

# Upper River Torrens Landcare Group Inc. NEWS



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## UPPER RIVER TORRENS LANDCARE GROUP

### Habitat Recovery Alliance Respond Rapidly to Cudlee Creek Fires

The December 2019 Cudlee Creek bushfires destroyed over 21,000 hectares, 84 homes and 21 properties. As an initial response, the Upper River Torrens Landcare Group (URLTG) committee members began sowing seed into trays to provide replacement vegetation for the affected areas.



## Habitat Recovery Alliance



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A social media post asking for assistance in the nursery and/or for growers resulted in over 600 emails offering help. Many teachers and school principals also responded wanting to get students involved. This project has grown rapidly and offers a practical way for the wider community to support the

A project of the Upper River Torrens Landcare Group in partnership with



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recovery process for wildlife, habitat and the people who live in these areas. A decision was made by the URLTG committee to build an alliance and collaborate with other local "like minded" groups to further develop the Project. The Project's aim is to recreate the habitat which has been destroyed and the participating groups decided on the name "Habitat Recovery Alliance".

The collaborating groups are:

- ◇ Upper River Torrens Landcare Group ◇ Kersbrook Landcare Group
- ◇ Mt Pleasant Natural Resource Centre ◇ Barossa Bush Gardens
- ◇ Cudlee Creek Fire- Garden Recovery ◇ Seeding Natives Inc.
- ◇ Mt Pleasant Farmers Market Inc.

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## Habitat Recovery Alliance Respond Rapidly to Cudlee Creek Fires

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Representatives from each of the groups are working together to continue to facilitate the Farmers Market seedling workshops, to provide support for volunteer growers, and to coordinate later planting activities. Planting workshops were held during the Saturday morning Mount Pleasant Farmers Markets each weekend in February.

In addition, we will soon invite people who are interested in getting some revegetation established on their properties to respond to a questionnaire.

This will allow us to assess needs and priorities in order to provide appropriate assistance.

The volunteer response for this project has been amazing, and to all the

volunteers we want to say a massive **Thank You!!!**

We could not have done it without you.



### Upcoming Events

**\*\*STOP PRESS \*\***Due to the recent coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak, and ongoing daily changes to government requirements in attempts to stop the spread of this pandemic, many events are being cancelled or changing format. As most of you will be aware, the Mt Pleasant Show has been cancelled. To keep up with the latest events and changes, please see our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/Upper River Torrens Landcare Group Inc.](https://www.facebook.com/Upper River Torrens Landcare Group Inc.)



# Upper River Torrens Landcare Group Inc. NEWS



## UPPER RIVER TORRENS LANDCARE GROUP

### **Surviving a Fire - A Landcarer's Perspective** by Tiffany Harding

On Friday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2019, after a week of heatwave conditions, the Cudlee Creek fires raced through the Lobethal region under catastrophic weather conditions. The fire struck our 22 acre Kenton Valley property at 5pm, after the wind change, and thankfully no longer fanned by the strong gusting northerlies. We first saw the flames creeping across the paddocks from the south, hitting our southern boundary shelter belt. The shelter belt seemed to slow the fire considerably, as it stayed in there for what seemed like a long time. Apparently because the shelter belt lacked middle storey, with only pulse grazed grasses underneath, the flames never reached up sufficiently to cause a full canopy fire.

Eventually the fire moved out from the shelter belt, across our recently slashed horse paddocks and towards the house and garden. After an initial panic upon seeing the flames, the horses had settled and stood fairly quietly in a small irrigated area whilst my husband Rob kept the flames away from them with the fire hose. Rob and I spent the next 6 hours fighting the fire with the fire hoses and when necessary, garden hose, buckets and even fire extinguishers. The fire would come in from one direction,

we would get that under control, and then the wind would swing around and the fire would come in from another direction. It came within a few metres of our car shed, one corner of the horse stable caught alight but Rob was able to put it out, and I discovered the goose yard on fire but managed to get the geese out before anyone was roasted! Finally the property was fully burnt all around, and we sat out on our lawn for a drink and rest. The experience was eerie, with fires glowing all around us in trees and structures on the hillsides, and the sound of explosions as the fire devastated other properties.

We managed to save all of our buildings, the majority of the garden, and we never really felt that our house came under threat. We firmly believe that our large, well-watered garden filled with exotic trees was a major factor in that, and our only garden losses were of unirrigated native plants on the periphery. A couple of gum trees with hollows smouldered for days, and a good week after the fire we had a flare up in an old stump in the paddock that had been burning underground for the whole week.



Above, our house and garden fully surrounded by blackened paddocks, and below, our hay paddock green after the rain but the neighbouring (heavily stocked) paddocks are parched and dry.



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## UPPER RIVER TORRENS LANDCARE GROUP

### Surviving a Fire - A Landcarer's Perspective cont.

Similar to our southern shelter belt, our other shelter belts burnt at the bases but not up into the canopy. Our patch of revegetated scrub at the top of the hill burnt a lot hotter, as it contained dense thickets of the prickly *Acacia paradoxa*. We did not completely lose any of our few living big red gums, but unfortunately a number of stunning old specimens in our neighbour's paddocks were completely burnt. The next day Rob commented that it seemed that half the district's birds seemed to be taking refuge in the oasis of our garden. Most of our regular wrens, honeyeaters and magpies seemed largely unperturbed by the fires, and two koalas now sheltered there too.

The 62mm or rain we received a few weeks later in January resulted in the most remarkable transformation of the landscape. Our hay paddock, consisting largely of exotic perennials like cocksfoot and brome and which had been fully blackened by the fires like the other paddocks, bounced

back incredibly well and now in March is green and around 20-30cm high. The horses and cows have been in smaller than usual paddocks and contained only with electric fencing on the southern half of the property whilst we work on replacing our fences, so those paddocks are looking more heavily grazed than we would normally be comfortable with due to the loss of standing paddock feed. However, they never suffered from erosion with the January rain, a testament to soil held together with good perennial pasture root systems thanks to our ongoing light stocking rates.

We have been excited to see many *Hardenbergia violaceae* germinants popping up where we have never seen any before, apparently triggered by the heat of the fire. We are also seeing *Acacia pycnantha* (Golden Wattle) seedlings, and many badly burnt grevilleas are re-shooting from the base, as is the *Bursaria spinosa* (Christmas Bush). Of course the Eucalypts are re-shooting madly. We are generally very pleased with how well our property survived the fire, and suspect that was partly due to good location and aspect, but largely due to good preparation and sound land management principles.

### AGM Hosts Guest Speaker from SA Seed Conservation Centre

November's AGM saw guest speaker Dr Jenny Guerin from the SA Seed Conservation Centre at the Botanic Gardens speak to a fascinated group. Established in 2002, the centre helps to protect the state's threatened plant species from extinction, whilst supporting the restoration of habitats around South Australia. 1 in 4 native South Australian plant species (more than 1,000) are threatened due to loss of habitat and competition with introduced species. Throughout the centre's program, wild provenance seeds have been collected from regions across the state and safeguarded in long term storage at subzero temperatures. Approximately half the species in the state (about 2,000) and nearly 70 per cent of the state's threatened species are currently stored in the seed bank and form part of the living collections at Adelaide Botanic Garden. By 2020 the centre aims to have at least 90 per cent of our state's threatened plant species in the seed bank.

Studying the seed biology of each species is an ongoing requirement for curating the collection. A large component of the research undertaken at the Seed Conservation Centre is to investigate methods to overcome dormancy mechanisms in native seeds so they can be used for restoration. Currently, extensive work is being undertaken to enable the ex situ growth of native orchids which are dependant on a mycorrhizal (fungal) partner for seed germination. The work is exceptionally challenging, involving novel methods and the collection, maintenance and storage not only of tiny dust-like orchid seeds but also fungal isolates. Some promising results are occurring at this stage.

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## On Ground Works Project: Winton Road, Birdwood by Matt Sackey



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In early 2019, and with the help of the NRM Board, we installed 1.4km of stock fencing around a 22 acre section of our 81 acre property. This area is mainly Stringybark forest, however we also included some grassland areas on the advice of an ecologist. The fencing is to exclude livestock from the area with the aim of letting it recover from the set-stocked grazing that took place here before we bought the property.

This protected area contains typical Stringybark forest plants, including Stringybark and Manna Gum trees, and a range of understorey plants, including Sweet Bursaria, Xanthorrhoea, Isopogons and more. We have also identified more than a dozen native orchids that grow in different places around the site. The grassland areas include many exotic species, however some native grasses including Kangaroo Grass, and some spear grass varieties persist in some spots – more work to be done on fixing this will come in the future.

The biggest challenge we have in this protected area is a number of significant and well established stands of Gorse. Our work to date has focussed mainly on preventing any further spread, and we have also made a start on eradicating it in a couple of spots. We are still experimenting and learning what works best in different situations, but we are getting some wins and making progress. We successfully applied for a grant from the Upper Torrens Landcare Group to assist with the Gorse control, and will very soon have a specialist contractor on-site to perform the initial treatment of gorse in the most sensitive area where it is growing closely in amongst the desirable native plants that we want to retain. The assistance from the Landcare Group not only speeds up the work to eradicate the Gorse, but having a specialist contractor doing the work also minimises any harm to the native flora. As an added bonus, I get to look on and maybe learn a thing or two about how the experts do it!

## Managing Woody Weeds in a Watercourse Field Day

On Saturday 14 December 2019, around 20 people met on a property near Birdwood with the River Torrens traversing through. Caroline Dorr provided a fantastic understanding and overview about the River Torrens, its history, and some very useful facts about environmental flows and native fish. Jim Donnelly gave some very useful and practical information about control methods, herbicides and wetting agents, and how to prioritise the work.



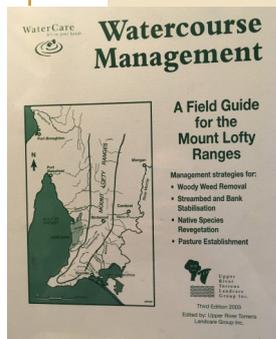
March 2020

# Upper River Torrens Landcare Group Inc. NEWS

## Updating 'Watercourse Management—A Field Guide for the Mount Lofty Ranges'



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For more than 15 years the *Watercourse Management – A field guide for the Mount Lofty Ranges* (at left) has provided a wealth of information for landholders engaged in managing watercourses.

It has also been an essential reference document for watercourse management practitioners working with landholders and land managers planning and undertaking projects within watercourses on their properties. The current version has not been updated since 2003 and contains out-of-date references to agencies, policies and legislation. The front cover is also looking very dated and due for a revamp. Therefore, providing the wider community with an online 2020 version will be greatly beneficial for broader distribution and allow for easier updates.

The immense value of this document as a practical educational tool has been recognised by the Natural Resources Adelaide Mt Lofty Ranges (NR AMLR) landscape practitioners and Water Management Services teams, which have provided the grant funds available through the River Torrens Recovery Project, to update the document.

As the creators and owners of the document, the Upper River Torrens Landcare Group (URLTG) are undertaking the review and update of the guide which will be completed by September 2020.



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## Porter Scrub Conservation Park Update

Porter Scrub has been completely burnt and is closed until further notice. In early February, Kim Thompson and others were invited to take a walk through the park with the district Fire Ecologist to see the devastation. There were parts of the park that we were able to walk through that we have never seen before. It was very interesting to see the terrain with no vegetation, including inspecting some of the historic mine sites. As expected, there is some hope for regeneration, with new life emerging through the blackened forest. Surprisingly, there were still lots of birds around.