Friends of Tomaree National Park **participants and community supporters** have cleared much of the invasive bitou and lantana over the last 12 months since April 2022. Some areas are naturally regenerating, which is the most desirable situation. However the margins and their associated impacted areas are particularly subject to weeds and there's been little natural regeneration – some active revegetation will help shade and reduce weed vigour. **Hence THE PLANTING 2023!**

Our native plants are grown locally, mostly from locally sourced seed. They are part of the coastal heathland plant communities. Heathlands form in areas where wind and soil conditions prevent very tall trees from growing.

The short wind-pruned shrubs are along the headland, which develop and provide some wind protection enabling taller shrubs to grow. Along the road margin there are short to taller shrubs and ground covers, but no larger trees.

Shrub layer -- taller shrubs

The **Coast Banksia, *Banksia integrifolia***, is a rugged versatile tree, which is specially adapted to thrive in low nutrient soils and tougher conditions. If you turn the leaf over, you'll see the silvery-white underside, which helps to identify the species both as a seedling and when it's mature.

Banksias have what are called cluster roots which look like small brushes and greatly expand the plant's ability to take up water and nutrients from the soil. The yellow brush-like flowers of the Coast Banksia are coming into bloom now and you should see them throughout the bush in autumn and early winter. The flowers are nectar magnets for native bees, as well as a wide range of both honeyeaters and insect-eating birds. And when the flowers go to seed, they're a favourite for seed-eating birds, such as Eastern Rosellas.

This Coast Banksia shelters the watchful female Eastern Koel

Coastal Teatree flower

Coastal Tea-tree, *Leptospermum laevigatum*, Coastal Beard-heath, *Leucopogon parviflorus*, and Bracelet Honey-myrtle, *Melaleuca armillaris*, all have white flowers. The Coastal Tea-tree and Coastal Beard-heath bloom in late winter to spring, while the Bracelet Honey-myrtle flowers mainly in spring.

The nectar and pollen from the flowers provide food for native bees and other insect pollinators and all three of these plants are also great habitat plants for native birds. Honey-eaters feed from the nectar in Coastal Tea-trees and Bracelet Honey-myrtles and the tiny bite-sized fruits of the Coast Beard-heath are an important source of food for many birds, including Silvereyes and scrub wrens. Smaller birds feel safer foraging in the dense leaves of these plants and the bark is often used for nest building. Some may also choose these plants for nesting - for example, the Rufous Whistler is known to favour Coastal Tea-trees and Eastern Yellow Robins favour Bracelet Honey-myrtles.

Coast Beard-heath fruit

Shrub layer – lower growing shrubs

These first three plants are lower growing shrubs that all grow well in coastal areas and especially in lower nutrient, sandy soils.

--**Coastal Wattle, *Acacia longifolia* subsp. *sophorae*,** has golden yellow, rod-shaped flower heads that bloom from late winter to spring. The flowers attract a range of insects, which in turn attract the birds that feed on them, and the seeds are eaten by seed-eating birds. Wattles are nitrogen-fixing plants and have bacteria in their roots that bring nitrogen from the air into the plant, which also benefits surrounding plants. Coastal Wattles are known as 'nurse plants' and can be used to protect other plants because they're fast growing and cast a light shade to protect other seedlings, and they're also salt tolerant and have roots that stabilise sandy soils.

Coastal wattle

Hairy Bush-pea

--Hairy Bush-pea, *Pultenaea villosa,* is also a nitrogen-fixing plant (in fact pea plants and wattles are generally known for their nitrogen-fixing ability). You can see this plant has tiny hairs on its leaves which help protect it from UV light and water loss in the hot sun. Native resin bees and leafcutter bees favour plants with pea-shaped flowers.

Coastal Rosemary

--Like the Hairy Bush-pea, if you look closely, you'll see that **Coastal Rosemary, *Westringia fruticosa*,** also has little hairs on its leaves and stems for sun protection. This plant can flower almost any time of year, with pollen and nectar for native bees, butterflies and other insects. The dense foliage also provides shelter and nesting sites for small birds.

Ground layer

The next group of plants are ground-layer plants and include grasses, grass-like plants and a scrambler. They all eventually spread, though not rampantly so, which makes them good for weed suppression and bushland rejuvenation.

--**Kangaroo grass, *Themeda australis*** *(sometime T. triandra)* and **Blady Grass, *Imperata cylindrica*,** are tufted grasses that grow naturally in low nutrient soils on ridges and slopes. Their root systems help stabilise the soil and the tufts of grass provide food and a place to lay eggs for many moths and butterflies. The grass tufts are also habitat for skinks, other reptiles, and small marsupials. The seed-heads of Kangaroo Grass are loved by seed-eating birds such as finches, parrots and pigeons.

Knobby Club-rush

--**Knobby Club-rush, *Ficinia nodosa*,** is also a clumping plant, which helps in stabilising sandy soil, and the weeping spread of the plant provides great shelter for small frogs, skinks and ground-foraging small birds.

Lomandra seed head

--**Lomandra and Dianella** are strappy-leafed, clumping plants that provide shelter for skinks, small frogs, and other small animals, and because they're also flowering plants, the flowers provide pollen and nectar for native bees, hoverflies, beetles and other insect pollinators.

Dianella commonly called the Blue Flax-lily, has a spray of small blue lily-shaped flowers that attract blue banded bees and other native bees. Lomandras are primarily pollinated by beetles, but other insect pollinators are also attracted to the flowers. After pollination, Dianella flowers form beautiful purple-blue berries enjoyed by fruit-eating birds, while Lomandras form seeds, food for seed-eating birds.

Blue Flax-lily with unripe green fruit

Climbing Guinea Flower

--This scrambler, the **Climbing Guinea Flower, *Hibbertia scandens***, is called a Guinea Flower because it has a wide, flat yellow flower, resembling a guinea coin. The flowers are nectarless but they're visited by native bees for pollen, which contains protein for building and repairing bee cells, whereas sugary nectar is used for energy. Pollen is especially important for larval bees, which need its high protein content to grow their bodies from egg to adult. As a scrambler, this plant provides good ground cover for ground-foraging birds and the smorgasbord of leaves, fruit and flowers provides food for a range of insects, which then attract small birds, microbats, and dragonflies.

All of the plants in this planting are good for both coastal gardens and urban home gardens, provided the conditions are right for the plant. You should be able to find them in local native plant nurseries though not all will be available all the time.

Plant descriptions from a variety of sources were compiled by Betsy Hussin, ***EcoPollinators EcoNetwork Port Stephens*****.** *You may be interested in the* **Habitat Planting Guide to the local plants of the Tomaree Peninsula** located at the bottom of the EcoPollinators page www.econetworkps.org/ecopollinators/