

## CHAPTER 9 ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL – THE 1950s

*‘Nadgee Faunal Reserve – With pleasure, we announce the dedication in 1958 of this reserve of 28,000 acres extending along the coast from Cape Howe to the Merrika River.’*

It was an active decade, the 1950s, with Thistle Harris Stead the President from 1949-1952 and W. H. Childs President from 1953-1960. Activities centred around the guardianship of the reserves and sanctuaries with a watchful eye on intrusive leases, a call for new reserves or protests over so-called ‘improvements’.

Eighteen sanctuaries or reserves came under the Society’s surveillance during the 1950s, as reported in Roy Bennett’s *Brief History of 1959*. The following are just three examples:

‘Barrington Tops Proposed National Park

A strong deputation to the Minister for Conservation was held in April 1957 to ask for the preservation, free from logging, of the Upper Williams Valley as this was considered an essential part of Barrington Tops National Park.

‘Ku-ring-gai Chase

We were unsuccessful in preventing the creation of a boatshed on these park lands (1955). Later in the same year, however, a request for the construction of an aerodrome in the Chase, which we had also opposed, was refused.

‘Macquarie Marshes

We protested against the issue of mining leases in this area where, for over forty years, we have been hoping to have a reserve. The leases were refused’.

Activities associated with campaigns for preservation were not restricted to sanctuaries and reserves, as the remaining pages of this chapter will show: the struggle for better legislation, continued export of fauna, general fauna protection, and a call for Commonwealth co-ordination.

### THE POLICY OF THE SOCIETY IN 1951

Thistle Harris Stead was President when the 31<sup>st</sup> Report of the Society was presented to a General Meeting of the Society on 22 November 1951.<sup>1</sup> The sombre note it sounded was in contrast to the active decade which lay ahead:

‘The policy of the Society since our last Report in 1949 may be adequately expressed under four headings:

1. Commonwealth Co-ordination in Nature Protection Matters.
2. Co-operation to the best of our ability with “The International Union for the Protection of Nature”.
3. A pursuance of a demand for adequate reservation of lands and the enlightened management of our wild life resources (largely with respect to New South Wales).

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<sup>1</sup> *Australian Wild Life*. Vol. 2, No. 3, June 1952

4. General vigilance in all wild life matters in an attempt to prevent loss of such potential as we may already possess.

‘At the very outset, we would make it clear that the profit from our labours must be measured with the knowledge that the work is limited to the time that may be spared from an already too busy life. We are sure that the potential of the policy outlined herein is tremendous: the meagre scratching of the surface is as much a disappointment to us as it no doubt is to members generally.

#### **‘Commonwealth Co-ordination**

Apart from the variance and often openly contradictory policy practised by neighbouring and even well-separated States - examples of which make interesting and disturbing reading in earlier reports - the safety of our wild life needs consideration on a national basis to eliminate the local, parochial short-sightedness of individual States.

It was suggested:

- (i) extend the charter of the Wild Life Section of CSIRO.
- (ii) A Land Usage Survey on a Commonwealth basis. The survey should begin with lands wherein lie the greatest problems.
- (iii) The establishment of a Standing Co-ordinating Authority representing the States and inspired and nurtured by the Commonwealth Authorities.

#### **‘IUPN**

The Society has sought on numerous occasions to bring IUPN to the attention of government authorities and various voluntary organisations. Unfortunately, this propaganda work has not been nearly as extensive as we had hoped; all consequent upon pressure of work.

#### **‘Reserves**

There was an attempt, from 1950, to prepare a Master Plan of Reserves, Present and Proposed, for New South Wales. The purpose was to determine what lands were urgently required as Wild Life Refuges or Faunal Reserves, or as new National Parks.

#### **‘General Vigilance**

There is a need for general vigilance, for example in the Royal National Park, where depredation and desecrations are widespread; also in regard to bushfires and shooting in sanctuaries.’

### **FAUNA PROTECTION PANEL**

In the June 1952 issue of *Australian Wild Life* the Society reported on the work of the Fauna Protection Panel, established under the provisions of the Fauna Protection Act of 1948. Reference has already been made to this Act in Chapter 7. In 1952 the personnel had not changed: F. J. Griffiths was still Chief Guardian of Fauna, E. J. Hallstrom of Taronga Zoo was Vice-Chairman and there were twelve other members. Allen Strom represented the Wild Life Preservation Society and Sydney Bushwalkers.

With a view to making a closer study of certain aspects of the work of the Fauna Panel, sub-committees were appointed to enquire into the report upon (a) Koala Conservation, (b) Faunal Reserves, (c) Education and Publicity, and (d) Ku-ring-gai Chase in relation to the preservation of the koala.

With regard to koala conservation, the Ku-ring-gai Chase Trust agreed to establish a koala reserve. The Panel also drew up a long range conservation plan with the object of ensuring that the koala will never become extinct. A survey of the State was undertaken to ascertain the present natural stock of the animal.

A discussion on faunal reserves led to agreement that it would be desirable to establish a number of reserves in different parts of the State, each reserve to be representative of a particular type of country. Various scientific and other organisations, more or less interested in conservation work, were invited to suggest areas. On the whole the response was not very encouraging. Finally, the following areas suggested by the W.L.P.S.A were accepted by the Panel:

- (i) Rain Forest and Snow Gums: Barrington Tops and Gloucester Tops regions.
- (ii) Open Forest and Sandstone: Morton Primitive Area.
- (iii) Streams and Swamps: The Macquarie Marshes Area.
- (iv) Mallee and Mulga: Suitable areas in the Western Plains.

‘In our opinion the establishment of Faunal Reserves and the Management of Fauna is, next to education, the outstanding function of the Panel. The matter of reserves is not moving rapidly enough, commensurate with the urgency.’

## **GOULD LEAGUES**

The first Gould League of Bird Lovers was formed in Victoria in 1909, and the Society helped form leagues in other states. In the 1950s the Society canvassed all state groups to change their aim (protecting only bird life) to include the conservation of all wildlife and of habitats. By the 1960s every state had its Gould League in the schools and they were an important educational tool.

## **CONSERVATION ACTION IN THE WEST**

### **The Abrolhos Islands**

Indirectly, the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia was to take a hand in the successful recognition of the Abrolhos Islands as a place worthy of protection from over-exploitation. Vincent Serventy had become a life member of the Society in 1946, encouraged by his sister Lucy who was already a member. Vincent was also an active member of the West Australian Naturalists’ Club, a group which lobbied on behalf of many issues in Western Australia.

The Abrolhos Islands were units in an archipelago of 122 mainly coral atolls in three groups about 60 kilometres off the coast at Geraldton, 424 kilometres north of Perth in Western Australia. From the 1930s, Vincent’s brother Dominic and sister Lucy often went there for holidays and worked to safeguard the wildlife there. Today the islands

are a strange mixture of untouched isolation and commercial fishing, mainly for rock lobsters.

From late 1953 into 1954, Vincent Serventy spent six months on Pelsaert Island, one of the southern groups, working as a kind of scientific beachcomber. During the summer he would help lead tourists on tours on the reef and among the bird colonies, while in the winter he worked with Lucy and other scientists, and with the various conservation groups to which they belonged, to push for the islands to be protected. Back in Perth he lobbied for the islands to be set aside as reserves; at this time they had no protection and there was fear of over-fishing and destruction of the local bird colonies.

Some time later Vincent wrote a letter to the Premier of Western Australia and received this reply from the Premier's Department:

'The Government of Western Australia is committed towards the protection of the State's biodiversity, its rural land and seascapes, and shares your view that the Abrolhos Islands are of particular environmental significance. The Abrolhos coral reefs are particularly diverse and unique compared to any other in the world. The islands provide significant habitat for a wide range of fauna and are considered to be among the most significant seabird breeding areas in the world.

'The Abrolhos Islands are also popular for recreation and important for the fishing industry. As you recognise in your letter, the Abrolhos are managed on a multiple use basis to ensure that the conservation, recreation and fishing values are all adequately accounted for.'

The reward for many years of conservation endeavours came when it was suggested an unnamed island in the central or Easter Group should be given the name Serventy Island in honour of Dominic, Lucy and Vincent. The Government agreed and, in the summer of 1987, Vincent led an armada of boats with press on board to land on the Island and declared it formally named. Today the uninhabited islands, beyond the ecotourism and commercial fishing, are part of a pristine marine conservation area. One cap Vincent was wearing in his lobbying for the Abrolhos Islands was as a life member of the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia.

### **Wild Life Shows in Perth**

Vincent Serventy was President of the Western Australian Naturalists' Club in the early 1950s and he decided to revive the natural history exhibitions which had been held before World War II. He called his first one the "Wild Life Show" and it proved a great success. The second year there was queues half a mile long waiting to get into the Town Hall. 'We had many novel ideas for the Wild Life Shows', Vincent wrote in his autobiography. 'One year we had a bush camp and cooked witchetty grubs for those courageous enough to eat them. They proved so popular we had to go foraging for more, particularly when girls coming from a station property proved over-enthusiastic and decimated our supply.'

At the Wild Life Show in September 1953, a boy brought a small tortoise to Vincent Serventy, asking for identification. 'A long-necked swamp tortoise,' Vincent said with confidence, as there was only one species in the southwest. 'Mine's got a short neck', the boy replied. Ludwig Glauert's eyes gleamed when he saw it at the Show a

few days later. Glauert was a director of the Western Australian Museum, and he believed he had a new species. But it was a rare survivor of a long-lost species, the western swamp tortoise, first discovered in 1839 by an Austrian, Ludwig Preiss, who sent his specimen to the Vienna Museum. He named it *Pseudemydura umbrina*. Today we know the short-necked tortoise as possibly the most endangered reptile in this country. Why had the tortoise become so rare? The small swamps north of Perth, their usual habitat, suffered from European settlement, shallow swamps which proved attractive to potato farmers. A public appeal, following the re-discovery, saved the swamps on the farm where the tortoise had been found and a concerned government saved those that were left to become the Ellenbrook Nature Reserve.

### **Kings Park – Perth’s Icon**

Vincent Serventy wrote – ‘It was in Kings Park that I began my walk on a long conservation road. My brothers and I had first explored this place as children.’

In 1871 the Premier of Western Australia, explorer and statesman John Forrest set aside this bushland of four hundred hectares in the heart of the new city. Several years before, a group of Americans had conceived the idea and ideal of the national park at Yellowstone National Park.

The first attack on the Park, a few hectares for a rose garden as a memorial for fallen soldiers, seemed sure to succeed. ‘We knew it was the edge of a wedge so attacked the proposal, supported by a returned soldier who was a senior member of the RSL. The rose growers soon found a property in nearby Claremont, and created a garden rarely used today.’

Then came a more dangerous proposal. The Perth City Council backed by sporting groups, convinced that all true Australians had sport as their god, proposed an Olympic Pool in the ‘only’ suitable place, Kings Park.

The Government, confident of success, allowed a non-party vote on a Private Member’s Bill. In 1954 this Bill to protect Kings Park from any development of more than two hectares without the consent of both Houses, passed – to the chagrin of the Government. The City Council tried again in 1957 and also in 1959 but each time they were defeated with support growing to keep the Park inviolate. Opponents to the conservationists had learned from previous defeats. This time it was not just a pool but an Aquatic Centre with training for swimmers, a garden centre for mothers and children, and a wading pool. The replacement of nature with concrete this time would succeed. A city planner, newly arrived from England, called Kings Park ‘mediocre scrub’, a remark he became sorry he made. In later years he came to know the Australian bush better, as well as becoming a conservator of the wild.

‘What did we learn?’ Vincent Serventy asked. ‘Each battle has gained us new helpers; legislative protection was also needed to cement each victory. A new society, a citizens’ committee to safeguard Kings Park, had been formed’<sup>2</sup>

### **Shark Bay**

From the early 1950s Shark Bay, north of the Abrolhos Islands in Western Australia, had been a place of special interest for Vincent Serventy and he was anxious to see it

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Conservation Victories’, 2004, p. 2

preserved in as pristine a state as possible. Thus it was that one of the longest and hardest struggles for World Heritage listing took place here, to protect one of the most diverse plant and animal treasure houses of Australia.

As a regional park, Shark Bay was home to a number of activities ranging from fishing through salt mining, to cockle shell quarrying, sandalwood cutting, sheep rearing and tourism. Many of those who earned their living in this way feared World Heritage listing but most of the work to be done towards listing over many years was to gradually strip away this misinformation. Vincent would convince the local shire council, only to find a year later that the old myths had once again taken over.

A few years later Vincent Serventy became involved again. Sir Thomas Wardle, as the owner of Dirk Hartog Island in the region, wanted it to become a nature reserve. Vincent approached the Federal Government to properly conserve the northern-most point of this island where the Dutch explorer Dirk Hartog landed in 1606 to nail the pewter plate which recorded his discovery. Later, Vincent was to encourage the State conservation departments to begin negotiations with an owner who was keen to help if the future of his island was to be a nature sanctuary.

The conservation struggle went on. Local government would show an interest in the regional park concept and then change on any agreement formerly made. Then Vincent helped in the production of a film on Shark Bay, a successful venture, and it helped the conservation cause with an increase in public interest for World Heritage listing.

Finally, after many years of lobbying, the Government was moved to take action. A powerful Labor politician, Graham Richardson, sensing the rising of the environmental star and keen to make his mark, decided to take on the previously lowly position of Minister for the Environment. His intention was to give this job a high profile and, during his term of office, he managed to secure World Heritage listing for Shark Bay. It was 1991, after years of lobbying at the local, State and Federal levels.

## **INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATURE (UNEP)**

*Australian Wild Life* for March 1954 (Vol. 2, No. 4) gave this report on UNEP:

‘Your Society maintained its affiliation and co-operation with IUPN during the period under review. The Union is doing increasingly valuable work in the gathering of information associated with fauna and flora preservation and general conservation from all parts of the world, and with the discussion of such, with a view to the elucidation of many problems associated with national and world conservation. The full fruits of these labours will be seen later on.

‘The Survival Service of the Union has been collecting information on some of our rarer Australian fauna and we were asked to assist with the Tasmanian Wolf or Thylacine and the Banded Marsupial Ant eater. Your President forwarded some helpful data. IUPN headquarters are at Brussels, in Belgium.

‘A Technical Meeting of IUPN was held during September, 1951, when we were represented by Dr. J. H. Westermann - our European Representative and

a member of Council of W.L.P.S.A. - and by Mr. E. S. Bryce. At this meeting certain studies were made of educational methods in Nature Protection and matters arising from the establishment of National Reserves.

‘The Third Session Assembly was held in 1952 at Caracas, Venezuela, from 3-9 September. Dr. Westermann again represented our Society. At this Conference three major topics were discussed and two minor ones. In the first category were the following:

- (1) Hydro-Electric energy and the Protection of Nature.
- (2) The degradation and the preservation of fauna in semi-arid regions.
- (3) Should vanishing species of fauna be raised in semi-captivity outside of their natural environment?

The two minor topics were:

- (4) The effects of fire on vegetation. (Actually of major importance as far as Australia is concerned.)
- (5) The preservation of endemic zoological and botanical species in small islands, particularly in the Caribbean Sea.

‘We have not the space here to refer in detail to the papers or discussions evoked by the presentation of these topics, but it may be said, without hesitation, that they were of first importance to this country. Of outstanding interest to Australia at present were three Resolutions passed for presentation to various Governments, as follows:

- (a) A Resolution drawing attention to the danger threatening Reserves from hydro-electric dams.
- (b) A Resolution asking that organisations concerned with the erection of large constructions consider investigations to specify repercussions on the fauna and flora of areas affected.
- (c) A Resolution urging that, in all future construction, careful study of all resources be made before construction and operation plans are drafted.

‘An important recommendation of the Education Commission of IUPN is worthy of special reference here, even if only to emphasise the stand by W.L.P.S.A. on this matter for long past. This was that the production of educational material relating to Nature Protection and Conservation be incorporated in the curricula of primary and secondary schools, universities and technical colleges and that Departments of Conservation of Natural Resources be established in centres of higher learning.

‘IUPN conducted a symposium at Salzburg, Austria, 15-18 September 1953 to which your then President (Thistle Y. Stead) was invited as a personal delegate. An invitation was also extended to her to prepare a paper on ‘Nature Protection and Tourism’. Unfortunately, both invitations had to be refused, the latter because of lack of time to undertake the necessary research. The Union also sent a request for information relating to Nature Protection Education in Australia. Information was forwarded and the request was passed on by us to Nature organisations in the other States. Close contact with IUPN is being maintained.’

## OUR ALPINE HERITAGE

In *Australian Wild Life* for March 1954 (Vol. 2, No. 4) there appeared an article on 'Our Alpine Heritage', written by Thistle Stead. The introductory paragraph is included here to show the concerns shared by the Society for this special area:

'We have been concerned for many years past about the fate of our relatively small alpine areas in Australia. When 1½ million acres of crown land was set aside as the Kosciusko State Park in 1945 our hopes were raised that this, added to the Mt. Buffalo National Park in Victoria, would result in effective protection for our unrivalled alpine flora and its concomitant fauna. Our hopes, however, have not been realised; and now, more than ever, these unique areas are in danger of losing those characters which Professor W. R. Browne, of Sydney University, has described, in reference to Kosciusko, as 'a botanist's paradise'. Mining and grazing in the past, and grazing, tourist activities and the inevitable destruction caused by the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Project of the present, are taking away the people's heritage. The Park is administered by a Trust which no doubt does what it can to safeguard its territory. But it is a Trust of limited powers which has no jurisdiction, for instance, over the granting of grazing licenses or over areas required in connection with the Hydro-Electric project.'

## THE SCANDAL OF FAUNA EXPORT CONTINUES (1954)

The Society reported on several glaring examples of advantage taken of the law which permitted zoos to export animals. *Truth and Sportsman* (14 March 1954) stated that a cargo of 2,000 caged animals left Melbourne in the *Cymric* packed in very small crates. The report said, 'The cargo is a goodwill gesture on the part of the Australian zoos in recognition of the coronation of Her Majesty Elizabeth II'. Another Sydney newspaper criticised the gesture and carried this headline:

THEY SAID GOODBYE IN SHIP'S BOX GAOL  
No Luxury Cruise for Australian Animals and Birds

David Stead wrote a letter to the Private Secretary to the Queen, saying:

'The point I want to show you is this: If the Queen, in her wisdom, accepts this collection, it may be used by exporters to justify further traffic, regardless of the value of Australian fauna for perpetuation in its native land, and for those who come after us.'

Stead also added that the Queen might be interested to know that her grandmother, Queen Mary, had helped the Society very much in its fight against the wearing of wild bird plumage when she publicly stated her detestation of the practice and her strong recommendation to other women not to wear such plumage.

The fight against export of fauna was fought on several fronts, including through ANZAAS (Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science). At the 1952 ANZAAS Congress in Sydney, the Society submitted recommendations for the cessation of export of fauna, except under certain stringent



conditions. But apparently they were too much for the preliminary committee of Congress to digest, as that body did not pass them on.

At the ANZAAS Congress in Canberra in 1954, owing to the limited time available for discussion at the Fauna and Flora Conservation Committee of the Congress, no decision was taken on the Society's motion that:

'This Congress recommends to the Commonwealth and various State Governments:

- (a) that no export of live indigenous Australian fauna shall be permitted except with the sanction of the Minister for Customs after a close scrutiny has been made in each case;
- (b) that no export whatever shall be permitted except to bona fide scientific institutions and then only in limited numbers.'

At the 1955 ANZAAS Congress in Melbourne the same motion came up again for discussion and was passed.

The *Melbourne Age* (19 September 1958) revealed that more than 27,000 birds and 6,000 animals and fish went overseas from Australia in 1957. 'Until such export can be completely banned, we cannot rest easy that our animals will remain represented in Australia in their wild state.'

## **NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF NSW (NPA)**

The Society reported that much of its work concerning Reserves had been taken off its shoulders by the formation of the National Parks Association of New South Wales in 1957. The Association was formed to work for better maintenance of existing National Parks, for the dedication of additional parks and, most significantly, for the passing of a National Parks Act. The Wild Life Preservation Society was closely affiliated with the NPA.

In 1957 a committee set up by the Nature Conservation Conference, on which the Society was represented, presented to the then Minister for Lands a submission regarding a National Parks Act, which included the appointment of a National Parks Authority.

## **CONSERVATION TEACHING IN SCHOOLS**

In 1957 the Society prepared a statement for the Director-General of Education, New South Wales, which subsequently appeared in the *Education Gazette*. This drew attention to the necessity for care in the protection of both plants and animals by children and teachers engaged in field work, which was becoming increasingly popular. A circular was sent to all Inspectors of Schools in New South Wales, asking for their assistance in interesting schools in conservation.

## **A CONSERVATION PROGRAM**

*Australian Wild Life*, March 1957 (Vol. 3, No. 2) contained an article by Vincent Serventy, B.Sc., B.Ed., who was then in Western Australia employed by the Department of Education as a Nature Advisory Teacher. The article was entitled 'The Requirements of a Conservation Programme'. He particularly referred to the need for modern and flexible legislation (to protect fauna from destruction by farmers or 'sportsmen') and to tighter control over reserves. National parks should be zoned, Vincent claimed, with a certain fraction set aside for tourist facilities, and the major section left undisturbed except for access roads. 'The proper way to manage a national park is to leave it alone.'

## CONSERVATION CONFERENCE

A very successful Conservation Conference was held in 1958 in Sydney, the Society being represented by President W. H. Childs and Councillor Roy Bennett. The Conference decided to ask the Organising Committee to delegate the motions passed to the appropriate bodies for action. The W.L.P.S.A. was asked to deal with the following resolutions:

### 1. **Export of Fauna**

This Conference urges Commonwealth and State Governments to ban the export of all indigenous fauna except for bona fide scientific purposes (not including zoos), and then only in very limited numbers.

### 2. **Indiscriminate Rubbish Dumping**

This Conference makes the strongest possible representation to the appropriate authorities to take all necessary action to ensure the prevention (or abatement) of the practice of indiscriminate rubbish dumping on roadsides and unoccupied land.

### 3. **Amendment to Fauna Protection Act**

This Conference requests that the State Government amends the Fauna Protection Act to provide for:

- A nominee of the Wild Life Section, CSIRO, to be a member of the Panel *ex officio*.
- That organisations which nominate members to the Panel under Section 5(3) (i) be 'voluntary' organisations.

### 4. **Conservation Exhibition**

It was proposed that this Conference agree to the appointment of a committee to investigate the possibilities of arranging an exhibition in Sydney for the purpose of giving publicity to conservation of flora and fauna, W.L.P.S.A. to act as convenor.

### 5. **List of Protected Birds**

This Conference recommends that lists of protected birds be placed in view of the public and in such places as schools, railway stations, police stations, post offices and other public buildings and that each bird/pet shop should be required to display such a list.

## FIFTY YEARS ON

Roy Bennett, Past President, wrote a comprehensive report in 1959 to mark fifty years of conservation work by the Society. Some remarks are here taken from his Conclusion:

‘Since its inception, our Society has placed itself wholeheartedly against useless and wasteful slaughter of our wild life. At first, we stood alone; now, over the years, comes the birth and growth of other voluntary bodies that, in their co-operation lighten our task and stand firm with us ...

‘Adequate legislation has always been an ideal, now gradually being realised, but no law is effective unless properly administered; we are primarily a goodwill Society, achieving better work by education and cooperation than by coercion. Here, the local Flora and Fauna Society, with its closer and immediate contact with district natural problems is doing much good work.

‘Our conception of Wild Life has always been on a national basis. Nature knows no arbitrary boundary cutting right across a plant or animal habitat and yet what one State may protect, its neighbour may exploit. State authorities cannot adequately cover the field, with its problems of finance, jurisdiction and co-ordination. The urgent and immediate need is a National Wild Life Service, on lines similar to the Fish and Wildlife Service of the United States of America. It is essentially a national responsibility and not the concern of the States. There are now signs of a willingness to co-operate and, after fifty years, our ultimate ideal seems a little nearer realisation.

‘We look back over our achievements with some degree of satisfaction – and look forward with greater confidence in the belief that many of the things for which we have laboured for so long will be achieved.’