

# Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch

## *Clean Up Australia Day Paddle*

by Antia Brademann

On Sunday 6 March, a team of seven participated in the Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch-hosted Clean Up Australia Day paddle, cleaning up litter in the Murrumbidgee River between Pine Island and Kambah Pool, a spectacular stretch of river also known as Red Rock Gorge. The team, comprising of four paddlers and a guided raft to ferry out the litter, stopped collecting half-way down with the raft and various kayaks quickly filling to capacity.

Shoes of all kinds, clothing, cans and bottles, punctured inflatable rafts/inner tubes, snack packaging and of course the insidious plastic bag were the most common items removed from the river and the immediate bank area.



“The majority of the litter we found probably comes from people enjoying the river, rather than being washed down from another point upstream,” said Antia

Brademann, the Clean Up Australia Day site supervisor.

“Taking our rubbish home when we are out on the river is one of the most immediate ways we can protect our environment. As we found, the litter doesn’t just ‘go away’, or get flushed out downstream, and it is certainly not regularly collected by ‘someone else’.

“Instead, litter is deposited in stream or on the immediate bank where it is hard to access, can be easily remobilised, interfere with native wildlife and generally degrade the quality of the river environment. This is a real shame, especially along this stretch of river which is greatly enjoyed for its natural beauty,” she said.

Despite finding much more litter than they would have liked, all members of the team



finished the paddle uninjured and happily exhausted, having had some pleasant paddling

along the way, although water levels were a little low.

“I had a blast and the scenery was brilliant,” said Waterwatcher for Pine Island and Kambah Pool sites, Ian Bell. “I had no idea what lay between the monitoring sites at Kambah Pool and Pine Island. You can only see so much from the walking trail and after seeing those bigger rapids I now have a bit of respect for that section of river you can see on guided trips.”

All agreed it was a worthwhile day and there should be more opportunities to allow people to experience the river and make a difference. The event is an example of positive ways that community members can become involved in helping to look after their local waterways and catchments through the support of organisations such as Waterwatch and Clean Up Australia Day.

“If you want to participate or have an idea for an event of your own, contact your local Waterwatch coordinator,” said Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch Facilitator, Tanya Noakes.



## What's Happening

### Waterwatch Fridge Door

(All programs are free and open to the public.)

#### Waterwatch QA/QC and Wetland Talk

16 April 2 pm — 4 pm  
Gunghalin Scout Hall

**Wear Boots and Long Pants! As we will have a look at the wetland!**

#### Waterwatch QA/QC

17 April 2 pm — 4 pm  
Bredbo Community Centre

#### Holiday program

Ages 5-12 years  
Dickson Library  
Friday 29 April, 10.30 am — 11.30 am

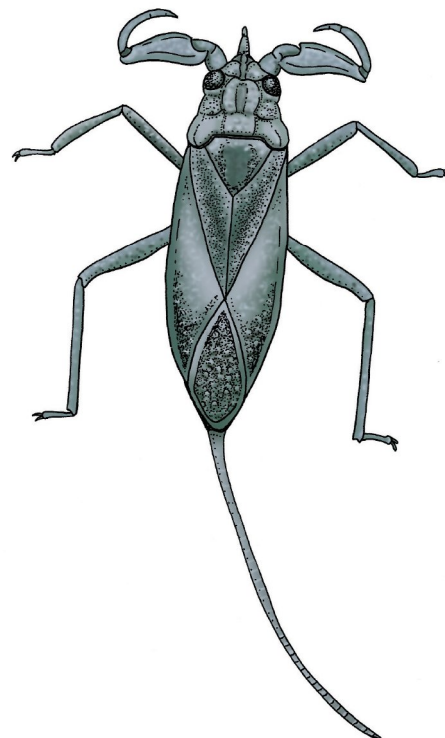
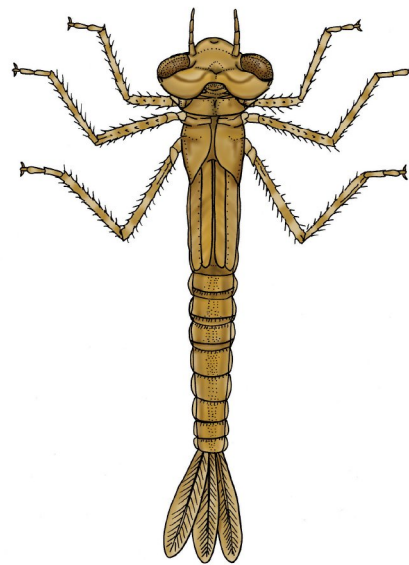
#### Bug Training

28 August  
Location: TBA

### Water Bugs Holiday Program

There are things in our water! Amazing, otherworldly things! Fierce creatures, and butt breathers, scorpions, aquatic tigers and damsels that swim like mermaids!

Book through ACT Libraries and join Waterwatch coordinators to meet the aquatic mini-monsters that call Canberra home.



### QA/QC Trainings

Upper Murrumbidgee (UM) Waterwatch will again offer quality assessment and quality control training for Waterwatchers and community members interested in becoming Waterwatchers at two venues on the weekend of 16-17 April.

Quality assurance and control are the twin pillars upon which UM Waterwatch makes this happen and gives the community an informed voice on the management of our most precious resource, water.

We have nearly over 150 sites being monitored by QA/QC volunteers and it is because of their hard work and yearly training that Waterwatch data is taken seriously by government and industry.

If you cannot attend, and it has been a year since you last trained, please contact your local Waterwatch coordinator to arrange a convenient time for a one-on-one training session.

Good data makes us all look good.

## *News from the Cooma Region*

### *Action for Clean Water Project Moves Ahead*

The *Action for Clean Water Project* is moving ahead. A contractor/project manager is currently being sought to produce a strategic document with on-ground works identified from Tantangara to the Cotter.

On-ground works in the Numeralla are commencing, funded by ActewAGL Source Water Protection Program and MCMA.

A Land and Property Management Authority grant for \$255,000 over three years has also been received for work on soil erosion at Rose Valley in the Numeralla area.



### *Rehabilitation of the Upper Bidgee*

Flow down the Murrumbidgee River between Tantangara Dam and Mittagang Crossing near Cooma has been dramatically reduced for nearly 50 years. Tantangara Dam captures and diverts 98% of flows into the Snowy Mountain Scheme. River flows downstream of Tantangara are currently dependent on tributary inflows and releases from Tantangara.

Riparian releases are relatively small, in the order of about 50 ML day. Environmental releases have also been small to date. Under the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed, the maximum volume that can be delivered to the Upper Murrumbidgee River as an environmental release in a given year is 27 GL. This is not enough to meet the environmental flow recommendations made by the Expert Panel in 1996.

The winter-spring-summer of 2011-2012 is scheduled to be a rather special year for the Upper Murrumbidgee River. It will receive an environmental volume of 43 G. This is a one-off situation, unlikely to be repeated unless institutional arrangements change.

Environmental releases from Tantangara Dam will take advantage of this special situation to provide flow components that have been

lacking from this upstream reach for the last 50 years. This will be a sustained flow at the maximum rate that can be operationally achieved in early spring to rehabilitate the channel (7 days at 1500 ML day), and an overall flow regime intended to encourage spawning in the endangered fish Macquarie Perch.

The Snowy Scientific Committee believes that the releases of 2011-2012 represents a real opportunity for river researchers, community groups and students to test ideas and hypotheses relevant to river rehabilitation, or as a real-life case study for a class exercise on a high flow event.

A calendar of environmental release schedule from Tantangara Dam, showing the timing of the spring peak, will be available for 2011-2012 after 30 April 2011 on the Snowy Hydro Ltd website (Home Page / Water / Water Releases / Tantangara Dam Montane Release Chart) or via the Manager (Water) at <http://www.snowyhydro.com.au/> For background information on environmental flows and the Upper Murrumbidgee River, see reports on Adequacy and Flow Recommendations, on Records page at <http://www.snowyssc.org/>



## *Community Gambusia Project Begins*

It's game on against gambusia in our region. Over the last month, interested community members have met and nominated a number of sites for control.

"We need to assess ponds then we can prioritise them for control," said Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch Facilitator, Tanya Rucosky Noakes. "We are looking for ponds at the top of catchment that aren't too big and are accessible for seine netting."

Using a technique adapted from a Victorian project, gambusia's biology will be used against these menaces.

"Their populations fall in in the winter and the survivors love warm shallow areas," said ACT



Government aquatic ecologist Matt Beitzel. "With a bit of planning, we should be able to net them out."

Contact Tanya if you would like to have a site assessed for potential inclusion in this project.

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## *Giralang Gears up to Improve Pond*

After the high flows, high sediment loads caused by development in the new northern suburbs and large amounts of rubbish had resulted in a very 'stressed' looking wetland in Giralang.

The Ginninderra Catchment Group (GCG) organised a community BBQ to give local residents the opportunity to discuss the future management of the wetland and gauge interest in forming a wetland carers or landcare group for the area.

More than 40 concerned residents joined Mark Jakabsons and Matthew Beitzel from the ACT Government's Conservation, Planning and Research unit who gave an electro fishing demonstration.

Of the many problems facing our wetlands, implementation and enforcement of control measures to limit sediment inflow from new development areas and a review of gross pollutant trap maintenance were the two common points of discussion raised by locals.

Locals were also concerned about the habit value of the wetland and the observed decline in bird, frog and fish species.

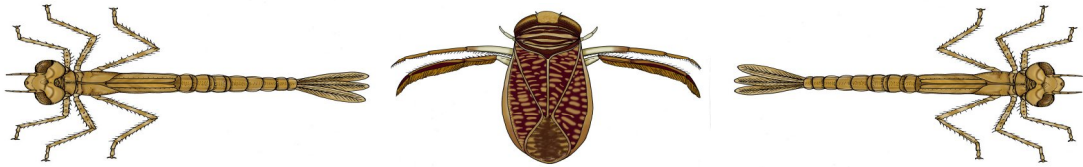


Matt and Mark prowling the wetlands for invasive fish.

GCG Waterwatch Coordinator Damon Cusack said he was pleased with the attendance and subsequent interest in forming a carers group for the area.

"To get this many people from just the surrounding houses shows just how important our wetlands are for the community," he said.

The GCG will be hosting a meeting of interested local residents to assist in the formation of a local carers group. Anyone interested in joining should contact the Ginninderra Catchment Group for more details.



## *Damsels and Dragons*

*By Stephen Skinner*



It has been a very good season for Dragonflies. The large green and brown ones, the Emperors, Archtails and Tigers, have been common at any wet spot. The powder blue

press but they are truly wonderful to see in action. Maybe it's time a few of the more familiar ones did get some names. Should

Skimmers and bright red or orange Perchers are easy to spot. Every bed of reeds has plenty of chrysalises of numerous kinds.



Likewise the damselflies (ringtails, river damsels and more) are very widespread this year. The eye-catching red of the Aurora Bluetail is fine...until you also see one of the tiny Pygmy Wisps and wonder if things have shrunk before your eyes! They also play their



the portly water boatmen with the big feathery legs be given a name reflecting their shape, their green striped cousins another name, and the dapper show-off backswimmers be called 007 bugs?

At present, aquatic macroinvertebrates are in optimum numbers, especially where the rivers and creeks have had a chance to settle down (not the Queanbeyan below Googong!) and can be watched in and on the water. March and April are the usual times for Autumn Macroinvertebrate Surveys. If you would like to have a try this year, let us know well in advance, and we will loan you a kit and some identification charts.



part in the web of life...not all hunters go unharmed themselves.

Dragonflies and damselflies have common names, as do the mayflies, among the fisher folk. So many of the other water bugs don't get much



## *Platypus Page*

### Wandering Water-Rats

Along with a thriving platypus population, the Queanbeyan River supports large numbers of native water-rats (or rakali), Australia's ecological equivalent to the otter. This has created a wonderful opportunity for Platypus Count volunteers to monitor water-rat activity at the same sites where platypus activity is regularly being tracked.

Water-rats were most often spotted in May, when the average sighting frequency across both years was 0.22 (equivalent to one animal being seen in roughly five visits to observation sites along the river). In both 2009 and 2010, the number of water-rats seen in May actually exceeded the number of platypus seen (the only month when this was true).

By comparison, only about half as many rakali sightings were recorded from June through August, when one animal was seen in eight to nine site-visits on average. At other times of year, the frequency of water-rat sightings dropped even further, with one water-rat observed on average in 20 site-visits.

How can this pattern of seasonal variation best be explained?

Although a great deal remains to be learned about water-rat ecology, studies carried out in Victoria and New South Wales have indicated that these animals mainly breed in spring and summer, though juveniles are sometimes born in other seasons. In favourable years, it is believed that two or three litters are likely to be produced in fairly close succession, with three or four siblings typically found in a given litter.

Water-rats are known to be fairly short-lived animals which are unlikely to survive in the wild beyond the age of three to four years.

Nonetheless, in the case of a relatively high density population like that found along the Queanbeyan River, it's likely that far more young water-rats will be born each year than can be accommodated comfortably through natural



attrition of adults.

At some point, many young animals will be forced, either in response to aggressive interactions or simply because food resources are starting to be stretched thin, to leave their natal area in order to look for a suitable place to settle elsewhere.

It follows that one reasonable explanation for the occurrence of a late-autumn spike in water-rat sightings is that it's related to juvenile dispersal, with large numbers of young water-rats predicted to start moving along the length of the river as water temperatures begin to drop and animals born in spring and early summer start to mature.

In fact, it wouldn't be at all surprising if dispersing juveniles are more likely to be seen during daylight hours than resident water-rats, given that it's in the dispersers' best interests to be out and about when their highly territorial elders are most likely to be asleep in burrows.

It will also be of great interest to confirm whether the seasonal trends in sightings described near Queanbeyan occur elsewhere in the species' range. Anyone living outside the Canberra area who sees water-rats regularly is there fore encouraged to contact the Australian Platypus Conservancy to discuss the possibility of recording observations.

## *Platypus Page*

### *Going with the Flow*

Have platypus populations been adversely affected by the post-storm flows that have broken the banks of so many rivers and creeks in eastern Australia this summer?

Although our knowledge of how platypus populations cope with flooding is far from complete, available information suggests that the answer probably depends on both the timing and severity of local flood events.

For example, it's possible that platypus might actually tend to benefit in the case of minor to moderate flooding, if silt that has accumulated in the course of a drought is dispersed to reveal a more diverse channel substrate, or additional woody debris in the form of logs and large branches is washed into the channel.

On the other hand, as the strength and duration of a flood increases, it's progressively more likely to erode banks severely and deposit

the resulting sediment into pools, sometimes resulting in massive degradation of platypus habitat.

The likelihood that platypus are killed by drowning or aspiration pneumonia, or that they experience prolonged food stress after bottom-dwelling invertebrate populations are washed away, is also expected to increase with the magnitude of a flood event.

With respect to timing, young platypus may be subject to widespread mortality if flooding occurs when juveniles are still confined to nesting burrows or have only recently started to hone their swimming skills. Along the Shoalhaven River in New South Wales, juveniles failed to be detected in surveys carried out in March 1992 after floods occurred in late December and early January, despite the fact that many adult females had been lactating earlier in December.

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### *Country Platypus Victims of Litter Too*

Litter is often seen as a problem mainly confined to major urban areas. Two recent incidents in Victoria have highlighted the fact that discarded items are also hazardous to wildlife living near country towns.



In the first case, an adult platypus was found on the banks of the Ovens River at Bright with an elastic hair band cutting into his neck and shoulder. In the second, a sub-adult platypus was picked up beside the creek running through Traralgon with a hospital identification wrist-band looped around his neck and a rubber band around his body. Both animals were reluctant to move when approached, presumably because it hurt so much to do so.

Fortunately, local veterinarians were able to remove the offending items and treat the

wounds caused by the litter. Both patients started moving freely as soon as the litter was removed and were then cleared for a return to the wild.

To safeguard platypus, it is essential to avoid dropping litter near creeks and rivers. It's also a good idea to cut through all plastic, rubber or metal loops at home before recycling them, rendering these items harmless to wildlife if they do accidentally enter a waterway.

# ACT Waterwatch

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## What is Waterwatch?

Waterwatch is a national community water quality monitoring program that encourages all Australians to become involved and active in the protection and management of their waterways and catchments.

## Who is Waterwatch?

Waterwatch involves local community groups such as Landcare, Park Care and Catchment groups, as well as residents, schools and landowners who regularly monitor the water quality of local creeks, wetlands, lakes and rivers.

## Why monitor?

Healthy catchments produce healthy ecosystems with happy fish, frogs, birds, plants, macro-invertebrates and people. Waterwatch aims to create awareness of water quality issues by involving all members of the community and by forming partnerships between the Waterwatch group and water authorities, resources management authorities, business and industry.

## First step

If you are interested in improving the health of your waterway and meeting or forming a group of like-minded individuals, you should begin by contacting your local Waterwatch Coordinator.

## Making a difference

Water quality information collected throughout a catchment provides a picture of the health of your waterways. Waterwatch groups have initiated many positive, community based conservation activities such as creek restoration, willow removal, removing litter from waterways, eradicating weeds, development of habitats, and reducing the use of pesticides and other pollutants.

## ACT Waterwatch is supported by the ACT and Australian Governments

Waterwatch is proudly supported by:



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