

Bumboras Community Tree Planting

Sunday the 31st July saw the completion of Norfolk Island Regional Council's 4th community tree planting for the year. This time we met at Bumboras Creek to continue with the efforts



of last year's planting, helping to stabilize the creek banks and create a healthier riparian ecosystem. A relatively small group of volunteers came together at 9am to plant 160 trees in various areas along the creek. Though the group was small, the morning was beautiful and relaxing, and everyone seemed to really enjoy themselves. We had a morning tea with koknat bread, fruit cake (thanks Jas), and the last of the season's oranges after the work was done.

It's great to see all of our creeks running so steadily. Bumby is one of the special places I was lucky enough to enjoy catching guppies, watching eels and lighting campfires throughout my childhood.

Did you know that eels are one of the world's greatest mysteries? On Norf'k we're lucky enough to have 2 different types of freshwater eel, the Shortfin, and the Longfin - which is much rarer. To this day, it is a mystery as to exactly where and how eels breed. For centuries people have tried to track, catch, and study freshwater eels around the world but the eel always manages to elude our human desire for answers. During the Spring, something triggers a mass migration of eels from their freshwater homes in creeks and rivers and drives them out to sea. It's believed that big rains, as well as the moon phase contribute to this migration, but not every eel feels the urge. Some may be young, only a few years old, while others may be over 100 years old! They leave the creeks en masse and they make their way out to the ocean. It's believed that they head out towards the Sargasso Sea, navigating their way across the oceans purely by instinct. Sometimes they travel at depths of 3000ft, perhaps to delay the development of their reproductive organs with the cold water. Once they reach the Sargasso Sea, our knowledge ends.



All we know is that around the following Winter/Spring, our creeks are filled with thousands and thousands of tiny baby eels known as Elvers, making their way back upstream. When they are young, they are transparent and almost shaped like a willow leaf. Then they grow into 'glass eels', and then Elvers. Their parents died after breeding and these tiny eels were left to navigate thousands of kilometers back home to the same creek that their parents left from. They will swim up waterfalls and even over areas of dry land to find their way back home. And then they wait patiently until that mysterious power calls them back out to the ocean again to complete the cycle.

In some cultures, particularly Polynesian cultures, eels are sacred. They represent guardians of waterways and natural environments. Some cultures view them as an important food source or a delicacy, and other parts of the world have developed a very lucrative business growing and selling wild caught eels to the hospitality industry. Worldwide, eel populations are declining and because we know so little about them, it's difficult to predict what the follow-on effects of this decline might be. As small as our little island is, we have a unique opportunity to protect and encourage the health and longevity of our freshwater ecosystem as well as the creatures that travel across the oceans to find their safety here. Though they may look scary and they're slimy too, these creatures possess a powerful grace and an innate wisdom that stupefies even the most determined of scientists.

Our planting days are contributing to the health of our environment and assisting in the protection of our precious plants and animals, thank you for being a part of it.

Lilli-Unna King
Environmental Project Officer
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