



Cattai Hills Environment Network CHEN Annual Report 2024

The Cattai Hills Environment Network (CHEN) has been at the forefront of educating, advocating, and celebrating the natural wonders in the Cattai and Little Cattai catchments. Since its inception in 2016, CHEN has worked tirelessly to build an informed and active community, advocating for the sustainable management of land and the preservation of our unique environment. In 2024, CHEN continued to advance its mission to create a connected and coordinated community dedicated to conservation across both public and private lands in the Cattai and Little Cattai catchments. This annual report highlights our key achievements, projects, and the wonderful contributions of our dedicated volunteers and community partners throughout the year.

CHEN's Mission and Objectives

Our mission: to build an aware community, encourage collaboration among stakeholders, and increase the effectiveness of independent conservation efforts across the Cattai and Little Cattai catchments. Our five key objectives guide every aspect of our work:

1. **Community Outreach** – To form a vibrant organization working actively in the community, with key contacts in important CHEN projects.
2. **Conservation** – To acknowledge and preserve the biodiversity within the catchments, ensuring appropriate land management practices, both on private and public lands.
3. **Research** – To engage in environmental research and monitoring, identifying key issues, recording wildlife sightings, and bringing these findings to the attention of the broader community.
4. **Advocacy** – To build strength through fostering cooperation and advocating for more sustainable land management practices across the catchments.
5. **Education** – To raise awareness and understanding within the local community about natural resource degradation and the importance of adopting sustainable practices to protect our environment.

CHEN acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet, the Darug people, and we recognize their ongoing connection to the land, waters, and culture.

Reflecting on 2024 – A Year of Growth and Accomplishments

2024 has been a remarkable year for CHEN. We have made significant strides in both community engagement and conservation efforts. Our work continues to be rooted in collaboration, and we have seen the impact of these partnerships reflected in our many initiatives, including local environmental projects, educational outreach, and advocacy work. We are particularly excited to celebrate the following milestones:

- CHEN's Environmental Charity Status –
- Well-Being Grant – We finalized a well-being grant from WentWest, which will support the continued development of community-focused environmental projects.
- "11 Stories from the River Dyarubbin" Launch –

Congratulations to Lilly Schwartz the 2024 THSC Environment Citizen of the Year.



In 2024 we celebrate that CHEN has meet monthly at the Annangrove Environment Centre Lucas Ave.





July we heard from TwoMadPhotographers.
 August launched Platypus Month with THSC
 October we explored local walks across our waterways.
 December we celebrate all things Native Food



JULY 4TH AT 6:00PM


Come along to Cattai Hills Environment Networks monthly meeting and hear from two dedicated wildlife photographers, 2 Mad Photographers - Netra Chetty and Ákos Lumnitzer. Netra and Ákos will share with us some of the fascinating wildlife that they have photographed in the Cattai Creek and Little Cattai Creek Catchments.

**Come to our 3rd October
CHEN meeting**
Listen to James and Andrew share the story of becoming walkers!!

Meeting Hall:
Currie Avenue, Annangrove
2156

An organisation educating, advocating and celebrating the natural wonders of the Hills Shine in the Cattai and Little Cattai catchments



CATTAI HILLS ENVIRONMENT NETWORK
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CHEN Highlights:

CHEN Project officer – Cailee Stainthorpe undertaking Ecokidz program collaborating with THSC Holiday Program at Maroota.

Land 4 Wildlife 7 properties registered with L4W NSW which is based in CEN Community Environment Network Central Coast.





CHEN Core team – with Sue Martin, Elaine White, Jocelyn Howden, Pat Schwartz, Ricki Nash, Linda Pine, Michael Mulhern and CHEN working group leaders.

Volunteer and Community Support We are incredibly grateful for the support of our volunteers, without whom none of our initiatives would be possible. Volunteers such as **Lynn Jones, Linda Pine, Lachlan Turner,** and many others have contributed significantly to CHEN's efforts, particularly in the development of our merchandise and at key

community events like the *World Environment Day* celebration, *Platypus Month*, and the *Orange Blossom Festival*. Their dedication helps raise awareness and funds, supporting our continued work in conservation.

CHEN Working Group Reports

Platypus Project



The *Hawkesbury-Nepean Platypus Project* has been a standout initiative in 2024. Led by Michelle Ryan, Kat, and Maddy, this project focused on both research and community engagement. Key activities included:

- **Clean Up Australia Day** – CHEN joined forces with The Hills Shire Council for a clean-up event at Caddies Creek.
- **World Environment Day** – Platypus conservation was featured as part of our celebration, bringing attention to the importance of clean waterways for the species' survival.

- **Platypus Month** – A highlight of the year, where multiple workshops were hosted by The Hills Shire Council to raise awareness about platypus habitats and conservation efforts.

Looking ahead to 2025, we are thrilled to welcome **Bree Webb**, who will begin her PhD research on platypus movement and connectivity in the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment. Additionally, the *Resilient Rivers for Resilient Platypus* program will bring us closer to local landholders as we work on riparian restoration in the Cattai Creek catchment.

Dr Michelle Ryan WSU academic and CHEN member

Hills-Hornsby Rural Koala Project

The *Hills-Hornsby Rural Koala Project* (HHRKP) has made tremendous progress in 2024. Coordinated by **Lilly Schwartz**, this initiative has seen significant successes, including:

- The use of **thermal drone technology** thanks to WildSeek, to detect koalas in the Maroota Forest, finding that multiple koalas were detected and this indicates a breeding population which includes verified females rather than 'transient' koala passing through.

- This takes the koala map total up to 32 verified sightings and non verified to about 51
- Data collected through camera traps and song meters, with notable findings such as wombats in Hornsby Shire, which was a surprise to many.
- Active advocacy for the recognition of koala habitat in the Hills, Hornsby, and Hawkesbury LGAs, contributing to a push for better conservation policies for koalas across the region.

The project has helped raise awareness about the existence of koalas and other wildlife in the area and continues to advocate for stronger protections.

Lilly Schwartz Hills Hornsby Rural Koala project coordinator

2024 report Community Environment Centre.

As I wear many "hats" across this Shire, including as a Foundation member/volunteer of our vibrant community centre at Annangrove, and thence to our Network, and via THSC's s.355 BCC committee,

I am humbled and am honoured to be part of these very special groups of like-minded souls who Love, Cherish and Nurture our Environment - or as they say, *Protect, Preserve & Conserve Biodiversity & all that is canvassed.*

To be part of these groups is special to me, as I could say fairly, all of us.

Importantly, in accordance with the Mission Statement of CHEN, we have achieved, we have accomplished what the aims are : awareness, encouragement, education, information, co-ordination, advocacy, make for more effective understanding of our local area - the Cattai Catchment.

The Community Environment Centre (CEC) promotes environmental awareness through forums, talks, workshops, and events such as World Environment Day. We actively participate in local festivals, including the Orange Blossom Festival, and collaborate with the THSC Bushcare Nursery on nature walks to highlight the Shire's landscapes and promote healthy lifestyles.

CEC also offers regular workshops at local libraries and engages with various groups, including schools, senior citizens, and gardening clubs. Our EcoKidz program introduces children to nature-based learning, while school groups visit Annangrove Park to explore its Endangered Ecological Communities.

The CEC serves as an information hub for sustainable living, offering resources like a reference library and a growing street library. Our Growing Food for Wildlife Project supports native plant plots that provide food for rescued wildlife in Annangrove Park, a designated release area.

One of our key projects is the Platypus Hub, which gathers scientific data from across the Cattai Catchment and beyond, in partnership with UWS and Sydney Water authorities. We are expanding our efforts to improve river health and ensure the protection of the local platypus population, with upcoming Streamwatch activities set to enhance data collection for this vital conservation work.

Elaine White CHEN Executive

Bushland Conservation Committee

The Bushland Conservation Committee (BCC) is a S355 Council advisory committee that seeks to protect, connect and improve the integrity and diversity of the natural environment in the Shire through advice to Council. The BCC is comprised of volunteers dedicated to protecting the Shire's native vegetation and supports the promotion of environmental protection wherever achievable by gaining an understanding of plans, activities, natural areas and community views.



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We collaborate closely with CHEN in regards to parks, reserves and Council owned bushland throughout our vast Shire, especially North Ward, in order to

- Reflect the views of the local community and environmental groups
- Identify and advise Council on challenges and opportunities in respect of bushland management
- Promote bushland regeneration works and associated public education.

During our last term the Committee worked with Council on a number of issues and were able to have positive actions implemented in various areas including weed maintenance in Heritage Park, Colbarra Reserve Off-Leash Dog Park and the Cycleway Plans. We also broached the issue of feral deer in North Ward which with CHEN's ongoing involvement is now being assessed at a higher level.

This next term we plan on focusing on areas of public bushland that aren't already on Council's radar and therefore have not been assessed or have ongoing maintenance in place. In order for us to do this Council has committed to supplying us with a list of which parks, reserves and bushland areas already have bushcare volunteers, Council's bushland team or contractors working in them.
Linda Pine THSC Bushland Conservation Committee

Friends of Fred Caterson Reserve – 2024 Report

This year, Friends of Fred Caterson Reserve continued efforts to raise awareness about the importance of protecting the reserve's biodiversity. Unfortunately, our requests to The Hills Shire Council for access to environmental reports on the former Pony Club site, a full Environmental Impact Statement for their entire Master Plan (rather than less-rigorous Reviews of Environmental Factors for separate developments as they arise), and a Biodiversity Management Strategy for the entire reserve were not acknowledged. However, in June, the Council released the environmental reports to the public after the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal ruled the reports could no longer be withheld from an Applicant, a local resident and wildlife carer, who had requested them under freedom of information legislation. These reports confirmed our concerns about the development of new playing fields, and we're working hard to share the findings.

Highlights of 2024 include the community's overwhelming support for preserving the biodiversity of Fred Caterson Reserve and a surprising social media reach, which in some weeks exceeds 60,000. Looking towards 2025, we hope for a significant reduction in the scale and intensity of the planned development of playing fields on the former Pony Club site, stronger protections of biodiversity in and around the reserve, and a thriving community appreciation and concern for its flora and fauna.

Fred Caterson Friends

Partnership with the Nature Conservation Council (NCC)

CHEN remains an active member of the *Nature Conservation Council of NSW* (NCC), collaborating with other member groups to advocate for nature across the state. In 2024, we participated in key NCC activities, including:

- The **National Conference** held in Sydney, where we joined discussions on koala conservation, clean energy, and land clearing.
- **Quarterly Forums** addressing the impact of mining on local biodiversity, specifically koala habitat in the Mudgee area.





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- **The NCC Leadership Meeting,** where we contributed to discussions on constitutional reforms and strategies to stand up for nature conservation in NSW.

Ricki Nash CHEN member

Platypus Landcare

Council has also partnered with Cattai Hills Environment Network and Greater Sydney Landcare to help run and support Platypus Landcare. This initiative focuses on restoring platypus habitats on local landholder properties along waterways and other key areas where platypus reside. Platypus Landcare has worked closely with Greater Sydney Landcare Creating Canopies Program.
Monique Bailey HRCC & Jess Styan THSC

Annangrove Public School Environment Walk

In 2024, we successfully secured a Land For Wildlife grant, which will support our efforts to remove weeds near the creek, including privet, ochona, crofton weed, and the emerging issue of arum lily. Signage for the track has been completed, though it remains underutilized. The principal, Mr. Rich, is keen to address this, and we hope to begin guided walks with Year 5/6 students this term, with final details pending. Regards. Sandra McDowell.

The Platypus in Situ Project

Marian College is proud to be part of the ongoing Platypus project initiated by CHEN. In collaboration with The Hills Grammar School and Lorien Novalis, we conducted stream sample analysis and attended lectures by Professor Michelle Ryan from Western Sydney University, culminating in a community education project.

In 2024, we expanded the project to St Madeleine's Primary, meeting bi-weekly to engage students in Platypus-related activities. Our first initiative was creating Platypus picture books, which are nearly complete, and we are now starting to design Platypus murals using recycled materials. A highlight this year was attending the opening event at the Community Environment Centre in Annangrove, where we connected with inspiring individuals. Looking ahead to 2025, we aim to further expand the Platypus Group, fostering greater awareness of habitat preservation among students.

Meg Thomas Social Justice coordinator Marian College

Lorien Novalis Science Department Initiatives

At Lorien Novalis, the Science Department has been actively involved in environmental education and field research. Some notable activities in 2024 included:

- **Wildlife Monitoring** – The school continued its efforts to monitor wildlife in the remnant habitat and Dooral Dooral Creek riparian zone, using trail cameras to observe species such as Long-nosed Bandicoots, Echidnas, Brush-tailed Possums, and Swamp Wallabies.
- **Microbat Survey** – The school participated in a survey organized by Environment NSW, identifying 9 types of microbats on the campus, two of which are considered vulnerable.
- **Song Meter Project** – A collaboration with the Hills-Hornsby Rural Koala Project led to the installation of a song meter to record nighttime wildlife calls, contributing to our knowledge of local biodiversity.

Karen Hoskin Lorien Novalis Science teacher

Platypus Month celebration



Blundells Swamp Wildlife Refuge WentWest workshop

Looking Ahead to 2025

As we look toward the future, we are filled with hope and excitement for the projects and initiatives we will continue to develop in 2025. Some of our key goals include:

- **Streamwatch Expansion** – Growing the *Streamwatch* program across the Cattai and Little Cattai catchments to monitor water quality and health.
- **Permanent CHEN Home** – Finding a permanent location for CHEN to offer ongoing programs and community engagement activities.
- **Dedicated Walking Pathways** – Developing a walking pathway along key waterways such as O'Hara's Creek to promote environmental education and recreation.
- **Landcare School Program** – Launching a Landcare School sport program to engage young people in conservation through hands-on activities.
- **Broadwater Wetland** – Advocacy for the *Broadwater Wetland* to be listed as a Ramsar Wetland, contributing to global conservation efforts.

2024 has been a year of growth, collaboration, and dedication for CHEN. Our achievements in community outreach, conservation, education, and research reflect the collective efforts of our members, volunteers, and partners. As we look forward to 2025, we are committed to expanding our impact and continuing to protect, preserve, and celebrate the natural beauty of the Cattai and Little Cattai catchments. Together, we can ensure that these landscapes remain vibrant and resilient for generations to come.

Sue Martin

Chair, Cattai Hills Environment Network