

River to River Corridors Project: Habitat-Friendly Gardens Guide

COUNCIL NAME

Ryde City Council and
Hunter's Hill Council

WEB ADDRESS

ryde.nsw.gov.au
huntershill.nsw.gov.au

SIZE

46.46 square
kilometres

POPULATION

127, 012 combined

Overview

The River to River Corridors Project was a 3-year wildlife corridors project that utilised, for Australia, a unique combination of scientific bird surveys and an ecological and social values survey of households to design a community engagement based project. The project aimed to reconnect vegetation and wildlife corridors across 9 kilometres of public and private land between the Lane Cove and Parramatta Rivers.

Rationale

The City of Ryde and Hunters Hill Council identified significant gaps in bushland and garden vegetation connectivity across both LGAs, and it was established that the two councils would partner to enhance and reconnect 9 kilometres of fragmented, vegetated space to improve wildlife habitat focussing on small birds with other smaller fauna benefitting.

Objectives

The River to River Corridor project has 3 main objectives:

- Restore functional value and connectivity to two bushland corridors.
- Effectively encourage participation and engage with the community to strategically plant locally native species within corridors to enhance connectivity.
- To raise community awareness on wildlife corridors and generate interest on wildlife corridors through the production of educational materials, so as to enhance on-ground planting works that connected areas along 9km of project wildlife corridors.

Implementation

Over 2,000 households across the two LGA's were surveyed about their ecological and social values. The survey showed there was little to no community knowledge on the function and purpose of wildlife corridors, particularly regarding depleted species richness and community sizes of small, native birds locally. Ecological bird surveys at 40 sites across the two LGAs indicated that populations of small birds were disconnected and their survival threatened.

The community engagement strategy was developed considering:

- barriers for engagement such as previous relationships (positive and negative) with council,
- age considerations (catering for older residents as well as younger demographics); and
- culturally and socially diverse residents across both LGAs.

A strong focus was needed on community environmental education to supplement on the ground works in parks and the creation of 'stepping stone' corridor habitats also across residential areas, by encouraging corridor residents to plant native species in their gardens to enhance fauna habitat.

Community engagement strategies were specifically tailored for each of the project zones and their differing community attitudes toward the environment. Survey findings identified the need for strengthening of local relationships, building new community partnerships and in providing education on wildlife corridors and habitat as being the key to the success of the project.



Project officers doorknocked and/or delivered invitation letters and brochures to community education days on eight occasions to 1,800 targeted households in six zones along 9km of corridors. The community education days gave the residents an opportunity to learn about local flora and fauna, planting for habitat, and maintenance techniques. Invited householders received 5-9 native plants per occasion, for planting in their gardens as 'stepping-stone' habitats. The project used local providence plants.

The project website was continuously updated, and the project included a pilot Facebook page to reach out particularly to the 18-40 years group in the City of Ryde, and linked readers back to the project webpage.

City of Ryde and Hunters Hill Council established a funding partnership with the Catchment Management Authority, and received support by nine bushcare volunteer groups involved in planting and sharing knowledge with residents, and who will assist in continuing the legacy of the project. Two of three school grounds identified as 'bottle necks' planted corridor vegetation. More schools planted on National Tree Days, and several local corporations volunteered on planting days.

The comprehensive Habitat-friendly Gardens brochure developed in partnership between the project ecologist and staff, and local specialists and volunteer groups, to fill a void in public knowledge regarding enhancement of local corridor vegetation and how to create wildlife habitat in residential gardens. The brochure was the main tool used for the success of the project in engaging with residents and partnering organisations through increased understanding of garden enhancement.

Outcomes

Community engagement and education contributed to enhancing vegetation and wildlife connectivity of fragmented corridor areas across 9km of private and community land between Lane Cove and Parramatta Rivers.

- Over 900 community members participated in planting works, planting 16,000 natives.
- Events included 7 community education days; 6 National Tree Days; 16 corporate and community groups; and six participating schools. One school project completed a corridor segment of 1,100m² using 4,400 plants.
- Ecological and social value outcomes guided contents of the comprehensive, project brochure 'Habitat-friendly Gardens' (the Guide), distributed to 1,500 properties as an education tool aimed at guiding residents on how to create wildlife habitats by planting natives.

Survey responses from project households pre and post engagement provided statistics on project successes:

- 41.4% 'actively used information about small birds and other fauna, and habitats provided by the project for future garden planning, plant selection or building structure for small bird or fauna habitat.
- 55% said the project had 'considerably' (highest score) 'increased my level of concern, education & knowledge for the environment in general'.
- 35% showed an interest in more actively getting involved in community conservation activities.
- 40% said that participation in the project had 'influenced the types of plants I choose for my garden to be more appropriate for small birds and other fauna'. Increased community efforts to plant natives and create habitats that support small native birds and other fauna, in addition to those participants encouraging neighbours, will increase local community knowledge over time about the function and importance of vegetation corridors for small native birds and other fauna.

Challengers/Opportunities

Challenges

- One key challenge with this project was engaging a very socially, culturally and age-diverse community across two very different LGAs to promote biodiversity. The challenge was how to best do this with limited time frames, education, staff resourcing and funding.
- Generating interest on an issue such as small bird habitat, where there is little understanding or prior education. Planning project time to allow direct engagement with community whilst completing on the

REFERENCES

Habitat-friendly Gardens Guide

ground planting works for corridor connection was needed. The project ensured it centred its planting days around providing a diverse array of activities to generate community interest and focusing on education about the importance of wildlife corridors.

Opportunities

- The opportunity for Council to maximise project education on Wildlife Corridors speaking publicly at various events targeting both schools and community. Project Officers were able to use findings from the Ecological and Social Values survey to target guest speaking appearance information to these audiences and effectively educate community and distribute education via the Guide.
- Providing research and educational opportunity to students across Sydney and NSW as was demonstrated throughout the project duration with many schools accessing the project website, social media channel, requesting copies of the Guide and contacting the project for corridor information.
- The 'Habitat-friendly Gardens' Guide will continue the project's educational legacy for wildlife corridors.
- Design considerations of the Guide, such as the slimline pocket fitting shape and magnet on the rear of it was for residents to take with them when purchasing their plants and to keep on the fridge as a reference when working with their gardens.
- Further programs can be developed building upon the previous works and utilising the project's previous social values and scientific survey findings. The Guide can also be used to educate community, further expanding the grant corridor works and 'stepping stone' areas.

Contact

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