across the three areas. The groups leveraged partnerships with PCS, MCG and other Landcare groups to train volunteers and to map warrens. The project was a great success and demonstrated the positive outcomes in conservation when community, Parkcare and PCS work together. Volunteers from the three groups spent 745 hours mapping and over 260 hours training, processing the data and project coordination.

While the groups have developed projects with a range of partners it is their partnership with each other that is to be commended. The groups' collaboration, ensuring a flow of knowledge, resources and enthusiastic volunteers, is a model for community groups everywhere.

3. Improved long-term environmental outcomes for urban areas suffering from the impacts of increasing population.

Through projects such as *Explaining Change* and the series of walks held on Mount Majura the groups have been able to demonstrate to the community the fragile nature of the reserves and their value. The regular walks held on Mount Majura are a fantastic way to educate the local community about the ecosystems operating on their door step. They give the community a reason to rally behind these three groups when it comes time carry out the on-ground works to provide habitat for the Swift Parrot they have just learned about or to clear weeds to allow room for the native wild-flowers they now value. These education campaigns also provide the community with a way to interact with the reserves in a passive way, they are not excluded from them but encouraged to walk along designated tracks to take in the area. This is vital in the reserves' protection as the community can feel a sense of ownership and a sense of place and a responsibility to protect the reserves from illegal activities.

The groups' lobbying of government has also improved the long-term environmental outcomes for the ACT. The groups have worked together to lobby Village Building Company to ensure the North Watson developments' impacts on the nature reserve were minimised, prepared joint submissions for the Investigation into Canberra Nature Park, had areas returned to nature reserve and kept pressure on government to fund rabbit and weed control along with supporting the essential services delivered by PCS.

The groups work tirelessly to clear weeds, plant natives and protect them from the ever-present rabbits and kangaroos. Through their monthly working bees and annual planting events the groups safeguard the reserves against the pressures from an increasing urban population.

Their combined efforts educating the community and carrying out on-ground works have undoubtedly improved the long-term environmental outcomes for the reserves and the ACT community.

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