

Friends of Lord Howe Island

Newsletter No.33 Autumn 2012



Target of removal of primary Climbing asparagus from Transit Hill block reached!!

As reported in the last newsletter (no. 32) the August 2011 FLHI weeding group reached the end of the mature Climbing asparagus on the Edie's Glen site on Transit Hill. This has been a long project, commencing in October 2007. Eighteen groups worked in the area over this time, contributing a total of 6,076 hours. A total follow up is still needed, and groups for 2012 and beyond will carry out follow up over areas at this site worked in 2011, then move to systematically cover all areas worked on so far.



The large infestations of Climbing asparagus from Edie's Glen have gone!! But when infestations are this dense, there is follow up needed for seedlings plus resprouts that are inevitable during the primary work. But certainly progress working through the areas will now be very rapid.



Group leader for the April 2012 weed trip will be Gwenda Lister (above left). Gwenda is well known to many Friends of Lord Howe weeders, as she came on her first trip in 2001 and has been every year since - making a total of eleven trips.

For the July 7 to 14 trip Robert Coenraads will be the leader; and Bill McDonald will be there for the August 26 to September 2 trip.

Friends of LHI Weeding trips for 2012

Dates for 2012 weed tours are:
April 28 to May 5
July 7 to 14
Aug 26 to Sept 2
see back page for a booking form

Friends weeders in April will enjoy the Providence petrel courtship flights.



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The Friends of Lord Howe Island 2012 AGM will be held at the Museum, 5.00pm on 12 July.

Note from our President Chris Murray

Dear Friends,

Only a week ago, I completed the walk from Government House to the top of Transit Hill, and it was fantastic to see so much of the area either side of the track completely free from climbing and ground asparagus. From the summit of Transit Hill, I walked back towards Clear Place and was equally impressed by the work done by the Lord Howe Island Board Weed Team.

At the time, I felt emotionally quite overwhelmed because I kept thinking of a similar walk I had taken about twenty years ago in the company of another Island resident. At the time, we had both viewed with total dismay the thickets of climbing and ground asparagus everywhere. My companion's comment about the prospect of ever rejuvenating the forest was stark: "It's gone" he said "...totally gone." which I gloomily took to mean, "Gone beyond saving or salvage."

How wrong could we both be! To paraphrase the old Chinese proverb which says "A Journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step" we might say that "A battle to save a beautiful forest starts with pulling a few weeds, but never giving up." Congratulations to the Friends Groups for an outstanding effort.



I am sure it will give great pleasure to those visiting this year to be doing follow-up remedial work, pulling or poisoning the odd bit of asparagus here or there, where once there were only impenetrable thickets of these noxious weeds. I look forward to meeting you in the months to come. Let's keep up the good work!



More weeding effort by Rosny College students

Even though the final 2011 Friends of LHI weeding tour was in August, there was one more effort on the asparagus fern on Transit Hill for 2011.

From 3rd to 10th September, a group of students from Rosny College in Hobart were on a week field trip to Lord Howe Island as a prize for winning the first *Tasmanian Envirothon*, sponsored by the Tasmanian group *The Bookend Trust*. Teams from different schools competed against each other on topics such as wildlife, forest ecology, soils and aquatics.

The Rosny College students had a program of walks and talks with researcher Jennifer Lavers and Ian Hutton to learn about island ecosystems, seabirds, rodents and weeds. The students and their teachers spent an afternoon on Transit Hill, tackling a regrowth area of dense climbing and ground asparagus at the Edie's Glen site. The students really put a big effort in, contributing another 39 hours to removing asparagus fern from the Island, and they all enjoyed the experience immensely.

Progress to date.

From the very first weeding tour in 1995 to the August 2011 trip, there has been a total of 67 weeding ecotours, with 22,087 hours volunteer labour contributed - and with a dollar value often put at \$35 per hour for remote work sites, this is an inkind contribution of \$773,045 to the Lord Howe Island Board weed eradication program.

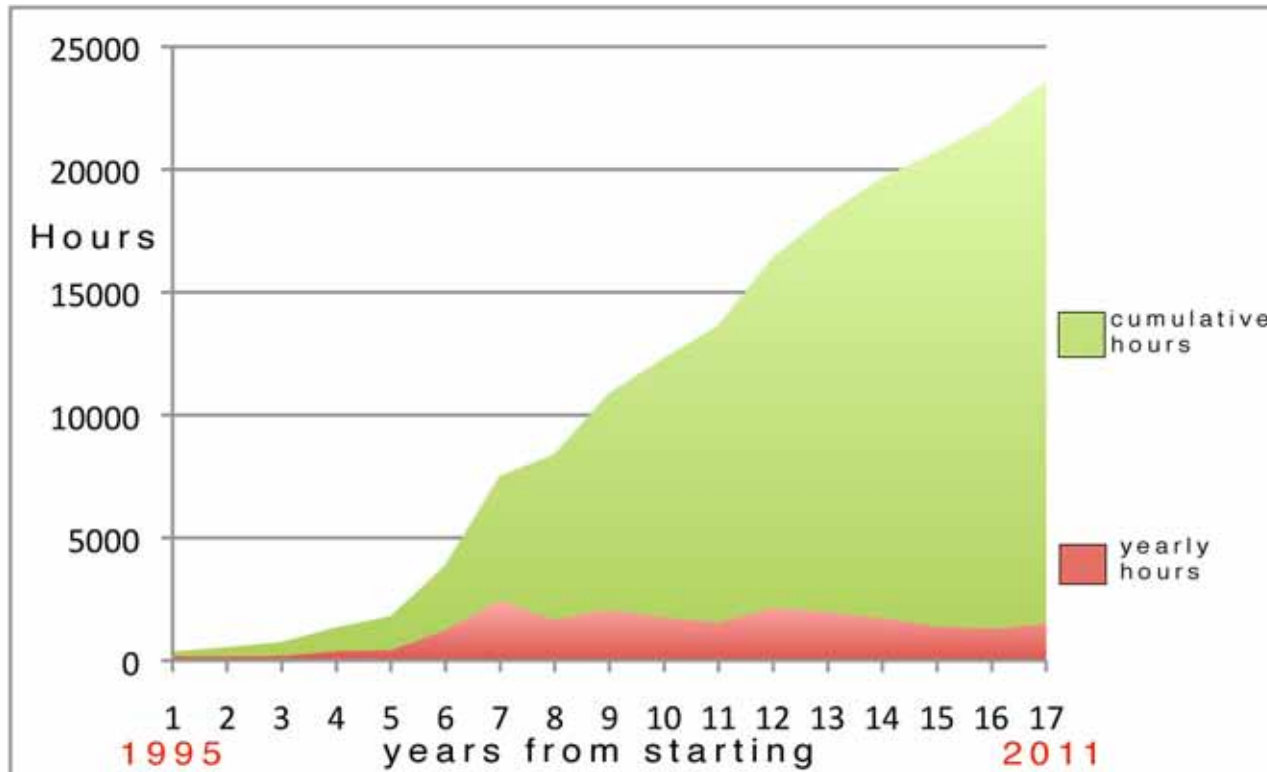
Along the way, many people have enjoyed the experience of a week on beautiful Lord Howe Island - exploring the Island tracks, discovering and learning about its flora and fauna, fine dining at Pinetrees, and knowing they have been able to contribute to conservation on this World Heritage Island. There have been a total of 696 people who have enjoyed a weed trip - but that figure doesn't tell the whole story - we have had many repeat participants who love coming year after year - 94 people have been on three or more trips; and 15 people have even been on ten or more weed trips. (A total of 1258 weed-person weeks)

We have had people from every state in Australia, and quite a few visiting from New Zealand, plus a small number from the UK and USA.



A group of happy weeders out enjoying the scenery on Lord Howe Island.

White shading on the map of Transit Hill below shows the area Friends of LHI weeders worked, and over some areas many times.



Eradication of African Big-headed Ant

The Lord Howe Island Board has engaged Dr Ben Hoffman, to finalise an eradication plan for the African Big-headed ant (ABHA) from Lord Howe Island. Dr Hoffman is a CSIRO scientist based in Darwin, with extensive experience with ants, including the African Big-headed ant.



The ABHA is listed by the IUCN as amongst the world's 100 worst invasive species and it has been identified by the Australian Government as one of six national priority tramp ant species that impact Australia's biodiversity.

These ants are considered a threat to Lord Howe Island's biodiversity. Dr Hoffman said that this ant is regarded as one of the worst invasive species in the world – a serious pest that will eventually wipe out 100 percent of other ants and 85 percent of other invertebrates in the area.

But he says it is also one of the easiest ant species to eradicate. There are about 30 documented cases of successful eradication,

including islands, and areas within Kakadu National Park. Cracked corn is used as the bait to lure the ants, and a chemical called Amdro (7.3gm/kg Hydramethylnon) is used as a toxin to kill the ants. Amdro is deadly to the ants, yet is safe for most vertebrates, including humans. Amdro is UV unstable, so breaks down and is non-persistent in the environment.

It is believed the ABHA could have been introduced onto Lord Howe Island as early as 1993, but not formally identified until 2003. It arrived most likely through infested building material transported from the mainland. Some infested material may have been deposited at the waste treatment facility, and then spread around the island in mulch, soil and by vehicles.

Some work has already been carried out by LHI Board staff on treating this invasive species on Lord Howe Island in previous years, but it still persists.

Dr Hoffman has trained Lord Howe Island Board staff in techniques to identify the ant and to locate, map and bait its habitats and then monitor the results. The area believed to be infested on Lord Howe Island is about 10 hectares, mainly within the settlement area and Dr Hoffman believes that eradication should be possible.

After treating all known areas it will still be several years before treatment could be declared successful, because that amount of time was needed to monitor the island for any remaining Big-headed ant infestations.

African Big Headed Ant *Pheidole megacephala*.

The ABHA is a small, light brown ant 2 to 4 mm in length, native to Southern Africa. But now found widespread throughout temperate regions of the world.



Despite the name, most ABHA do not have a big head – only the Major workers of this species are characterized by disproportionately large heads with powerful mandible, but they are vastly outnumbered by the Minor workers, which do not have enlarged heads.

ABHA are truly a tramp species, that is they have lost the ability to fly in their reproductive form and are therefore dependent on people to disperse them any significant distance away from the parent colony. New colonies are formed by "budding" where one or more fertile queens split off from the main colony along with a group of workers.

The LHI Board received a grant of \$195,000 from the Caring for Country program to carry

Small Island Forum at Lord Howe Island.

From April 30 to May 4 Lord Howe Island will host a *Small Island Forum* - where delegates from islands around Australia and some overseas islands will meet to discuss issues common to all small islands - topics such as waste, energy, transport, tourism viability etc.

Key speakers at the Forum will include Dr Tim Flannery, Anne Prince, Dr Ray Nias and Peter Kenyon.

There will also be local community events so that visiting island people can meet with the locals.

A number of afternoon workshops will be held, and Friends of Lord Howe will be presenting an outline of the weeding program and how volunteers can make a large contribution to island conservation.



Forum sponsor Mitsubishi Australia have sent 3 of their latest small electric vehicles (the i-MiEV) over to the island for the Forum.



New computer system at the Lord Howe Island Museum.

In 2012 the LHI Museum has made a major upgrade to its computer systems.

This was to improve the security of all digital archive records held at the museum- over 3,500 photographs, scans of documents, letters, records and diaries, etc.

The upgrade includes state of the art Apple iMacs, servers, backups and three iPads showing the photo collection, videos and guide books for residents and visitors to view. These iPads also allow free access to the Museum and the Lord Howe Island Tourism websites.

The computer system has a large-screen television monitor to present documentaries, audiovisual presentations etc through the week.

To further improve the facilities for tourists at the Museum/Visitor Information Centre a comprehensive Guest Internet system has been installed. This includes a wireless system where you can, with a ticket purchased, use your iPad, iPhone or laptop to access the internet 24 hours a day.

Continuing research on Lord Howe Island flora by UK botanists

In March, Alex Papadopoulos visited Lord Howe Island for his third time, to collect plant specimens for his genetics research.

Alex and a team from Imperial College UK, have been involved with plant research on the Island since 2003. Their initial research looked at the mechanisms and timing of the evolution of the palm *Howea forsteriana* from *Howea belmoreana*. This research was published in the prestigious *Nature* journal.

Since then Alex has been working on other genera that may be considered "sister" species, including *Metrosideros* and *Coprosma*.



Alex here in the field near World's End behind Mount Lidgbird, downloading temperature and humidity data from loggers that are at 50 sites across the Island.

Lord Howe Island Plastic Action Group

In response to the issue of plastic debris impacting on the Flesh-footed shearwaters (see newsletter 32), local residents in 2011 formed the LHI Plastic Action Group.

The general aim of the group is to promote awareness of the issue of plastic in the environment and the detrimental effects on seabirds; particularly the Flesh footed shearwater. Where possible the group will facilitate minimal plastic use on Lord Howe Island and provide means for tourists to become aware and encourage them to change their habits where they live. Work with local school to encourage participation in plastic awareness, through art and engaging in monitoring of plastic. Long term aim to work towards some "Green" accreditation for the whole island as an environmental goal and marketing tool for tourism.

To date the group have been active with information days at the local community markets, purchasing alternatives to plastic items (stainless steel water bottles, bamboo toothbrushes, Onya bags and backpacks) for local shops, and involving tourists in a monitoring program for microplastics(below)



The group have had discussions with the LHI Board, who are going to purchase and install two water bottle refill stations, at the town centre and Ned's Beach, for refilling water bottles. The local qantaslink agents are installing a third unit at the air terminal.

Other activities include regular screening of the documentary "Bag It" - showing facts of how much plastic is in our every day life, and the potential dangers to wildlife and us.

In March, the group organized a visit by Jon Dee - founder of Planet Ark, and Do Something (Jon was responsible for having Bundanoon the first plastic water bottle free town in the world). Jon gave a lively presentation at the local community hall, to a packed audience.

Jon is keen to help Lord Howe Island become plastic bottle and plastic bag free. He met with local shop owners to explain how businesses can gain through selling refillable water bottles instead of bottled water.



Jon Dee having a tour of the local bulk food co-op with Cindy Shick.



Members of the group worked with local schoolteachers and school children to collect plastic debris off the beach, and use the pieces to make this art work - a mosaic shearwater. This large mosaic forms a part of the permanent displays at the LHI museum.



On our walks with the FLHI weeding ecotours we have explored and explained the last stages of a classic hot spot volcano on Lord Howe Island - where just two percent of the island remains, with its climax forest containing a unique suite of endemic plants and animals.

Following many requests, Ian Hutton and Robert Coenraads have put together this nine day tour to the Big Island of Hawaii for you to experience what Lord Howe Island resembled when it was forming 7 million years ago.

Our tour is based at World Heritage Volcano National Park, containing 133,000 hectares and seven ecological zones. The site was dedicated in 1916 as a National Park, as an International Biosphere Reserve in 1980 and World Heritage listed in 1987. The Park contains two of the world's most continuously active volcanoes and is an excellent, safe way to explore and learn about volcanic island formation processes.



Lush ferns (above) colonise the lava, as well as grow in the climax rainforest on Hawaii. Market days (right) are always interesting at Hilo.

Hawaii Geology Tour

**Step back in time 7 million years
to see the birth of Lord Howe Island.**



We have chosen our accommodation at the *Kilauea Lodge*- a beautiful old lodge located close to Volcano National Park. At 1200metres above sea level, set amongst tree ferns and rainforest it has a charming old world atmosphere.



Ian Hutton



Robert Coenraads

your Hawaii tour leaders

Dates 21 to 29 September 2012

Cost \$4275 twin share ex Sydney;
includes all air travel, land transport,
accommodation, all park and museum fees,
breakfasts, lunches and final dinner.

Still a few places, so book now:
email : ianhutton@clearmail.com.au
for details and booking forms.

Unusual bird sightings December 2011 to March 2012

The summer and now into autumn has continued to be wet, so the swamp at Moseley Park is still full - ideal conditions for any unusual vagrants to stay on for a while.



Barbary Dove - one bird turned up at Capella Lodge on 6 April. A native of northern Africa to Arabia, this bird has been introduced as cage bird to New Zealand and Australia in the 1860's. Some have escaped into the wild; this one was probably blown from New Zealand.



Tahiti petrel - one sighted by Ian Hutton and Jack Shick while on a pelagic boat trip to the north of the Island 18 February. The 3rd record for this bird around Lord Howe Island.

See the Lord Howe Island Museum website for full details on Lord Howe Island birds. www.lhimuseum.com.au



Intermediate egret - one turned up at the Moseley Park swamp 23 February - for about two weeks. A vagrant to Lord Howe Island.



Plumed whistling ducks. Two first seen on 2 February at the Moseley Park swamp. One disappeared soon after, but one still remaining to mid April. Due to very wet 2011 across much of Eastern Australia, this bird has had very successful breeding, and is being seen at many previously unrecorded locations in Eastern Australia.

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2012 WEED TRIP BOOKING FORM

for booking post the form and deposit cheque to:
Lord Howe Island Nature Tours
PO Box 157
Lord Howe Island
NSW 2898

Price ex Sydney or Brisbane,
April May \$2598 twin share; \$2773 sole
June, July August \$2333 twin share \$2508 sole
Price subject to change without notice.
Deposit \$ 200 (cheque made to Pinetrees Travel)
Balance required 45 days prior to trip.

Please book me on the Lord Howe Island bush regeneration tour (included is my \$200 deposit pp)
Name(s) Mr/Mrs/Ms/
Miss _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____
QANTAS Frequent Flyer number _____

My bush regeneration experience is _____ years
I prefer to go on dates :

April 28 to May 5
July 7 to 14
August 26 to Sept 2

OR EMAIL ianhutton@clearmail.com.au