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Wildlife

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Celebrating a new century of wildlife preservation in Australia

Journal of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Limited

(Founded 1909)

Birds that “live where people live”

What has happened to all the small birds in our backyards?

What has happened to their environment?

What has happened to their food? Shelter? Water? Nesting sites?

Why have the larger honey-eaters and rainbow lorikeets flourished in our suburban areas?

How can we provide suitable habitat for small birds in our own backyards, parks, bush reserves and wider communities in and around our larger cities?

How can we eradicate the threats to small birds – such as cats, dogs and the terrible Indian myna?

Our Society will later this year be launching an exciting new project focusing on preserving Australian native birds that “live where people live”.

We plan to look at what small birds need, what we can provide in our own gardens and in our local communities, and how we can work together to plan for bird-friendly spaces that will ultimately benefit all wildlife and ourselves.



Golden whistler (*Pachycephala pectoralis*) was once found from northern Queensland, around coastal eastern and southern Australia, including Tasmania, to the middle of Western Australia, but urban development and land clearing has led to their decline. Photo by Lindsay Hansch - Canberra Ornithologists Group



Southern emu-wren (*Stipiturus malachurus intermedius*) has been classified as a critically endangered species. Habitats are becoming increasingly fragmented resulting in declining populations. Photo by Stuart Harris – taken at South Pacific Heathland Reserve in Ulladulla NSW



Rainbow lorikeet (*Trichoglossus haematodus moluccanus*) has become common in suburban areas. Photo by John F Martin



Hooded robin (*Melanodryas cucullata*), once widespread and abundant across most of Australia, but now rare due to predation by cats. Photo by Graham Stephinson



Superb fairy-wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) used to be a common garden bird, but predation by domestic pets and expanding urban development has led to their decline. Photo by John Martin in November 2009 near Nelson, Victoria in native scrub (extreme SW corner of Victoria in Lower Glenelg National Park). Nikon D70, Nikkor 70-300mm VR lens @ 300mm

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Superb blue-wren (*Malurus cyaneus*)

Photo taken near Nelson, Victoria in native scrub (extreme SW corner of Victoria in Lower Glenelg National Park).

Nikon D70, Nikkor 70-300mm VR lens @ 300mm.

Photographer: John F. Martin Nature Photography

Articles and comments expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Editor, Society or members. Articles contributed from outside sources are included for the reading enjoyment of members and to encourage discussion on different points of view.

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Celebrating a new century of
wildlife preservation in Australia

Australian Wildlife

is the official journal of the
Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Limited.

Founded in 1909, the Society is dedicated
to the conservation of our unique Australian
wildlife in all its forms.

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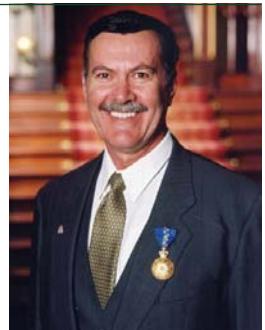
Our Mission

The Wildlife Preservation Society is an independent, voluntary, non-profit conservation organisation, formed in 1909, and is committed to the preservation of Australia's precious flora and fauna. We act as a watchdog and provide advice to government agencies and institutions regarding environmental and conservation issues concerning all aspects of wildlife preservation. Our mission is to conserve Australia's fauna and flora through education and involvement of the community. We are dedicated to the conservation of our unique Australian wildlife in all its forms through national environmental education programs, political lobbying, advocacy and hands on conservation work.

Our Society has always known that a conservation battle is never really won until the victory is enshrined in legislation. We have always tried to convince politicians of the necessity to include the preservation of Australia's precious wildlife and its vital conservation habitat in all their planning and environmental issues and discussions.

From the President's Desk

Patrick W Medway AM - National President



A successful Centenary

We want to congratulate all our members who contributed to and participated in the 2009 Centenary celebrations for the Society right across Australia

The directors, members and guests had a great time with a wide range of functions, events and activities to mark this important milestone in the long life of the Society. A Centenary is such a wonderful and unique experience for most people. It is even more exciting to think of the next 100 years and what may be achieved in preserving Australia's precious wildlife. On 3 March 2010 we will be holding our 101st Annual General Meeting, to be followed by a members and friends luncheon.

We also want to thank the executive officers who worked so hard to organise and attend most of the Centenary functions. Our particular thanks go to Noel Cislawski, who chaired the Centenary Committee, for his outstanding efforts throughout this special year, and to Qantas who sponsored the airfares to Australian capital cities.

National projects

We are now embarking on a number of national projects to help save our native wildlife for the next generation of young Australians.

We have made a commitment to help re-establish the bilby back into the Pilbara region in Western Australia in a new and very large regional conservation park; in Queensland we are still working to save marine sea turtles across our northern regions; more funds are being donated to assist in helping the wombats in Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales; in Botany Bay Sydney we are working towards restoration of the migratory wading bird habitat; in Tasmania we are still trying to find the solution to the problem of native wildlife grazing on the newly planted plantation trees; on top of all this is the constant reminder of the effects of global warming and climate change on wildlife.

Wirrimbirra Wildlife Sanctuary revisited

The directors recently visited the Wirrimbirra Wildlife Sanctuary to meet with the new directors of the Board.

After an inspection of the sanctuary, over a light luncheon, Janine Kitson, the newly elected President of the Wirrimbirra Sanctuary, outlined the long history of our mutual associations through our respective founders David George Stead and Thistle Harris. All directors enjoyed the visit and the re-awakening of our mutual interest in Australian wildlife and environmental education issues. Our Vice President, Dr David Murray, has now joined the Sanctuary Board as a director and we look forward to working together over the coming years.

New membership drive

Following extensive research by our Membership Committee and Board, we are continuing with a major membership drive in 2010 to increase our membership across Australia. We invite all our existing members to consider inviting their friends and relatives to join with us in saving our

precious native wildlife. We have a number of membership categories which would appeal to a wide audience – from individual to family and even corporate membership. Please contact the office if you would like membership brochures or check out the latest magazine for the membership forms. You can now join or renew your membership online at www.wpsa.org.au

Three year membership offer

We have introduced a discounted three year membership category and have had our first application from Tasmania – we are grateful for such wonderful support for the wildlife conservation work of the Society. We encourage everyone to consider taking advantage of this special bonus offer and save on money and time in making Society membership renewals.

A very Happy New Year to all our Members

101st Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 3 March 2010
Commencing at 11.30 am

Adam Room – 4th Floor, NSW Masonic Club (Castlereagh Inn)
169 Castlereagh Street, Sydney

AGENDA

1. Welcome and recording of those present
2. To receive apologies
3. Minutes of the 100th Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 25 February 2009
4. National President's Report for 2009
5. Treasurer's Report for 2009. Receive and adopt the Balance Sheet and Income and Expenditure of the Society for the year ending 31 December 2009 in accordance with our Constitution.
6. To elect three Directors
 - a) Patrick Medway retires in accordance with the Constitution (10.3) and being eligible, offers himself for re-election
 - b) Dick Mason retires in accordance with the Constitution (10.3) and being eligible, offers himself for re-election
 - c) Clive Williams retires in accordance with the Constitution (10.3) and being eligible, offers himself for re-election
7. To appoint the Auditors for 2010.
8. To transact any other business which may be lawfully brought forward.
9. Closure.

Issued by authority of Council of the Society
Suzanne Medway
Executive Director/Secretary

Editorial

Suzanne Medway

How exciting to be starting a new century of wildlife preservation



On looking back over our Centenary year, the greatest thrill for me was meeting, reading about and remembering the conservation heroes who devoted their energies to preserving and protecting the native fauna and flora of Australia.

In his speech at the 100th Annual General Meeting our National President, Patrick Medway, said that he feels he is “standing on the shoulders of conservation giants”. My wish for 2010, the beginning of the Society’s 101st year, is that the current executive can continue the commitment and mission of our dedicated predecessors.

We were very excited to receive a parcel of the first ten editions of *Australian Wildlife* magazine from one of our Life Members, John Bennett of Mosman. John’s father, Roy Frederick Bennett, became a Life Member in 1926 and President in 1930. Patrick and I visited the National Library in Canberra late 2008 to research the early history of the Society and were able to view the early editions of the magazine, but it is very thrilling to now have original copies in our Society’s collection.

After a short break over the Christmas period, our office is back in full production and the executive are busy planning the activities and projects for the coming year. We would love to receive suggestions and ideas from our members on how they think the Society should proceed with our mission of preserving and conserving native Australian wildlife in this new century.

Last year saw the start of our fortnightly email newsletter. I hope all our members have been enjoying the regular updates. If you have an email address and are not receiving this regular newsletter, please let the office know your email address and I will make sure you are put on the distribution list. Any feedback or contribution from members would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you to all the members that gave their encouragement and contributions to the quarterly magazine and email newsletter, it is greatly appreciated. It is very encouraging to receive positive feedback and, occasionally, to be picked up on errors I have made. A special thank you to Sabine, who lives in Tasmania and helps with the editing of the magazine – oh the wonders of email! It seems that no matter how many times you read and check something, an error seems to slip through occasionally!

The response to the series of frog photographs in the last magazine was overwhelming, so we have featured on the inside back cover of this magazine some more of the beautiful photographs taken by Michael and Sharon Williams. Thank you Michael and Sharon for allowing us to reproduce the photographs free of charge.

One of my personal objectives for 2010 is to grow the membership of the Society and I ask our existing members to tell their family and friends about the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia and encourage them to join us.

We have an exciting and busy conservation year planned, starting with our 101st Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 3 March 2010, to be followed by our members and friends luncheon. In March we are holding our regular wildlife tour, this year visiting Falls Forest Retreat located between Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour in New South Wales. Details of these events are featured in the magazine. I hope to meet lots of new members and their friends at the coming functions.

I wish all our members, their family and friends all the best for the coming New Year.



GROWLING GRASS FROG - (*Litoria raniformis*.) More of Michael and Sharon Williams' stunning images can be found inside the back cover

Revisiting our history with the Stead Foundation

Janine Kitson, President, David G. Stead Memorial Wild Life Research Foundation of Australia (Stead Foundation)

The history of the Stead Foundation is closely intertwined with the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia because its key pioneers – Vincent Serventy and Thistle Harris – were actively involved in both organisations. During the Wildlife Preservation Society's Centenary celebrations in 2009 it was timely that both organisations met and revisited their mutual histories. Both organisations had close associations with David G. Stead (1877–1957), who was instrumental in founding the Wildlife Preservation Society in 1909. Vincent Serventy became President of the Wild Life Preservation Society in 1966, remaining in that position until 2002, and then holding the position of President of Honour until his death in September 2007. Thistle Harris was the long-time partner and wife of David Stead, as well as serving herself as a Wild Life Preservation Society Councillor, Honorary Secretary and President.

However, as can happen in families, organisations and even conservation groups, disagreements, personality clashes and unresolved conflicts can occur. Thistle Harris, a strong-minded conservationist, resigned from the Wild Life Preservation Society and never returned. Why?

In 1975 Thistle Y Harris tried to move a motion to incorporate the Wild Life Preservation Society into the Stead Foundation. However, Vincent Serventy, who had only just returned from an overseas trip, made sure he attended the meeting, was elected President and defeated Thistle's motion to wind up the Wild Life Preservation Society. So dramatic and fiery was the meeting that bush regenerator pioneer, Eileen Bradley, collapsed and tragically died of a heart attack. Thistle walked out of that Wild Life Preservation Society meeting never to return. Vincent Serventy relinquished his interest in the Stead Foundation.

Time heals and it is pleasing that the Wildlife Preservation Society and the Stead Foundation have met, shared their collective memories, and acknowledged their close histories.



Back row: Patrick Medway (National President, WPSA), Chris Lloyd (Board Director, Stead Foundation), Peter Hardiman (WPSA Councillor), Dr Clive Williams (Vice President WPSA), Bob Burke (Board Director, Stead Foundation), Dr David Murray (Board Director, Stead Foundation & Vice President, WPSA), John Cantell (ex officio Treasurer & Company Secretary, Stead Foundation)

Front Row: Janine Kitson (President, Stead Foundation), Rae Dutton (Secretary, Stead Foundation), Tony Cornell (WPSA Treasurer & Councillor), Matt Oakley (Vice President, Stead Foundation)

In October 2009 the newly elected Stead Foundation Board welcomed the Wildlife Preservation Society Council to Wirrimbirra Sanctuary, the nature reserve it manages at Bargo. The Stead Foundation gave Wildlife Preservation Society President Patrick Medway and other Wildlife Preservation Society Councillors a tour of Wirrimbirra's fauna enclosure area, native nursery and bush tucker garden, as well as providing a delicious luncheon. Dr David Murray, Vice-President of the Wildlife Preservation Society, also joined the visit to Wirrimbirra. The Stead Foundation welcomes him as a recently elected board director, along with Tony Bastow, Bob Bourke, Rae Dutton, Janine Kitson, Chris Lloyd, Matt Oakley, Melka Oakley, Sandra Reynolds and Kerry Timms.

After David Stead's death in 1957 tributes flooded in. Thistle was determined that David Stead's contribution to the environment movement should not be forgotten. In 1962 she purchased bushland at Bargo to set up the flora and fauna sanctuary – Wirrimbirra, as his memorial. She formed the David G. Stead Memorial Wild Life Research Foundation of Australia to manage the property. In

1965 the Stead Foundation donated the 95 hectares of land to the National Trust of Australia (NSW). In the Stead Foundation's *Wild Life Research News* edition of March 1966 it states:

'As you all know, "Wirrimbirra" has now become the property of The National Trust of Australia (NSW), as from 20th December, 1965, and has been leased to the Foundation for the purpose for which it was first acquired. This measure, authorized at the Extraordinary General Meeting held on 30 November, 1965, has been carried out with the object that the valuable Wirrimbirra site will remain inviolate for all time as a wild life research establishment and flora and fauna reserve, in the permanent security and authority of the Trust's patronage. We look forward to close co-operation with the National Trust in our work, not only at Wirrimbirra, but in general, and appreciate this assistance from The Trust in furthering our work for conservation.'

In the foreword to Thistle Harris' biography, former National Trust President Barry O'Keefe states:



David Stead

'By her Will she made a generous bequest to the National Trust, in recognition of which the National Trust has committed itself to the maintenance of the Wirrimbirra Sanctuary in perpetuity and to helping ensure that it remains a place for education and research – an appropriate memorial to David Stead and a tribute to a great Australian, Dr Thistle Stead.'

Perhaps too, Thistle Harris may not have wanted David Stead's daughter, Christina Stead (1902–1983) to have the last say about the man she loved? Christina Stead wrote a scathing autobiographical novel about her father *The Man Who Loved Children* (New York, 1940). Thistle Harris said that she thought *The Man Who Loved Children* was 'substantially true' but 'tremendously cruel'.

Dr Thistle Yolette Harris AM (1902–1990) was a teacher and then lecturer in biology at Sydney Teachers College from 1938 to 1962. She was a prolific author and popularised Australian native plants, with her 1938 publication, *Wildflowers of Australia*. She pioneered environmental education, starting a field studies centre at Wirrimbirra which was one of the first environmental centres established by the Department of School Education between 1971 and 1995. Today there are 23 environmental education centres in NSW. When she died in 1990 she left a bequest to the National Trust (NSW) with the expressed wish that the proceeds be spent on the development of Wirrimbirra.



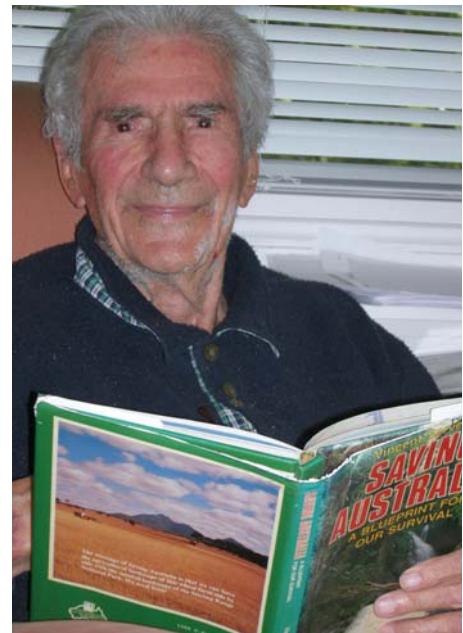
Thistle Harris in 1928

Thistle Stead was an active and dedicated participant in the evolving conservation movement. She worked closely with Vincent Serventy on many campaigns, including the campaign to stop the flooding of Lake Pedder in Tasmania – which failed – but made environmentalists even more determined to stop the damming of the Franklin River in the 1980s. Thistle's interest in the protection of Kosciuszko's alpine region was very much supported by the Wildlife Preservation Society.

Wirrimbirra is listed on the Register of the National Estate, the National Trust Register, the State Heritage Register and the Local Environment Plan. Most of this is preserved native bushland that has rich and diverse flora and fauna. Wirrimbirra is divided by the main southern railway line into two sections. The larger eastern area (approximately ninety hectares) is a largely undisturbed area of eucalyptus woodland known as 'Bargo Brush'. The western area (approximately five hectares) includes an information centre, a native plant nursery, cafe, bush tucker garden and fauna enclosure area, where the public



Wirrimbirra Sanctuary's information centre



Vincent Serventy

can see eastern grey kangaroos, red-necked wallabies, swamp wallabies, tammar wallabies, emus, wombats and other native animals and birds. Wirrimbirra has budget cabin accommodation and picnic and BBQ facilities. Wirrimbirra is entirely run by volunteers and raises its revenue by donations and Event Days.

Wirrimbirra is an iconic nature reserve because it tells the inspiring story of Australia's early environmental pioneers – particularly David G. Stead, Thistle Harris and Vincent Serventy – who contributed so much to the protection of Australia's unique environment.

Wirrimbirra is located at 3105 Remembrance Drive, Bargo and welcomes visitors Tuesday to Sunday 9am - 4.30pm. Entry to the Sanctuary is free.

Wirrimbirra is run by volunteers and raises its revenue by donations and Event Days. The next Event Day will be Reptile Day on Sunday 28 February 2010.

For more information visit www.wirrimbirra.com.au or contact (02) 4684 1112



The creek in the Bargo brush at Wirrimbirra

The inconvenient cassowary

Liz Gallie - Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation (C4)



At approximately 7am on a Sunday morning in December another cassowary was killed on the road at Mission Beach (south of Cairns in Queensland). This is barely a month after the last road fatality took the life of a female estimated to be twenty years old. The death occurred at the approach to Mission Beach as the road straightens out from the sharp bends of Fenby's Gap. It is a known crossing area where Queensland Parks and Wildlife staff often post 'Recent Crossing' signs.

Photo by Liz Gallie



Photo by Liz Gallie

There have been other cassowary fatalities in this area. It is on a main roads section of road which displays a recommended speed limit of 60km/h within an 80 km/h zone.

It appears that this is another case of a cassowary being hit by a vehicle and the driver not stopping.

A couple travelling out of Mission Beach saw a cassowary standing next to something on the other side of the road bending down and touching it with its beak. They stopped and realised then it was another cassowary. They described the scene as the cassowary standing over the other (dead) bird and it looked like it was trying to pull it up. Another witness who stopped called the police to report the 'traffic hazard' because the other bird wouldn't go away. "It kept pecking it and nudging it. It would walk into the bush and come back out again", they said.

When a wildlife life carer arrived, the bird was sitting a few metres away in the cover of the rainforest. The dead bird was removed by a Queensland Parks and Wildlife ranger.

More signs went up and life went back to normal ... for the motorists, that is.

Why there were two birds on the scene raises some questions. Both of the birds were described as similar in appearance.

It has been said, "I wish I had never heard of cassowaries, they are holding up progress" and even at the scene of the death a month ago someone said, "Get it off the road, they are just a bloody nuisance".

No one driving past the site since Sunday would know that another (likely breeding) adult cassowary had been killed at this location and removed from the important population at Mission Beach. No one knows what its relationship was with the other bird. It was simply another wildlife roadkill.

Despite overwhelming evidence and knowledge that vehicle strike is a major cause of cassowary deaths, traffic-producing development continues to be approved without traffic-calming measures to protect these endangered species at Mission Beach.

The Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation (C4) has been voicing their concerns to all levels of government for twenty years and yet, urbanisation continues and with it traffic increases. At Mission Beach all traffic travels through cassowary habitat.

A recent report commissioned by the Federal Environment Agency found that there are 1,000 vacant blocks of land and over 900 new units currently approved or being assessed for development. However, the actual number is greater.

A local real estate agent admits there is an oversupply of real estate at Mission Beach, with many blocks going unsold at the regular land auctions now being held to try and move sales.

The local business group promotes Mission Beach as an adventure playground and appears to play down the importance of the cassowary to the Mission Beach tourism economy



Photo by Liz Gallie

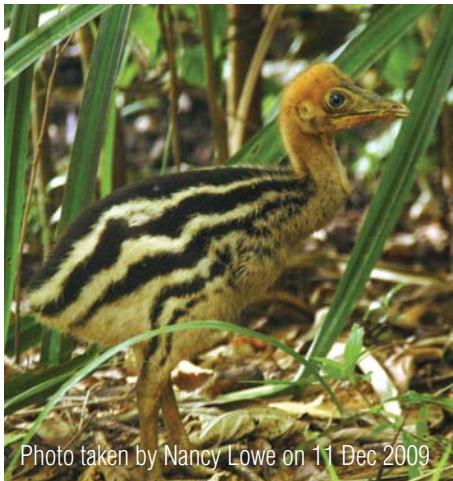


Photo taken by Nancy Lowe on 11 Dec 2009

ignoring the consequences of increased traffic to the area.

Cassowary Coast Council must start taking responsibility and show political will by acknowledging the importance of the cassowary population to the health of our rainforest, our community and our economy. Immediate steps need to be taken to manage and control the ongoing and increasing threats associated with development the Council is approving.

Local, state and federal legislation is allowing for serious environmental harm to occur at Mission Beach. C4 urgently calls for a temporary freeze on more development approvals, especially those that disregard the FNQ 2031 plan.

We ask the federal government to pay particular attention to the impact traffic will have on the continued presence of the cassowary when assessing all current and future developments in important cassowary population areas.

Forty percent of cassowary habitat at Mission Beach is not protected. C4 has already raised \$80,000 to buy back cassowary habitat and protect it forever. We recently entered into a fundraising partnership with renowned Rainforest Rescue. Bob Irwin is our champion and encourages people to please donate to help secure essential cassowary habitat in the lowland tropical rainforests of Mission Beach. We hope that state and federal governments will match donations from the public, which seems fair given cassowaries are listed as endangered under their legislation, although that could be an inconvenient truth.

Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation (C4)

The constant pressure of development on Crown land at Mission Beach, all of which is now critical cassowary habitat,



Photo taken by Robert Tidey on 12 Dec 2009

was the impetus for a group of twelve locals to get together to form Mission Beach's first incorporated conservation group, the Movement for Responsible Coastal Development.

In 1990 the newly elected State Labor Government, with the assistance of several local councils and the Tully branch of Wildlife Preservation Society Queensland (WPSQ), organised a conference at Mission Beach to discuss the plight of the cassowary. The outcome of this conference was the establishment of the Consultative Committee for Cassowary Conservation (C4). C4 was a consortium of local community groups, local councils, government departments and other agencies such as CSIRO.

In 1994 the MRCD and C4 combined to form the Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation.

C4 aims to:

- implement the Cassowary Recovery plan.
- identify and ensure the retention of environmentally significant areas.
- liaise with all levels of government and have input into the social, economic and environmental well-being of Mission Beach.
- maintain a heightened community awareness of environmental

issues through education and information.

- maintain a Land Gift Fund to protect and secure essential cassowary habitat

C4 established five working groups to achieve these aims:

- Habitat
- Education
- Rural
- Nursery
- Rescue and Rehabilitation
- Representation and advice from the local indigenous people (Djiru)

Through the working groups and the vision statement of 'Knowing Keeping Sharing', C4 undertakes to protect Mission Beach's natural values to ensure a healthy environment, community and economy. We believe Mission Beach can develop and maintain its unique identity including being a place where you can still see a cassowary in the wild.

In 2006 the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia donated funds to C4 for feeding of a protein substitute and fruit to the cassowary population after Tropical Cyclone Larry devastated the region and the cassowary's habitat.

Website:

www.cassowaryconservation.asn.au



Photo by Liz Gallie



The bilby

Some facts about the bilby from the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia

Bilbies (*Macrotis lagotis*) are desert-dwelling marsupial omnivores; they are members of the order Peramelemorphia and are closely related to the bandicoots. Bilbies have long pointed snouts, long ears, delicate grey fur and compact bodies. Before European colonisation of Australia they were distributed across most of Australia, occupying desert and temperate areas. The bilby is sometimes referred to as the greater bilby to distinguish it from the lesser bilby (*Macrotis leucura*), a central Australian species that was last recorded alive in the 1930s.

Bilbies measure between 30 and 55 centimetres in head and body length and differ from other bandicoots by their larger ears, long silky fur and longer tails. Their large ears allow them to have very good hearing and they probably play a role in maintaining body temperature and water balance in an arid environment.

Unlike bandicoots, bilbies are excellent burrowers and build extensive

underground tunnel systems up to a metre deep with their strong forelimbs and well-developed claws. A bilby typically makes a number of burrows within its home range, up to about a dozen, and moves between them, using them for shelter both from predators and the heat of the day. The female bilby's pouch faces backwards, which prevents her pouch from getting filled with dirt while she is digging. Bilbies are active at night, sheltering in their burrows during the daytime.

The bilby is a word from the Yuwaalaraay Aboriginal language of northern New South Wales, meaning 'long-nosed rat'. It is known as *dalgyte* and *ninu* in Western Australia and the nickname 'pinkie' is sometimes used in South Australia. The Wiradjuri people of New South Wales also call it *bilby*.

The bilby is an important part of traditional Indigenous culture in the deserts of Central Australia. Its large rabbit-like ears have also made it a

Greater bilby [nt] (*Macrotis lagotis sagitta*)

Once widespread across most of the mainland, the bilby is now confined to the deserts of central Australia.

Photo supplied by Alice Springs Desert Park

popular Australian icon at Easter. Sadly, through habitat loss and competition with introduced animals, the number of these small mammals has dramatically reduced over the last one hundred years.

Bilby habitat

A hundred years ago bilbies were common in many habitats throughout Australia, from the dry interior to temperate coastal regions. Changes to the bilby's habitat have seen their numbers greatly reduced and today the species is nationally listed as vulnerable. They now occur in fragmented populations in mulga shrublands and spinifex grasslands in the Tanami Desert of the Northern Territory; in the Gibson and Great Sandy deserts and the Pilbara and Kimberley regions of Western Australia; and the Mitchell Grasslands of south-west Queensland.

Bilby diet

Bilbies are omnivores, which means they feed on a range of foods including seeds, fungi, bulbs, and insects such

as grasshoppers, beetles, spiders and termites. When looking for food, the bilby digs small holes up to 25 centimetres deep. These holes are scattered over bilby feeding areas.

The bilby has several distinctive features that it uses to find food. It uses its big ears and sharp sense of smell to find food, and it has a long, skinny tongue that it uses to lick up seeds from the ground. However, this feeding style means the bilby eats a lot of sand. In fact, twenty to ninety percent of its waste can be sand! Another feature is that it often eats the exoskeletons of insects, which shine in the light when their scat is broken open.

The bilby gets most of its water from its food rather than from drinking, which means it can survive in habitats with no standing water.

Bilby reproduction

The bilby is a prodigious breeder, and can produce up to eight young a year. Female bilbies usually give birth to two young and, as they can breed throughout the year, they can give birth up to four times per year. Additionally, female bilbies have a very short gestation period of just fourteen days.

Female bilbies have a backward-opening pouch, which prevents soil entering the pouch when they are digging.

Young stay in the pouch for eighty days, and then once they are out of the pouch they stay in their mother's burrow for a couple of weeks. During this time their mother is very busy moving in and out of the burrow so that she can forage outside for food and return regularly to feed her young.

The bilby is a threatened species

While there are many threats contributing to the dramatic decline of bilby populations, the most important of these are habitat loss and change, and competition with introduced animals. As agricultural activities extended over the more fertile regions of Australia, the bilby's habitat has changed rapidly. Changing fire patterns also affect the type and abundance of food plants.

Competition with introduced animals is a major threat as domestic stock such as cattle and sheep eat the same plants. Rabbits compete with bilbies

for their food and burrows, foxes and feral cats also prey on them.

Having disappeared from the areas intensively grazed by livestock, as well as those areas densely populated by rabbits, cats and foxes, bilbies now only survive in small isolated populations in the driest and least fertile regions of arid Australia.

Predation by the introduced European fox appears to be the major threat faced by bilbies. Predation by other carnivores (ie feral cat, dingo) could also threaten bilby populations. However, there is considerable interaction between these three predators. Specifically, dingoes may protect a range of native species, including bilbies, by controlling cats and foxes either through direct predation or excluding them from carrion during droughts. Competition with rabbits may also be an important threatening process faced by the greater bilby. However, the negative impact of rabbits has been greatly reduced following the release of rabbit calicivirus disease (RCD) in the 1990s. Grazing by cattle may be a threat on some pastoral leases. Unsuitable fire regimes may restrict breeding and impede dispersal into unoccupied

areas, and reduce food options and availability.

Bilbies are slowly becoming endangered because of habitat loss and change as well as the competition between them and other animals.

What is being done to conserve bilbies?

There is a national recovery plan being developed for saving bilbies. This program includes breeding in captivity, monitoring populations, and re-establishing bilbies where they have once lived.

Reintroduction efforts have also begun, with a successful reintroduction into the Arid Recovery Reserve in South Australia in 2000, and plans are underway for a reintroduction into Currawinya National Park in Queensland, with a recent success of six bilbies released into the feral-free sanctuary in early February 2006.

Successful reintroductions have also occurred into Peron Peninsula in Shark Bay, and at Lorna Glen rangelands conservation park as a part of an initiative of the Western Australian Department of Environment and Conservation's Western Shield fauna recovery program.



Bilby in the lab at Lorna Glen having a tail transmitter fitted



Successful reintroductions have also occurred on other conservation lands, including islands, and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy's Scotia and Yookamurra Sanctuaries. There are highly successful bilby breeding programs in Western Australia at Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre, Peron Peninsula, and at Dryandra woodland.

There have been reasonably successful moves to popularise the bilby as a native alternative to the Easter Bunny by selling chocolate Easter Bilbies (sometimes with a portion of the profits going to bilby protection and research).

Where can I see a bilby?

Finding a bilby in its natural habitat is almost impossible, but you can be sure to see a bilby in many of the various wildlife sanctuaries around Australia.

One such place is the Alice Springs Desert Park where visitors can easily access the diversity of arid zone landscapes, plants and animals, with the added bonus of a managed environmental experience. The park offers guaranteed viewing of desert plants and animals, including the greater bilby - and many wild species are attracted to the habitats by the additional water and food resources. For more information visit their website at www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au

How is the Wildlife Preservation Society helping, and how can you help?

Members of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia have been working since the Society's foundation in May 1909 to preserve and protect Australia's wildlife in all its forms.

We are calling for donations to the Society's bilby project. Any donations will be put towards a special bilby conservation project in the northern goldfields region of Western Australia. This project is being overseen by the WA Department of Environment and the local Indigenous communities. This project was recommended to the Society by our WA Regional Advisor and adopted by the Board of Directors.

Operation Rangelands Restoration

Operation Rangelands Restoration will be carried out on adjoining ex-pastoral leases – Lorna Glen (Matuwa) and Earaheedy (Kurrara Kurrara) – some 150 kilometres north east of Wiluna. Comprising some 565,000 hectares within the Gascoyne and Murchison Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA) regions, the Lorna Glen-Earaheedy complex was acquired by the WA Government in 2000 for the conservation reserve system under the auspices of the Gascoyne-Murchison Strategy. The properties have been reverted to unallocated Crown land with the intention they will be made into a conservation park.

The Operation Rangelands Restoration project was initiated by DEC, through a project team that includes staff from its Goldfields Region (Kalgoorlie), Science Division and Nature Conservation Division. The Wiluna traditional owners, who are excited by the prospect of the return of native mammals, are involved through a joint management MoU with DEC. In addition, the project has attracted the involvement of students and academics from local and international universities as well

as the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia. Perth Zoo will breed some of the animals to be reintroduced back into the wild.

In 2007-2008, 109 bilbies were reintroduced to the Lorna Glen conservation park, about 1,100 kilometres north-east of Perth. This was undertaken as part of the Rangelands Restoration project where the former pastoral property is being managed by the WA Department of Environment and Conservation and local Indigenous communities to restore rangeland ecological diversity and function. A key part of this program is to reintroduce twelve species of native mammal that formerly occurred in the Lorna Glen and desert areas of WA. To date bilbies and brushtail possums have been successfully established at Lorna Glen. In 2010 golden bandicoots, boodies and mala will be translocated into a predator-proof, 1,000-hectare enclosure at Lorna Glen to give them time to acclimatise to the local environment before being released into the wider landscape. Fox and feral cat control has been underway at Lorna Glen since 2004, domestic stock have been removed and the property fenced to limit incursions by camels. A fire regime has also been implemented to mimic a more natural fire mosaic pattern. Once the mammal species have been reintroduced, it is anticipated that many of the ecosystem processes such as aeration of soil, nutrient and water recycling, and seed dispersal will be improved through the digging of the animals, and that the vegetation condition will improve.

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Red footed booby

Going home

Bruce Alden

Our little red ship is due any day now to take us back to civilisation, and I never thought that 'it' would happen before we sailed away. After nearly six months of waiting, I have finally got the collared kingfisher (*Todiramphus chloris*) on film. It is probably not that an unusual sight along coastal northern NSW and Queensland, but I find it incredible that this bird visits Willis Island, 500 kilometres off Cairns in the middle of the Coral Sea!

When I first got out here, one of the other chaps who had been here before told me that kingfishers visited the island. I must admit that I was pretty sceptical that what I regard as a bird of the coastal mainland would be found so far out in the ocean. It is just so strange to see a bird that seems so totally out of place. Every other bird here is an oceanic type bird. With his fine colours, he looks more like a bird that should be in the jungle,

woodland or mangrove creek rather than a desert island. This is the third one that I have seen since June, but the other two were only fleeting glimpses and one-off sightings. This little bloke had been hanging around for four days and seemed to want to roost on the roof timbers of the verandah in the evenings. However, he was so flighty that to get within camera range, even with a 12x zoom, was not easy. No matter how carefully I tried to sneak up on him, he bolted as soon as he caught a glimpse of me.

There is no permanent water on the island; five minutes after it has rained, it has all soaked away into the coral sand and rubble so, obviously, the kingfisher can exist without drinking. The island has no trees, just a few low, scrubby bushes that provide nesting places for the sea birds. The bird just seems so out of place on a tiny island chock full of sea birds.

The kingfisher spends the day sitting on top of our remote balloon launcher. Every now and then he would duck away and come back and clean his bill, so he was feeding on something but I couldn't tell what it was. Over the two weeks before I first saw the bird, we had over 100 millimetres of rain, so maybe something hatched and that was providing his food source. However, there can't be too much small insect life for him to prey on as I have seen many dead and feeble buff-banded rails (*Gallirallus philippensis*). These appear to have died of starvation or possibly old age. In the dry season, the rails seemed to eat anything that moved and after a while nothing moved! So, maybe the Wet increased the insect life, hence the kingfisher making an appearance.

It appears that this bird does move about the islands to Australia's north, the Torres Strait and southern New



Immature red footed booby



Collared kingfisher

Guinea, but I still can't swallow that this tiny bird with the big beak is on an island in the Coral Sea!

Now, meanwhile back in the real world, (I must have dreamed up that kingfisher, but I do have him on film!), my life on the bird rookery is coming to an end. Only eight more sleeps till the ship arrives and we will be back at Townsville on 3rd December.

With all the rain on an accumulation of six months of dry guano, rapid decomposition followed. The smell, usually terrible, turned downright nasty. It was like living in the ammonia section of a fertilizer works; it was so strong it made your eyes water. Thankfully, that terrible smell has subsided as the guano has broken down. Maybe it is time to leave before my nostrils are assaulted once again.

It has been fascinating to live so closely to so many birds and watch them go through their breeding cycles. To have boobies land on your arm and stare at you with their huge eyes and gently peck our arm to see what you are made of has been a wonderful experience. The smell, the noise, the constant screeching, fighting and arguing over nesting sites 24 hours a day, I probably will not miss at all.

It is just that beautiful little kingfisher with his bright azure back and his two almost alien-looking white blobs on his nose when looking straight at you - that I will miss. I hope he/she finds a mate and lives happily ever after.



Collared Kingfisher and Booby chick



Torresian crow

Something to crow about

Bryne Smith

Having travelled several thousand kilometres by car around Australia (literally), across and through much of it, I have made some interesting observations about the behaviour of our wildlife.

This does not pretend to be science-based research but rather, anecdotal experience.

Firstly, it has to be said that long road trips into some of Australia's most isolated areas bring considerable joy, but unfortunately also moments of sadness at the state and fate of some of our wildlife – but more on that later.

One of the most fascinating conclusions I have drawn is that the much-despised Torresian crow has to be one of our most intelligent birds – and is getting smarter. It might sound strange, but in my view crows in some remote areas have worked out the meaning of that white line in the centre of the road. Because of the amount of roadkill, crows are amongst the most prolific birdlife one sees on a long inland or remote motoring trip. Where the traffic is not heavy, crows will often wait until

the approaching vehicle is only a short distance away, then fly off or hop a few metres off the road edge, before returning to the carrion.

However, on a trip between Cobar and Broken Hill earlier this year, on a number of occasions where crows were feasting on roadkill on the eastbound lane, one or two would remain eating there while we whizzed past on the westbound lane. There seemed almost an attitude of disdain as if to say, 'Don't interrupt our eating – just stick to your side of the road'. Then on another trip through south-western Queensland in August, some crows were doing the same thing. Maybe there needs to be a change in that saying about 'playing chicken'. It should now be called 'playing crow'.

When I mentioned this behaviour to two co-travellers at one of our western Queensland stops, they were not at all surprised. They told me of crows using their beaks to pull open the zip on their backpacks to get at food inside. The intelligence of crows may not come as a surprise to some, particularly to cane farmers in north Queensland, where

crows are credited with working out how to use that marauding scourge, the cane toad, as a food source. Unable to pierce the thick hide of the toad, eventually crows worked out that if the toad was flipped on its back, they could penetrate the soft belly of the animal and avoid the poison glands on its head.

Certainly many city residents have a dislike of crows because of the noise they make, particularly around sunrise. However, take a long trip by road around Australia and you will readily admit that if it wasn't for crows, many of our roads would become a putrid, smelly mess. Often they are assisted in their scavenging work by the various species of kites, majestic wedge-tailed eagles and another scourge, feral cats.

That brings up the sad subject of roadkill itself. Mostly native animals, as well as some birds, pay a high price for our national road transport system, particularly in country and remote areas. Those that pay the highest price in the areas I have travelled are kangaroos, wallabies and similar small marsupials. The signs on many trucks and road trains say, 'Without trucks,

Australia stops' but unfortunately, it is these juggernauts that are the main culprits when it comes to roadkill. These operators travel through the night to meet tight schedules and it is at these times that most animals are killed on the roads.

In inland areas in Australia, primarily for safety reasons, tourists and caravanners fortunately know not to travel at night because of the nocturnal movement of many of our native animals. In some of the inland towns, where local residents have to travel at night through 'kangaroo country', their vehicles are often fitted with bumper bar systems that would flatten an elephant.

Caravanners have to be acutely aware of the presence of roadkill during daytime travel, because if one drives over a large dead kangaroo on the road, car and caravan can become unstable to the point of crashing, or at least serious damage can result to the van coupling.

Considerable research has been carried out on various aspects of roadkill in Australia and overseas and can be accessed online.

This next experience does not add to scientific research but is an anecdotal pointer to the toll on Australian wildlife. On a 210-kilometre, day-time caravan trip from Quilpie to Charleville on the Diamantina Development Road in September 2009 I took particular note and estimated there was a relatively new kill or a decaying kill of a kangaroo, wallaby or small marsupial approximately every half a kilometre. Sometimes there would be two or three kills in a fifty-metre stretch. Admittedly this was in a time of drought when these animals are more likely to be looking for the small vestiges of green shoot at the side of the road. Nevertheless, it was a staggering, but unfortunate total.

So, to end on a more pleasant note: emus are quite commonly seen by the roadside during the day, but fortunately

they constitute only a small percentage of the total roadkill I have seen on my travels. Rarely does one see chicks still in their striped plumage out and about with 'Dad' so close to a major highway. However, on the same stretch of road between Quilpie and Charleville a family of five, only a matter of weeks old, were strolling some 100 metres from the road. They were about the size of a grown chicken. Then, within an hour, near the Ward River, another group of emu chicks aged about four or five months were standing beside the road. They had lost their striped plumage and acquired brownish feathers and were slightly larger than a bustard.

These observations showed that in this area at least, one of our favourite national icon species appears to be in good shape, even if the other national icon is paying a high price for our economy being so truck-dependent.

Annual Members and Friends Luncheon

Commencing 12 noon on Wednesday 3 March 2010

Patrick W Medway AM, National President and Directors of the board of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia cordially invite you to the Annual Members and Friends Luncheon

Venue: Cello's Restaurant - The Castlereagh Boutique Hotel
169-171 Castlereagh Street, Sydney

Guest Speaker: Geoff Ross

Co-ordinator, Marine Fauna Program, Department of Environment, Climate Change & Water

Topic: The conservation of marine mammals in NSW

Acceptance slip

(Please fill in and email back to info@wpsa.org.au or send via post)

We are pleased to accept your invitation to the Annual Luncheon on Wednesday 3 March 2010.

\$..... for..... Tickets at \$75 per person (includes 2 course meal and all beverages)

Name.....Address.....

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Cheques can be mailed to:

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Celebrating a new century of wildlife preservation in Australia



Bonney with Jamie Nicholson

Being a carer

Jamie Nicholson

It all started some years ago with the delivery of a letter. The address on the front of the letter bore only the street name and the addressee was to a certain Daddy Wombat and Mary Wallaby. Not much to go on for a newly appointed Post Master. After several rather weird conversations and some other curt replies, I arrived at this rather nondescript front door only to be summoned by a welcoming voice from within, to continue my journey around to the back of the house and to make my own way inside. No questions as to who, just come in. Such are small country towns and the wonderful people who live within. I went through the gate at the end of the driveway and was immediately accosted by two very large dogs and escorted to the backdoor. I couldn't help but notice the baby

forester kangaroo and pademelons watching me intently from under the clothesline and the three wombats ensconced in the woodshed peering at me from their rather substantial log homes. No matter how hard one tries not to notice such things, they seem to leap out and poke you in the eye like the branch on a tree. On entering the house I was greeted by a rather cheery smile with a possum clinging to her shoulder, a little near bald faced wombat peering from a beanie in her left arm and a Bennetts wallaby close to her heels. This was, I may tell you, in the centre of suburbia and not in some far flung part of the antipodes. I was in the right place. Mary's menagerie and sure enough Daddy Wombat, a rather portly gentleman with that equally welcoming voice I had heard through the front door happened around the

corner less than a minute later. He too was carrying yet another small bundle of joy trying to catch a smell of me on the wind from the safety of its world of beanie.

What can I say? Maybe something like, "and so it is with carers". A lot of us behave this way. Our homes are open to people and fury friends alike and all are welcome, providing they do not come with malice. This is what we do and this is who we are. Very often at the expense of many other things in life, and most definitely at great expense to our own pockets, but I can honestly tell you that we love it. We would not be doing it if we didn't love it and there are few amongst us that seek accolades or rewards for our labour of love. Our greatest reward in life is seeing our little children disappearing back into the bush, healthy, safe, fully grown and with the confidence that their many wild comrades take for granted. To be wild and free. The centre piece of the word wildlife being the word wild.

Like all our children, they turn that one last time to look at us as they head off into the big new world. Their eyes are not ones of sadness. In them you can only see that one word, "thanks". It is enough for us as it is with many parents. It leaves one with that warm fuzzy feeling that many unfortunate human beings never even have the chance to feel. Even better is when they come back the next year or even the following year just to show off their new baby. It is almost as if they are saying, yes, you may well be proud grandparents, because I have now made my way in the world and it is all due to you. Female wombats very often do this. Then they leave, never to return, but that one short visit is like gold and can sustain you a lifetime. Then of course there are the others that return monthly and rattle the door until you bribe them with rolled oats to go away. A bit like carpet baggers. Still they are our children and although their bedrooms are taken by others, there is always room for one more at the dinner table and a place to sleep on the floor in front of the fireplace.

I have always been blessed as far as wildlife goes. I have grown up with wildlife and as my retirement job I am still blessed by being able to work as a shuttle bus, come tour guide in one of the world's premier spots, Cradle Mountain in Tasmania. I also do spotlight tours and get to explain all my little fury friends to those who are interested. Needless to say, the best way to protect anything whether it be fauna or flora is by educating people. They are less likely to destroy something they understand and respect. As I write this now I am watching half a dozen pademelons, two wombats and a family of Bennetts mowing the lawn through the window.

Our journey into being carers has taken the path of many other carers as we progressed from soft releases on our properties through to what is now fulltime care. Wombats are our favoured fury friends. Many other carers find them difficult because they are more of a long term proposition. Wallabies are six to eight months whereas wombats are twelve to fifteen months. Does that answer your question? Having said that, they are incredible animals.

The best way to explain to you what we do with our wombat care is to tell you of the journey of just one small individual. "Bonney" is a common wombat. You ask any of our wombats if they are "common" and they will most certainly insist otherwise. Bonney came to us at 750 gm after a tourist ran over her mother and she was still in the pouch. Either this or she was stolen from her mother. This stealing happens regularly and what gave us this idea was her condition, which was rather desperate by the time we got to her. We had to fill her full of electrolytes and saline to get her going. Some people think that they can look after them like a kitten, and granted, they are cute and cuddly, but that is where the likeness ends. After this they abandon them either in the bush or in some cases even in caravan parks. In all cases, it is close to being a death sentence. In actual fact there is even a thriving black market in baby wombats at this time of the year, which is rather sad. People selling them in pubs and the like.



Cute aren't I? My name is Bonney. At this stage I feed every five hours on a special mix called "Wombaroo". The amount of formula is governed by my weight and hence the age. I will go through roughly two 20kg bags before being released at fifteen kilos and every bag is about \$220 each, so now you know why Daddy and Mummy have to go to work. Worth every bit of it though. When I reach about five kilos I will only have four feeds a day, but obviously larger amounts. This also means Daddy and Mummy get to sleep most of the night through. Each feed time is accompanied by play time, cuddle-pop time and just generally eyeballing and trying to squeeze through the childproof fence in the kitchen to terrorise Minty the dog. At eight kilos I am down to three feeds a day, attacking and scratching on doorknobs and passing feet. Sweet potato, carrot and what Daddy and Mummy call "the salad bar", (the back lawn) as well. At this stage I spend my days in the outside enclosure instead

of the laundry with my friends. This enclosure is located in what we call the "Wild Woods" named after The Wind in the Willows. No the weasels don't live there, but it is home to all the big scary people, like giant wombats, wallabies and even an eagle or curious currawong. No longer noises of the washing machine or drier to keep me company, just bush noises. Each evening about four in the afternoon Mummy or Daddy arrives to escort me back to the salad bar, where they sit with Minty the dog and have their evening wine together as they watch over me. Daddy sometimes does his bio-diesel, but I get chucked out of there because of the chemicals. A bit like the pantry. All those intoxicating smells that one is never allowed to savour.



That's me as a teenager. Seven kilos of pure muscle. I was arm wrestling coke boxes and bulldozing the esky around the kitchen floor at this age. What were you doing? Nothing that cool, I'm sure. Since then, I've grown up and fallen

in love with Minty. Needless to say he doesn't do everything I ask, but what boy does? He doesn't always want to follow me when I have him on the lead.



Having said that, he loves me too, because we both spend an inordinate amount of time grooming one another. I follow him everywhere and when I hide under the shed, Mummy or Daddy simply takes Minty for a stroll past. I simply have to come out from underneath and follow. Do you think I'm under his paw? Then comes the exciting part of the evening. Bath time. Firstly Minty and then me. It has been rather muddy in the outside enclosure these last few months so I have rather taken to my baths.



I lie there like a lounge lizard and raise my front legs to be washed underneath. Then the back and finally the tummy.

I nearly go to sleep with that one. After that we wash off all the special sensitive soap and wait for towel time.



After towelling and a cuddle, we go inside for our sweet potato and a play with Minty and other family members before having our bottle. Minty has his raw sweet potato as well, but doesn't get a bottle like me. After this we terrorise the kitchen as Mummy and Daddy make dinner before we return to our laundry cage. Mummy or Daddy sits with me as I eat even more potato and about half a cup full of rolled oats before going off to bed. At about ten thirty at night, I wake up and tear around the kitchen once again playing silly-buggers before scoffing my last bottle for the evening and tucking up with more sweet potato and rolled oats. This is of course after I have climbed into the stationery cupboard and attacked the vacuum cleaner. Last week I climbed into the front-loading washing machine with the washing. Luckily, Mummy or Daddy's hand always come in to make sure there are no solid objects before doing the wash cycle. Tipping up the wash basket or the rubbish bin in the kitchen can also be entertaining. I just pretend it was an accident. Much like when I head for the pantry, only to veer off at the last second and scratch my bum on the brickwork only to look up at them as if to say, "I fooled you, didn't I?"

At fourteen kilos which will be in about two months, Bonney will be separated from the love of her life, Minty, and taken up to a friends' property near Wilmot. There she will be started into her soft release program. On her last month with us we will start having less and less contact with her. Wombats are pretty good this way and go wild fairly easily. At this stage she will be becoming fairly independent anyway and there are times in the enclosure we will not see her for a few days. The oats formula which we will now give just in powdered form is mixed with the oats and not given as a bottle. We will be providing hand-picked salad daily and taking her for walks in the bush to get her used to the tastes and smells. In Wilmot there is yet another outside enclosure which is also surrounded by bush and forestry. Once again it is made from tin and buried two metres into the ground so that bigger wombats cannot dig in and attack her as she is getting on her feet. There is a smaller hole also in the door that she can negotiate, but no wombats larger than her. This way she has a safe haven as she investigates and establishes her new area. The new surrogate parents will keep an eye on her and still provide the rolled oats and water, but after about a month, she will have gone her way. Free and wild, as it ought to be.

What can I say? Being a wildlife carer is so rewarding. However, do it right. Get registered and join a wildlife rescue group. There is a lot of expertise needed and you will always find that necessary support from within. Secondly, remember that the centre piece of wildlife is WILD. They were born to be free and wild and not somebody's pet. Thanks comes in them allowing you to share just that small part of their lives with you.

Babushka - the feisty female wombat from a wombat rescuer's point of view...

Liz McNeil

I have spent hours in fire ground searches since March 2009, volunteering in a 'wombat search and rescue team' under a wildlife organisation, and rescuing sick and starving wombats from areas in Victoria. At first, most of the wombats seemed to be okay and the team was mainly rescuing wombats that had been hit by cars or directly burnt in the fires. Food drops had started and this seemed adequate.

Until July this year, we were increasingly seeing tired, lethargic, skinny wombats out during the day from noon onwards, trying to pull up the two millimetres of grass that had grown back, or dig at burnt tree roots. The team of wildlife volunteers that had completed all the necessary training bought in around twenty wombats and transported them to good carers; however, many died from their ordeal or had to be euthanized. They were all fairly easy rescues, which, for a wombat, tells you something is wrong – until I met Babushka ...

Another rescuer and I were driving along and, from a distance, I spotted her; I had become pretty good at that. She was pulling up grass from the roadside, as in the forest area it was all burnt and the fire had been the most intense in this area. I could see her prominent, square bum plate and her spine as we walked in for a closer look. I put my thumbs up, which means the wombat needs to come in. I walked in front of her and the other rescuer walked behind her. She looked at both of us, as if deciding which way would be safer, and then she chose me! I got my blanket ready and slipped over, right in front of her, which made her go for cover under two burnt logs. I quickly got up and put the blanket all the way over her. All was going well until I called the other rescuer to help, as I didn't have the best of holds on her. From this moment we got to know Babushka. She growled fiercely; it wasn't a normal wombat growl but sounded like one hundred tigers and, under the blanket, she was stomping her front leg, like a bull does before it charges. I had never



Babushka while she was in care

encountered any wombat like this one in all my rescues. Most are so tired and run-down that they 'sink' when captured ... not this one.

We arrived at the carer's place, and by then Babushka was all settled and calm. I warned the carer that she appeared feisty and to be careful. The carer assessed her as being severely underweight and anemic, due to poor diet, and needing to remain in care for quite a few weeks. We took her to a wombat enclosure, and the carer, with many years' experience, just put her hands in and gently placed Babushka in the enclosure. Babushka did nothing!

No growling, no stomping! She went straight over to the food bowl and ate and ate. That was beautiful to watch; it made us see why the work we do for these animals is so worth doing. We all got a bit teary and I wondered if she was feisty after all.

A few days later, I phoned the carer to find out how Babushka was settling in. I was told she was one feisty, cranky girl. Any volunteer who wasn't confident she would charge at. She would growl if she heard any noise or anyone came into the enclosure. One volunteer refused to go in there.

I had another wombat to drop off to the carer a few weeks later and, when Babushka heard my voice, she came out of the enclosure and growled, did her bull-stomping thing and shook her heard fiercely at me. That told me she remembered me!

The carer had resorted to arming anyone who went in to see Babushka with a poo scoop to place in front of them and to hold Babushka back. She was eating well and gaining weight.

Several weeks later I got a call that she was ready for release and, given her crankiness, it would be too risky to keep her in care for any longer. On the way there my hubby and I were planning how we would capture her from the enclosure, how to reduce her stress as much as we could, and I mentioned how far away I would be standing upon her release!

About 4pm we arrived to find Babushka looking healthy and eating in her enclosure. She wasn't the prettiest wombie I'd ever seen: she had war scars and torn ears and was the boss. So, we put our plan into action and, with lots of growls and snorts, we transported her to the release site. We got everything set up, then moved away slowly. Within thirty seconds she came out, turned to look at my hubby and me with what we thought looked like sadness in her eyes! She sniffed at the food and her bedding and began exploring again, stopping to eat every now and then. I sung the Babushka goodbye song, by Kate Bush and wished her well.

We are all grateful for the experience Babushka gave us, no one got hurt or bitten, and she was saved ... one less victim of the devastating Victorian bushfires.



3 night/4 day Wildlife Study Tour

**\$350 per person includes
share accommodation in
5 townhouses each with**

- Queen bed
- Twin beds
- Queen bed on landing

**All meals included,
plus morning and
afternoon tea**

**Tour led by
Dr Mike Augee
(Mammalogist/ Paleontologist)**

**Deposit of \$100 required at
time of booking**

**Bookings by 1 February
2010 essential as numbers
are strictly limited**

**Phone: 02 9556 1537
or email info@wpsa.org.au**

Falls Forest Retreat Wildlife Study Tour

9 – 12 March 2010

Wildlife and Climate Change Seminar

Enjoy the peace and beauty of a secluded rainforest valley at the foot of Middle Brother Mountain. Situated only 5 kilometres from the Pacific Highway in a protected rainforest setting near Johns River (between Taree and Port Macquarie on the Mid North Coast of NSW)

- Relax in the comfort of fully equipped townhouses.
- Enjoy the gardens, lawns and saltwater swimming pool.
- Explore the surrounding tall eucalypt forests with their ancient rainforest pockets and the creek and waterfalls.
- Enjoy bushwalking and bird watching in the Retreat's 200 acres and the adjacent State Forest and National Park.
- The Retreat's trails join paths in the surrounding Middle Brother National Park and State Forest, enabling our members to enjoy long bushwalks and visit a spectacular waterfall.



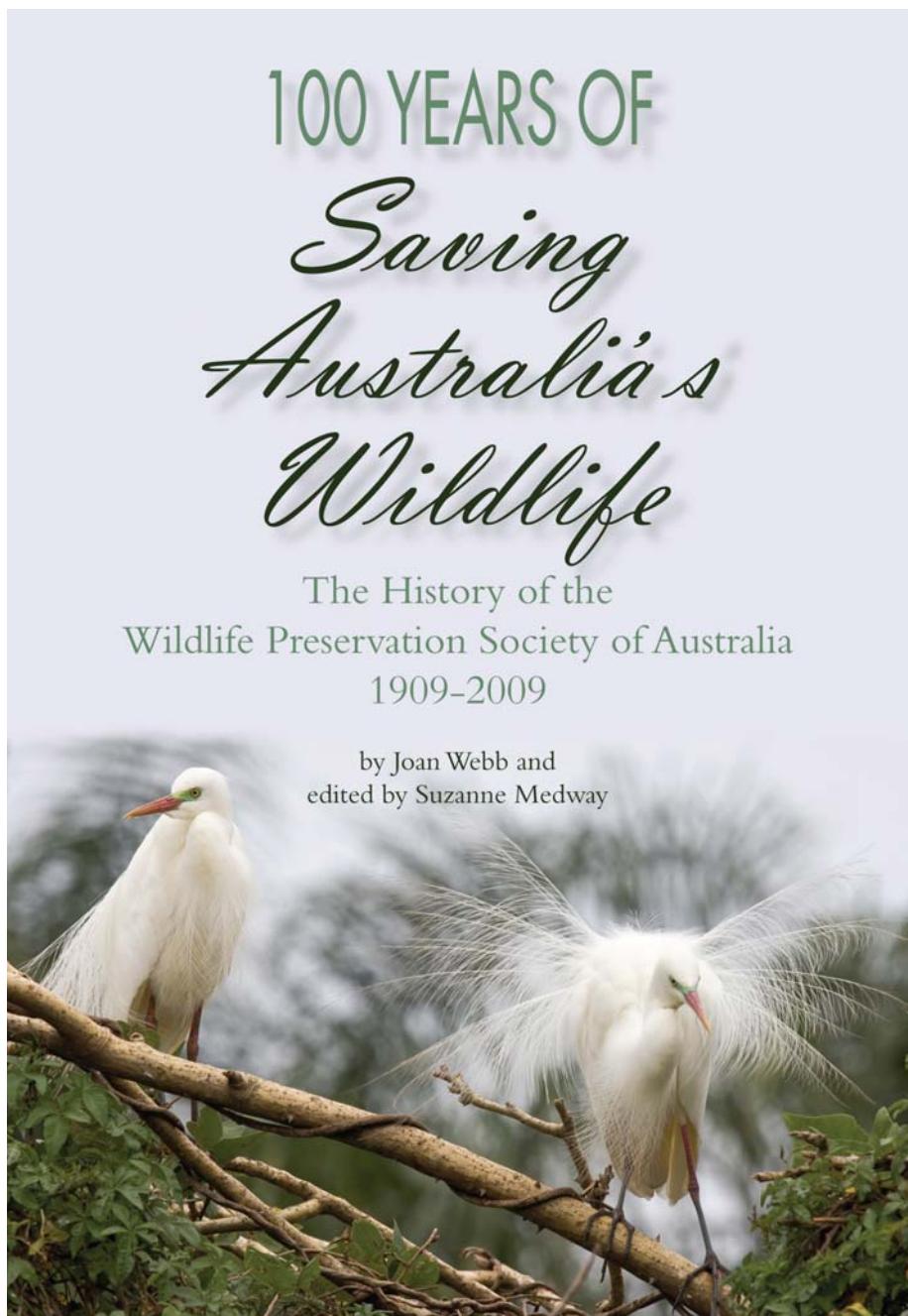
Highlights

- **Address by Dr Mary White** (writer and lecturer will talk about the prehistoric world and the evolution of the Australian continent and its biota)
- **Bird walking tour led by Win Filewood** (writer and lecturer, will talk about the prehistoric world and the evolution of the Australian continent and its collection of organisms)
- **Roundtable discussion of 'paleoclimate' with Armstrong Osborne, Dr Mike Augee and Dr Walter Jehne** (one of Australia's leading thinkers on Climate Change)
- **Roundtable discussion of 'Climate change in the 21st Century' with Dr Walter Jehne and Dr Mary White**
- **Excursion to Kooloobung Creek Nature Park** (seven ecosystems which are abundant with native plants and animals)
- **Private tour of Port Macquarie Koala Hospital**

Travel - own arrangement and cost

- **Fly:** Daily flights from Sydney, Brisbane, Newcastle, Coffs Harbour to Taree or Port Macquarie. We'll meet you.
- **CountryLink Train:** Three times daily service. Just 5 relaxing hours to Kendall station from Sydney's Central Station. We'll meet you.
- **Drive** via the Pacific Highway (Less than 3½ hrs from Sydney).

100 Years of Saving Australia's Wildlife



\$29.99 plus \$5 postage and handling

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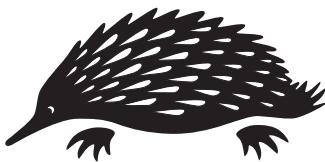
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02 9599 0000
Email: info@wpsa.org.au

Membership Form



WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA LIMITED

Membership

PO Box 42 Brighton Le Sands NSW 2216

Become a member of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Limited

Simply fill out this form.

Name:.....

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City/Suburb:..... Postcode:.....

Telephone:..... Fax:.....

Email:.....

Membership category (please tick)

- Individual: \$50
- Family: \$65
- Concession (pensioner/student/child): \$45
- Associate (library, school, conservation groups): \$80
- Corporate: \$120
- Life: \$1,000

(Includes postage within Australia. Add \$60 for overseas postage)

Three year membership (please tick)

- Individual: \$135
- Family: \$175
- Concession (pensioner/student/child): \$120
- Associate (library, school, conservation groups): \$215
- Corporate: \$325

(Includes postage within Australia. Add \$60 for overseas postage)

Payment details (please tick)

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Total \$.....

Mail to the: Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Limited
PO Box 42, Brighton Le Sands NSW 2216.
Email: info@wpsa.org.au Website: www.wpsa.org.au

Consider - A Bequest

Another way which you can support the work of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Limited is to remember us in your will.

If you would like to make a bequest to the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Limited, add the following codicil to your Will:

I bequeath the sum of \$..... to the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Limited for its general purposes and declare that the receipt of the Treasurer for the time being of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Limited shall be complete discharge to my Executors in respect of any sum paid to the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Limited.

"The challenge to the present adult generation is to reduce the increasing pressures on the Earth and its resources - and to provide youth with an education that will prepare them emotionally and intellectually for the task ahead.

PATRICK W MEDWAY AM
National President

WPSA Merchandise

Many of our members have expressed interest in purchasing gift merchandise for friends and family (or even themselves)! This is a great way to support the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia, so we have responded below with a mail order system. Simply send your cheque or credit card details (with expiry date) and we will post your order out to you. All prices include GST and 20% member's discount. All proceeds go towards our conservation projects.



Polo Shirts - \$25
(Navy with white logo / White with navy logo)



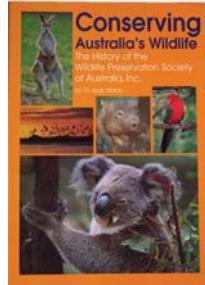
Kids T'Shirts - \$10
(Navy with white logo / White with navy logo)



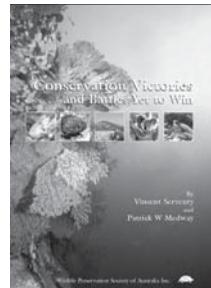
Cap - \$10
(Navy with white logo)



Drink Bottle Bag - \$10
(Navy with white logo)



Conserving Australia's Wildlife
By Dr Joan Webb - \$15



Conservation Victories and
Battles Yet to Win By
Vincent Serventy and
Patrick W Medway - \$20

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Children's T'shirts	_____	4-6,8,10	\$10	_____
Caps	_____	n/a	\$10	_____
Drink Bottle Bag	_____	n/a	\$10	_____
Conserving Australia	_____	n/a	\$15	_____

Add \$2.50 per item postage and handling within Australia:

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PO Box 42,
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02 9599 0000
Email: info@wpsa.org.au

More images of native frogs from Michael and Sharon Williams



Australian lace-lid
Nyctimystes dayi



Growling grass frog
Litoria raniformis



Green-eyed tree frog
Litoria serrata



Waterfall frog
Litoria nannotis

