



Glenlee, a Culturally and Ecologically Significant Site in Danger of Destruction

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Set on the Lugarno peninsula in New South Wales, Glenlee is an oasis in a desert of urban sprawl. Relatively undisturbed since 1856 (and in the one family for over 110 years), it is one of those rare gems where nature has been free to do what nature does so well.

Over those years, Glenlee has become a vital part of a forested river foreshore corridor stretching from Oatley, through Lugarno, to Georges River National Park. It is home to a wide range of wildlife, including the Vulnerable grey-headed flying fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*), eastern osprey (*Pandion cristatus*), powerful owl (*Ninox strenua*) and white-bellied sea eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*), as well as swamp wallabies (*Wallabia bicolor*), echidnas (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*), possums, reptiles, frogs, and a number of other threatened species of birds and mammals. Furthermore, several threatened microbats were found in the recent Georges River Local Government Area Biodiversity Study. Any microbats located in Oatley Park could also be expected to occur in the Lugarno area, where large trees with hollows are present.

The eastern osprey is breeding in the area for the first time in almost twenty years. They frequently roost

and nest in large eucalypts, which Glenlee has in abundance; smooth-barked apple (*Angophora costata*), red bloodwood (*Corymbia gummifera*), grey gum (*Eucalyptus punctata*), Sydney peppermint (*Eucalyptus piperita*) and other Angophora. To the rear of the property is a remnant Blackbutt Forest which has remained untouched since Europeans set foot on the land. The coastal swamp oak (*Casuarina glauca*), found on the site, is listed as Endangered by the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999.

Many trees are well over one hundred years old and provide the hollows, cracks, and crevices essential for birds, mammals, reptiles, and invertebrates to roost and nest. These trees, 200 of them and their understory, are in danger of being destroyed by a development currently before the Land and Environment court. This 2.5 hectares of irreplaceable habitat and exceptional biodiversity is expected to be replaced with thirty-one dwellings.

Lugarno is home to a small breeding population of scaly-breasted lorikeet (*Trichoglossus chlorolepidotus*), and the loss of suitable hollows could threaten their survival on the Lugarno peninsula in the face of dozens of displaced larger and more aggressive rainbow lorikeets (*Trichoglossus moluccanus*).

Yellow-faced honeyeaters (*Caligavis chrysops*) and white-naped honeyeaters (*Melithreptus lunatus*) forage in the foreshore corridor, and several hundred were observed to alight in the mature Blackbutt canopies of Glenlee, adjacent to Heinrich Reserve. The trees provide the necessary blossom, nectar, and seed, essential food for a wide range of wildlife who forage within its borders.

Glenlee borders the mangrove forest and intertidal mudflats of the Georges River, the habitat of several threatened shorebirds and waterbirds. The Vulnerable bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica*), Endangered pied oystercatcher (*Haematopus longirostris*), and Critically Endangered

Top: Glenlee borders the mangrove forest and intertidal mudflats of the Georges River. Image: Glenyss Barnham.

eastern curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*) are regularly recorded on the intertidal flats at the mouth of Lime Kiln Bay, Oatley.

The vast vegetation of Glenlee has acted as a filter to the stormwater runoff from surrounding streets, preserving the river. Erosion and the pollution impact from urban runoff caused by the development will potentially impact the feeding habitat of these threatened species.

Zoologist, Debbie Andrew, warns that “*The impact on threatened flora and fauna through the destruction of their habitat, and the damage that will be caused to terrestrial and estuarine ecosystems on the property, will be an environmental disaster.*”

Cultural Significance

Glenlee is part of one of the earliest land grants made in Lugarno by Governor Sir William Thomas Denison in 1856. It is listed by the National Trust of Australia for its Early Settler history and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage. Well-preserved evidence of Aboriginal life remains on the site and is listed in the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System of the state government. Throughout the 165 years since European settlement, only two families have lived on the land, so in many ways, it is a time capsule of our early Australian history. A living history, a remnant of the way things once were.

On 12 June 2021, a resident action group was formed to fight the development and save Glenlee. Over one hundred people met with the Mayor and a local councillor, and 270 submissions were lodged with Georges River Council’s Planning Authority. The residents have now formed The Friends of Glenlee Association to spearhead the campaign.

Currently, an Interim Heritage Order has been enacted to allow an Archaeological Assessment to be completed as required by the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 and Heritage New South Wales,



Glenlee is an oasis in the urban sprawl. Image: Adrian Polhill and Garry Housley.



A white-bellied sea eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) inspecting his catch. Image: Rob Annesley.



An eastern osprey (*Pandion cristatus*) near Glenlee. Image: Rob Annesley.



Glenlee, home to the short-beaked echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*). Image: Rob Annesley.

in conjunction with the Metropolitan Land Council. The Land and Environment Court process continues at the same time. The first meeting of the Court with residents is in mid-October. The Association is raising funds to increase the campaign to save this historic and environmentally significant site by engaging experts to provide reports that can be put before the Court.

The Friends of Glenlee Association is petitioning the three levels of government to provide the funds to purchase Glenlee and preserve it for the community and future generations. In a recent Sydney Morning Herald article by Julie Power, the New South Wales Minister for Planning and Open Spaces, Robert Stokes MP, was quoted saying, "It is my goal to make Sydney a 'city within a park'. The pandemic had shown how vital our public spaces are and how we need to conserve what we have and create more where we can."

We do indeed need to conserve what we have because it is irreplaceable. To help preserve the precious flora and fauna that remains in Glenlee, please sign the petition, join The Friends of Glenlee Association, or donate to the fighting fund through the Save Glenlee website <https://www.saveglenlee.com/>



A bird's eye view of Glenlee. Image: Adrian Polhill and Garry Housley.