

Community Wildlife Conservation Award

This time last year our Society announced the inauguration of a Community Wildlife Service Award to recognise organisations which make a significant contribution to the preservation of Australian wildlife.

We were delighted that there were seven nominations received. All of them were worthy nominations and geographically came from metropolitan Sydney, regional NSW and interstate.

Clive Williams announced the recipient of the inaugural award – “Bringing Back the Flashjack Project” of Emerald in Central Queensland.

Flashjack is the name given in the Emerald district to the bridled nailed tailed wallaby. These beautiful little animals were once plentiful on the western side of the Dividing Range from Charters Towers in North Queensland right through NSW to the northern districts of Victoria. However, the usual culprits of foxes, feral cats and heavy destruction of habitat led to their severe depletion. In fact, they were thought to be extinct, but a remnant population was discovered on a station property at Dingo in Central Queensland in the mid 1970's. Subsequently the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) bought the property to preserve both the colony and the habitat.

Since then a captive breeding program has been conducted at the BHP Gregory mine site, with the co-operation of scientists from the University of Queensland and the QPWS. It was important to establish colonies at other sites so that the animals would not be so vulnerable to natural disasters. A local landholder in the Emerald district, Hugo Spooner, and his wife, on their property, 'Avocet', had set aside over 1,100 hectares as a wildlife refuge. QPWS examined the site and determined it was a suitable habitat. Emerald Shire Council appointed a special officer to coordinate the project. Volunteers carried out an audit of feral animals on the site and appropriate eradication steps were taken before the flashjacks were released.

Re-establishing animals is usually conducted in National Parks or other lands managed by governments. When the flashjacks were released on Avocet, it was the first occasion in Queensland, and perhaps elsewhere in Australia that animals had been released onto private land.



Janelle Lowry, Her Excellency, Clive Williams, Yvonne Thompson and Patrick Medway

One of the most exciting aspects of this project, that made it such a strong community effort, was the involvement of the local Gindie Primary School. Two teachers, with the assistance of an Education Department consultant, developed a science program on Conservation, lasting one term and taught at different levels in the four highest grades of the school. The children not only had the opportunity to learn about the scientific basis of conservation, but also had the delightful experience of being involved in the release of the flashjacks. There have been several releases of the animals and local TAFE students, scouts and volunteers have also been involved. Each animal has been individually radio-tagged so that its location can be monitored and from all accounts the flashjacks are doing well and are multiplying.

This is a project which has involved a university, a government department, a shire council, a mining company, a local landholder, a school, a TAFE college, scouts and numerous volunteers. The “Bringing Back the Flashjack Project” is a worthy winner of our inaugural WPSA Community Service Award. In fact it sets a benchmark for others to emulate.

Janelle Lowry of the QPWS and community volunteer, Yvonne Thompson, received the Award on behalf of Bringing Back the Flashjack Project from Her Excellency, the Governor of New South Wales.



Janelle Lowry and Yvonne Thompson