Bush

by Phil McNamara (he/him) and
The Third Fuse Project



Logline

Bush is a slow-paced comedy-drama about a band of quirky volunteers who look after a small patch of bush on the fringe of suburbia that is threatened by neighbours and other characters in the local community.

Key Details

A comedy-drama of 3 series, each with 6 x ~30 minute episodes.

- **Series One** – Weeds
- **Series Two** – Fire
- **Series Three** – Bikes

Bush was and is being written on the land of the Kaurna and Peramangk peoples.
The Third Fuse Project acknowledges the Kaurna and Peramangk peoples' ongoing physical and spiritual connection to Country. We look forward to a future when First Nations are empowered to make decisions about matters that impact their people and Country.



Series Synopsis

Bush is a limited series situation comedy about a quirky band of volunteers who look after Bog Park, a small patch of bush in the hilly suburb of Stanley Bridge. The volunteers don't call it Bog Park because they feel it is a post-colonial badge of disrespect for a place of such ecological significance. To them it is affectionately called 'Still Un-named'.

Enid is the leader. She is wise and well-spoken but in no way pretentious and is loved by all the volunteers. There is timid Pip and short-fused Jo, shit-stirrer Barb and formal Marg, and old Kent and young Ollie. They are best friends and wander through the reserve in their natural pairs slowly and carefully removing weeds. To them, the best things in the world are spending time in Still Un-named and spending time together, with their friendly banter, 'watsonia bombings'* and weekly visits to Luigi's Cafe to plan their next working bee. Their goal is to eventually see Un-named weed-free and they would do anything to protect their favourite place.

But threats to the biodiversity of the reserve are always around the corner. Trevor Treadwell from the local council doesn't agree with their slow and careful approach to the weeds and wants to 'spray them all out' (Series One, 'Weeds'). Neighbour, Manic Maud, sends anonymous letters to the council about the fire hazard and somehow avoids getting caught clearing more and more of the bush on the other side of the fence (Series Two, 'Fire'). And Jack the mountain-biker petitions the council to open up Still Un-named for extreme recreational activities (Series Three, 'Bikes'). But above all, there is grumpy Mike who lives at the entrance. He's never not there when they 'head-in' and is always complaining about people parking beyond the sign. He scares the volunteers but, little do they know, he is the hero of their story.

Bush will appeal to an SBS audience with its exploration of the experiences of people who don't fit into mainstream Australia and survive by connecting with others who have a common purpose and passion.

**'Watsonia bombs' are pretend grenades made from bulbous weeds that are thrown into the air.*

Character Descriptions and Arcs

Everything in Bush revolves around Pip and Jo. And young Squeak's journey across the three series adds an endearing element.

Pip and Jo are best friends and live next door to each other on the same street as Still Un-named Park. They are both passionate about protecting Still Un-named and spend every spare moment there. They struggle living in a fast-paced world and Un-named is their safe-place – a place where hardly anyone goes and they can escape. The combination of their strongly held convictions and social ineptitude result in many funny and poignant moments as they struggle to cope with antogonists, like Trevor Treadwell, who want Still Un-named to change. But over time they come to accept, by observing change in nature, that change is inevitable. They also come to accept there is good in most people, including grumpy neighbour Mike who, by the end of Series Three, saves the reserve from a network of mountain-bike tracks and bargains with the council to give Still Un-named a Peramangk name.



Pip

Pip is in his early thirties and lives with wife, Sam the ambo, and daughter, Squeak, who is seven. He works at the city museum as an entomologist and can’t bring himself to buy anything brand new. There is his constant battle with wife Sam who struggles with his environmental obsessiveness. But an even bigger dilemma for Pip is Enid’s expectation that he will one day lead the group. Enid throws Pip into situations to lead where he is bound to fail, which helps him deal with those expectations when Enid dies at the end of Series Three.

Jo

Jo is also in her early thirties. She lives alone in her small house and art room where she works doing botanical drawings for the herbarium. Jo has strong opinions, a short fuse and, unlike Pip, has a propensity to step head-first into conflict. There was no love in her family growing up and she is estranged from her parents who don’t accept her sexuality. Her developing relationship with Jane, the botanist, ebbs and flows across the three series, and ends with Jane’s final ultimatum, which Jo can only bare with Pip’s company and friendship.

Squeak

Squeak is seven, a deep-thinker and very perceptive of people and their emotions. Enid and Jo are her best friends and she loves to attend working bees where she takes on the role of observer. She likes to fix problems but tackles them head-on and struggles to navigate solutions without Enid and Jo’s help. But over time, her relationship with Enid and Jo becomes a source of ridicule at school and with local nursery owner, Fran, who thinks she should have friends her own age.



The Bush World

Bush is set in the Adelaide Hills, South Australia, in the green and hilly fictional suburb of Stanley Bridge. The main street has a welcoming and cottage-like feel and is lined with old and green deciduous trees – similar to Stirling on the outskirts of Adelaide. But at its core, it is like many peri-urban suburbs of a major Australian city where only tiny fragments of the bush are left as a distant reminder of the wonderful diversity of plant and animal life that once existed.

The focal place, Still Un-named Park, is one such fragment of remaining bushland and is based on a National Trust of South Australia reserve, Engelbrook, in the Adelaide Hills. It is mainly stringybark open forest with a thick and bushy understorey. Like many patches of bush on the fringe of suburbia, its importance is not fully recognised by many in the local community. It is a place to fear – a fire hazard, a source of weeds and a place that harbours rabbits and foxes.





The Bush World (cont.)

Everywhere else in Bush is a capitalist construct for Pip and Jo but they do find places outside Un-named where they feel at home and can spend time with like-minded people like at Luigi's Cafe, the Herbarium, Pat's Organic Market, Pip's workplace in the dungeons of the museum's entomology lab and Jo's home art studio where she can draw and paint in isolation.

The contemporary time point is also important for Bush and the First Nations thread that weaves its way through all three series. It is relatable to contemporary Australia where many want to do better for First Nations but struggle to give up anything of their way of 'doing' to do so. And Bush provides a not-so-subtle lens on how a modern-day group of people can help bring about meaningful change for First Nations by listening and learning from their enduring wisdom.



Tone

There is a gentleness about Bush. The pace is slow and almost meandering, particularly when the volunteers are in Still Un-named. They move slowly through the bush removing weeds, and there is rarely any urgency in their movements. This is also brought to life with b-roll close up images of nature (and pop-ups with species names), sounds of nature and carefully placed silences at key moments. As a reference point, these tonal elements are very similar to the English sitcom The Detectorists.

Despite the conflict in each series, there is also a kindness about Bush. There is a good deal of friendly banter and conflict is always resolved in a nice way. This is largely due to the ever-present wisdom of Enid, who is worshipped by the volunteers and respected by the wider community, and who has a knack of knowing everything and staying calm in the face of adversity.

Also like The Detectorists, the humour in Bush is subtle, sometimes poignant, and above all relatable because anyone who is passionate about an interest or hobby will see their same enthusiasm in the volunteers and laugh at their own quirkiness.



Ixodia achillaeoides
“Mountain Daisy”

Style

Bush should be filmed in a similar style to The Detectorists with wide shots to show the landscape coupled with close-ups of nature. The people images should use wide shots in combination with a close frame to show facial expressions and reaction between characters for group scenes.

The colour palette for Still Un-named should be similar to what would be observed in Australian bushland with greens and browns with pops of vibrant colour from animals and wild flowers. Places like the herbarium and entomology lab of the museum, though stark by nature, need to feel welcoming because they are places Pip and Jo feel at home. The colour palette changes to greys and yellows when Pip and Jo are outside their comfort zone, like on the bus, in the city or at the pub.

The lighting should be bright and even with minimal shadows to create a positive cheerful atmosphere when the volunteers are in Still Un-named but also during scenes of conflict to give the impression that all is okay and will be resolved in a kind way.

Music should be used minimally to enable the sounds of nature and silences to be heard and to support the slow pace of scenes and poignant moments. A familiar musical theme for the series is important and should be representative of the tone and style of Bush.







Episode Synopsis

Series One: “Weeds”

Episode One

The volunteers walk slowly through the bush at Still Un-named park, carefully removing weeds as they go. Trevor, the new guy from Stanley Bridge Council, arrives to see what they get up to and criticises their slow approach. Pip and Jo try to explain but get distracted by a weedy pittosporum growing in neighbour, Mike's, 'good' bush. They ask Mike if they can remove it but he refuses; Mike's more interested in where Enid has parked her car – past the sign again.

The following day, Pip and Jo head back to Still Un-named and stumble across Trevor and Mike at the Main Creek blackberry site. They secretly listen to their conversation. Trevor is complaining about the volunteers' slow approach and Mike talks disparagingly about Pip's B.O. Offended by the insults, Pip and Jo cut and swab the weedy pittosporum in Mike's good bush. The episode closes with an image of a trail camera on a tree overlooking the pittosporum they just killed.

Episode Two

It’s morning and Trevor knocks on Pip’s door. He tells Pip he’s received complaints about the blackberry in Main Creek and wants to ‘spray it all out’. Later, at Luigi’s cafe, Enid shows Pip and Jo a video of them killing the weedy pittosporum in Mike’s good bush. Pip feels like crap but, as usual, Jo comforts him. Enid calls Trevor to suggest he uses their regular contractors – Tony and Steve – to do the blackberry.

In the afternoon, Pip and Jo head off to tackle outlying weeds near Mike’s boundary and bump into Trevor again. Pip feels better when Trevor says he is happy to use Tony and Steve to do the blackberry. But as Trevor leaves, Pip and Jo see Mike under his verandah loading bullets into a rifle and there is a sign on the fence that says, ‘Trespassers will be shot’. They slink away. Pip returns home and calls Tony and Steve about the blackberry work and warns them about Trevor.



Episode Three

Pip, Squeak and Jo hurry down to Still Un-named to talk to Trevor, Tony and Steve about the blackberry work. Tony and Steve unexpectedly arrive in Hazmat suits and spray back-packs full of poison. They impress Trevor but Pip thinks they have gone to the 'bad' side. In disbelief, Pip rushes back up the hill to get Squeak to school.

Later, Ollie arrives at Pip and Sam's house to babysit Squeak while they go to the pub with Sam's work mates. Ollie has come prepared with an agenda that goes all the way up to midnight. At the pub, Pip is totally out of his depth and makes regular trips to the toilet to get away. The night takes a turn for the worse when Jeff forces him onto the dance floor with Sam and videos Pip's awkward dance moves. When they get home, Ollie and Squeak are still awake and have done everything on Ollie's list. The episode ends with Pip apologising to Sam but he is worried about their relationship.

Episode Four

Pip, Sam and Squeak wake to find Jeff's video of Pip dancing all over the socials and Enid visits to help Squeak search online for the First Nations who traditionally owned Stanley Bridge. They join the other volunteers at the entrance to Un-named and walk silently and carefully past Mike. When they get to Side Creek, Squeak does an Acknowledgement of Country but becomes upset because it feels superficial. Enid makes a plan to contact the Peramangk people.

Everyone gathers at Main Creek for morning tea and Tony and Steve show the volunteers their work. Pip can't believe he was so worried. They have carefully removed isolated blackberry in the good bush and only sprayed the edges of the thick blackberry. Trevor arrives and is 'pissed off' then leaves in a huff. Pip and Jo comment that they never see any rabbits in Un-named, which is unusual, and the episode ends with Trevor secretly photographing Pip and Jo 'watsonia-bombing' the other volunteers.

Episode Five

Pip and Jo catch the bus into the city to drop off plant specimens at the herbarium where Jo has a crush on one of the botanists, Jane. Jo awkwardly flirts with her but this puts Jane off. Later, Pip and Jo go to Un-named to remove a weedy sollya and Jo is unusually subdued. As they work, they notice a reporter in the bush take a photo of them. They return to the entrance and Trevor makes a smart-ass comment. Jo explodes and has a go at him for not doing anything about Mike and his rifle. But Trevor says Mike is just killing rabbits to stop them chewing down the native plants.

The following day, the volunteers arrive at Luigi's Cafe where a newspaper clipping is pinned up behind the counter with a photo of the watsonia-bombing. The title of the article is, 'Weed warriors not weed worried'. They suspect Trevor is to blame. After the working bee, Pip, Jo and Squeak visit Fran at the nursery but this makes Pip late home for going out with Sam, and Sam leaves in a huff.

Episode Six

The volunteers find out Trevor is planning to visit Un-named with a 'long-line'* to spray-out the blackberry. They gather at the entrance with placards. Trevor arrives and the volunteers start chanting. Trevor admits defeat and leaves but Jo is suspicious. They hurry down Main Ridge track and find Trevor stuck in the blackberry with a broken leg. They carefully weed the blackberry around him and cart him out in a chair on Kent's trailer. As they go, Pip sees Jane briefly hug Jo.

Later in the week, the volunteers gather once again at Luigi's Cafe where there is another newspaper article, this time with a picture of Pip and Jo and the title, 'Park duo lauded by locals'. In a quiet moment, Enid tells Pip he could lead the group one day. This makes Pip anxious. At the working bee, the volunteers get their revenge on Pip and Jo with a barrage of watsonia-bombs. Enid watches-on with pride.
The episode ends with Enid receiving a call from Mack, a Peramangk man.



**A 'long-line' is a long hose attached to a reel on the back of a utility and used for spraying herbicide.*

The Team

Bush was written by Phil McNamara from The Third Fuse Project – a small family-owned business that publishes environmental writing. Bush is Phil's first screenplay. He has one other major piece of writing, an environmental novel, Red Reflection, which was published in 2021.

Phil has been volunteering at Engelbrook Reserve in the Adelaide Hills for over 20 years. Bush has been inspired by his experiences at the reserve. Phil has also worked in the environment industry and with First Nations for a similar amount of time.

Phil has been supported in the writing of Bush by a number of important colleagues, family and friends who were involved in a reading of Series One 'Weeds' at Beltana House Studio, Adelaide, in October 2024.

Phil does not currently have a producer attached to this project and would welcome SBS' assistance in finding one to work with. As a new talent in the area of writing for television, Phil has attached a copy of Series One 'Weeds' (6 episodes).





Contact Details

In case you want to know more, please contact:

Phil McNamara
The Third Fuse Project

0447 099 034
phil@thirdfuse.com.au
www.thirdfuse.com.au

Attachments

- **Attachment One** – Bush (Series One – Weeds – 6 episodes) by Phil McNamara

THIRD FUSE

The graphic design for this pitch deck was done by Skye McCarthy.