

## **Volunteer Work for Healthy and Sustainable Environment**

Ying Chun Habura

Department of International Environmental and Agriculture Science (M2)

Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology

Conservation Volunteers Australia

Location: Centennial Parklands Depot Banksia Way Centennial Park (Depot Road) NSW 2021

Duration: March 28 – June 4, 2013

Key words: Conservation, Volunteers, Environment, Native, Healthy, sustainability

### **1. Description of the host Organization**

Conservation Volunteers Australia is a Non-Government Organization founded in 1982 in Ballarat Victoria, it has grown into Australasia's leading practical conservation organization with offices across Australia and New Zealand. Now they already have built 24 offices during the first 30 years. In 1986, Conservation Volunteers undertook 5,000 volunteer days; they now manage more than 100,000 volunteer days a year. The Conservation Volunteers plants more than 1 million trees a year, and complete more than 2,000 projects a year. The projects are managed in conjunction with project partners that may include regional councils, national parks, museums, land care groups, conservation departments and other national conservation agencies. The main projects are Wild Futures, Flora & Fauna, Land care, Parks & Reserves, Coasts & Waterways, Healthy communities, Heritage, Disaster recovery projects.

Conservation Volunteers was founded when discussion of environmental issues was fresh, vibrant and a touch radical. It was also a different world' from today's.

Conservation Volunteers welcomes people with a love of the outdoors and interest in the protection of environment to build healthy and sustainable world. No matter who you are, no matter without any prior skills or experience, in fact, anybody can get involved. (picture1)

### **2. Activities during the internship**

During the course of my internship, I had participated with three full kinds of project work with international conservation volunteers and local volunteers in New South Wales and Victoria area. The locations were Newcastle, Canberra, Bellingen and Melbourne. The projects included planting, cutting, beach cleanup. The Planting project was for planting local native plants in various national parks and a rainforest area; the cutting project was for cutting down non-native plants in the local area, some national parks and in a rain forest area; the beach cleanup project was for cleaning rubbish on the old beach and busy beach.

1, Newcastle, New South Wales

I had three kinds of project with other international volunteers and local volunteers for four weeks in Newcastle. There were Cutting project (castor oil plants), Planting project (old beach, cattle farm, national park), Beach cleanup project. (picture2)

Castor oil plant originates in Africa, now is widespread through the tropical and subtropical regions of the world. Seeds of castor oil plant spread by rodents and birds, on mud adhering to boots, on vehicles and machinery and by floodwaters. Taller plants can throw their seeds over five meters from the mother tree. It grows very quickly and the roots extend to other plants' area. Australian people advocate conservation of native plants and clearance of every non-native plant. We hand-pulled the young ones and cut the big ones for controlling them. We also had a planting project in the national park for protecting wild life, especially the birds. Australia is home to some of the most incredible wildlife and plants on the planet. Changes to the landscape as a result of human activity have put many of these unique at risk. Since European settlement many species of birds, animals and plants have already become extinct. I also had a beach cleanup project for building a new beautiful and clean beach. The project included preparation for the cleanup, cleanup of rubbish on the beach and from the bushes near by the sea. We also pulled out the some non-native seaweeds and planted native seaweeds (pig face) in the same area for building the healthy and sustainable environment.

## 2. Canberra

I had two weeks project for cutting poplars, hawthorns, and brooms (we called it "Chop Chop Project") and planting activity with other international volunteers and local volunteers in Canberra. They were also for to keep and protect local native plants and to control the erosion of waterside banks. (picture3)

## 3. Bellingen

I also had two weeks project for cutting Lantanas, clearing privets and planting of native plant.

Lantana is a big problem in Australia. Lantana might looks like a strikingly attractive plant and in some respects the foliage and flowers are quite beautiful. The species is a genus of the verbena family, native to Mexico and South America. Lantana is a problem because it forms a dense thicket. It usually invades disturbed land and river margins, particularly open, sunny areas. Given the right conditions, it spreads quickly. Lantana is releasing chemicals into the surrounding soil to prevent seed germination, notably of the native flora, so that it eventually takes over native bush land. As with other successful weeds, lantana can spread in different ways. It layers - that is, it produces roots from where the plant touches the ground, and that produces new plants. But more importantly it's propagated by seed. These are ingested by birds and foxes, which spread them through their droppings. This means it can spread over a distance very quickly. But perhaps more importantly, it can produce up to 12,000 seeds from one plant in a year. No wonder it has become a problem weed. So it is now known as a weed of national significance and is regarded as one of Australia's worst weeds. It is invasive, it has potential to spread and it is impacting on the economy and the environment. (picture4)

Lantana is already well established on the east coast of Australia. The best method of control is to prevent its further spread. To get rid of large areas of lantana you might need to use herbicides, though you could try mechanical removal. Biological control has been tried, however the controlling bugs and beetles vary in their effectiveness, partly because lantana drops its leaves when stressed, leaving the bugs with no food. In this project we had cut down the lantana and planted the local native plants (bangalow palm, river oak, celery wood, yellow carabeen, brush chery, gian water gum, weeping lilly pilly, bleeding heart, foam bark tree, brush box, white cedar, white bolly gum and water gum e.tc. ) in the same area.

We also cleaned up the Privet in the rain forest area. When water washing coming in the rain season, the non-native plants such as Lantana and Privet are washed away with the water to influence the water quality and kill fish. Local people want to plant more local native plants to hold soil and protect river to build the healthy environment. They have very strong water washing two or three times a year, that is why they need such as planting project every year.

#### 4. Melbourne

I had a one week project for planting in Melbourne. We had planted local native plants in some national parks and planted seaweeds on the beach. I also had an additional work to work on which was to cleanup beach before planting. Because we found there were lots of plastic rubbish (juice bottles, plastic containers of fast food, cigarette ends e.tc.) on the beach. (picture5)

##### **About my interview**

During the project work, I had interviewed some local volunteers, project team leaders and staff of national park. The questions were such as: why they join volunteer project; why we need such kind of project and information about the targeted plants.

As a result of my interview, I found that most of the local volunteers are older peoples and they join this organization for part time job, of course some of local volunteers for volunteer work. I also found the main reason of the project work is for plant more native plant to build health environment.

##### **Weekend study**

Every week we worked for a project from Monday to Friday, and they had to change international volunteers on every Friday. Weekend is free time for us to study, to visit a local area and to communicate with other international volunteers. I have visited the Australian National University, Melbourne University and some botanic gardens.(picture6)

#### **3. Personal thoughts**

Human has very high speed of advance and development. We will make high and new technology and new modern world to future. But on the other hand we have also consumed a lot of resources and brought many kinds of problems including over population, environment problems and so on. Should we just satisfy immediate demand or consider for younger generation? What is sustainability? What is healthy development? We should think about them when we develop underground resources, when we cut down trees, when we walk on the beach, when we enjoy the scenery near the sea. It needs a little attention, needs a little time and needs a little activity to build a healthy and sustainable environment for the future. This is what I observed throughout my internship.

We know environmental problems already have been global issues, occurred in any country. But I think nobody wants to make it more seriously, nobody wants to get any effect from it. Hopefully, environmental efforts don't have to be global or bring adverse circumstances. So what should we do now? Where should we start? I think we just start from the little things. We should pay attention to the small things and take care of small things. Don't think it is very little and small, many small things accumulate to form the whole world. We should pay attention when we throw rubbish on the street or on the beach; please take care when you see a bird or fish; please turn the tap off completely when you finish washing. All of which looks very easy and very simple, but when we persist in doing every day you will change your world to be healthy and sustainable.

Australia is a developed country and has rich natural environment. Australia not only has a lot of experience in dealing with development-related social problems, but also they are planting more and more local native plants to build the sustainable environment. Working with Conservation Volunteers Australia and local volunteers for nine weeks I have found that people in Australia have very high consciousness and many activities for the environment conservation. My internship did not only show me the importance of weed control in order to help maintain native species survival in the wild, but also showed me the willingness of people to learn and participate in activities to conserve the environment. Conservation Volunteers Australia organizes people and gives them a platform to do it. It will encourage more and more people to participate.

After internship I have found some connection between what I learn in the lab and my conservation volunteer experience. I now pay more attention to the environment conservation activities and have been more and more interested in environment science. Working with people of different backgrounds and different age groups was a good chance to learn more information and communicate about environmental problems.

Lastly, I would like to tell everyone that we need to build the healthy and sustainable environment and if we want to enjoy our life, we should start now!



P1, The CVA office in Canberra



P2, Beach cleaning



P3, Cutting Hawthorns



P4, Cleaning Lantana



P5, Planting project in Melbourne



P6, Australian National University