

CHAPTER 16

A FOCUS ON EDUCATION – THE 2000s

'The battle not yet won – a Universal Declaration of Environmental Rights – this new Bill was intended to complement the UN Bill of Human Rights, the move by our Society to improve both. This will be published with our Earth 2000 papers.'

Vincent Serventy

STRATEGIC PLANNING DAY IN 2008

A special Strategic Planning Day was held on 11 May 2008 in Sydney to organise and plan the future conservation work of the Society with a special emphasis on the forthcoming Centenary in 2009. Major changes were recommended to the very old Constitution and legal advice suggested important improvements to comply with the Federal Government's new legislation. To this end, the Society ultimately adopted a new Constitution on 2 July 2008 to fully comply with current taxation laws and to achieve gift deductible recipient status under these new laws. For the Society to continue, it must meet the needs of the next generation of Australians and continue to be a financially viable conservation organisation.

EDUCATION

In the Society's new planning for the future, there are seven important aims or objectives. The final three are mainly to do with administrative matters, but the first four are significant. They are:

1. To preserve and assist in preserving the natural flora and fauna of Australia
2. To conserve and assist in conserving areas of natural beauty and areas of actual or potential scientific value
3. To promote public education and interest in the aesthetic, economic and scientific benefits of conservation
4. To discourage and oppose wanton destruction of Australian wildlife.

How may these aims be achieved? There are, of course, many ways. But one important way to affect each of the four is through education.

This emphasis on education is not new. It was seen as a fundamental role of the Society in 1909 and still is. And so it should continue to be. The Society has never slackened in its attempts to maintain an educative role through a wide variety of strategies - workshops, conferences, articles, brochures, specialist responses to issues, local newspapers, school materials, support of other education agencies, practical example and the journal, *Australian Wildlife*. Sadly the areas of television and radio have been used minimally. Mass media outlets can be costly and very time-consuming for a voluntary organisation such as the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia.

One of the visions for the Society is to develop an educational base in an appropriate environment. Through the years the Society has influenced education departments

across Australia to include environmental education in the school curriculum. This has led to a blossoming of such provisions as field studies centres (building on those fifteen minutes of nature study lessons of previous years) as well as permeating our culture with a preservation 'attitude'.

The success of field studies centres shows how effective education can be when it takes place in a complementary setting. It is this understanding that has influenced the vision of establishing an environmental education centre for the Society. While this will give a national 'home' for the Society, it will also provide an optimum setting for influencing and educating a whole range of people from the youngest to the oldest.

Throughout the first decade of the 21st century, the Society undertook a number of activities which all fall under the umbrella of 'education', as the following pages will tell.

EARTH 2000

In an effort to widen the influence of the Society in preserving and protecting Australian wildlife, the Council of the Society resolved to promote a major conservation lecture each year.

To launch the new series of conservation lectures, it was decided to choose a prominent international conservation celebrity to be the inaugural Earth 2000 International Conservation Lecturer. On the advice of our President Vin Serventy, the Council chose Professor Jared Diamond, Professor of Physiology, University of California, Los Angeles.

The inaugural Earth 2000 International Conservation Lecture was held on Thursday 8 June 2000, at the Wesley Centre Theatre in Sydney. The keynote speech by Professor Jared Diamond made for a thoroughly enjoyable and informative evening. Over 720 people attended, and many requests followed for copies of the conference papers.

The Earth 2001 lecture was presented by Professor Ian Lowe at the Australian Museum, Sydney, in October 2001. The Australian Museum Society (TAMS) supported the event and Professor Lowe's outstanding presentation delighted members and guests.

PRESIDENT SERVENTY RETIRES

Vincent Serventy officially announced that he would retire from office at the 93rd Annual General Meeting of the Society held on 25 February 2002. The Council had extended an invitation to all members and friends to attend a special Retirement Luncheon in the New South Wales Parliamentary Dining Rooms following the AGM.

At the AGM, Patrick Medway moved a motion that Dr Vincent Serventy AM be made President of Honour in recognition of his truly outstanding service as President of the Society, having served with distinction in this office since 1966, as well as being a very committed life member of the Society for sixty years.

Patrick Medway was elected as the new President and Chairman of the Council of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia at this 93rd Annual General Meeting.

Several people sent messages at the time of Vin's retirement. Kristin Williamson, a neighbour in Pearl Beach, New South Wales, the wife of playwright David Williamson, said:

‘Our guru does not wear flowing robes, ring bells or put us in a trance. He just stands on Goanna Rock in his old khaki shorts and sandals and tells us a story. Like all good leaders his stories have morals. But they are never boring and can be understood by the youngest of the three generations.’

Marjorie Woodman, a former Councillor and life member of the Society, said:

‘Vin is the Society. He is our figurehead, the David fighting our Goliaths who seek only money-making ventures, who can see big value or beauty in wild places.’

Sometime in the late 1990s, Vincent Serventy outlined his Ten Green Commandments, the substance of which was to be the backbone of the Environmental Bill of Rights. Here are Vincent's Ten Green Commandments:

1. All people have a right to an earth where they can live and enjoy a fair quality of life.
2. No nation has the right to change the world of nature in a way that will damage the earth's resources.
3. All nations must keep the present diversity of the natural world, its plants and animals and the beauty of landscapes.
4. All nations must use their resources in a sustainable way and plan for the future when some run out.
5. All nations giving aid must make sure this will increase the quality of life of those to whom the help is given.
6. The resources which the world holds in common must be used for the common good.
7. All nations must carry out international agreements and abide by the decisions of the World Court.
8. All nations must check their own environments and warn of dangers ahead.
9. All nations must develop a sustainable population policy, not expecting other nations to accept their excess due to unwise planning.
10. All nations must educate their people into a new morality which cares not only for the rights of the people but also for the rights of the environment.

SEMINAR – SOILS, HABITAT AND BIODIVERSITY

In the brochure advertising this seminar, to be held on 6 April 2002, Vincent Serventy said:

‘Soil degradation

For the last few years our Society has been spelling out to all those who would listen – ministers, premiers and prime ministers, as well as the opposition

parties – that the continued damage to the soil is threatening all of our wildlife habitat, woodlands and other vast areas of our continent ...

‘Farmers all over Australia have joined Landcare, certainly the responsible ones have. In our travels we have seen vast tree planting schemes across this country – this solution to land degradation was told to our Society by a farmer over sixty years ago.

Habitat destruction

Habitat destruction contributes to animals and plants being threatened with extinction. Today we want to alert the whole of Australia to the problems of habitat destruction. Not just Landcare, but all conservation groups caring for wildlife habitat and the revegetation of our land.’

In *Australian Wildlife*, Autumn 2/2003, the following note is found on page 15:

‘Save Our Soils Conference 2003

Our Society continued to support this important Conference. Last year we sponsored the inaugural seminar to highlight the importance of protecting the soils, to ensure the preservation of the habitat for our precious wildlife.

‘The NSW Nature Conservation Council appointed a Project Officer, Saliran Claff, to co-ordinate this year’s conference.

‘The 2003 Conference was called Ancient Soils New Solutions and featured a conference on Soils, Biodiversity and Agriculture, held over two days on 28 and 29 March 2003 in the Southee Complex, Sydney Showgrounds, Olympic Park, at Homebush.

‘A wide range of speakers covered Soils and Biodiversity, capacity of people, government actions, economics of recovery, capacity of the land, acid sulphate soils and salinity.’

REDUCTION OF ROADKILL

The Councillors of the Society agreed that reduction of roadkills would be the major project for the year 2003 to draw attention and explore solutions to the danger to Australian native wildlife on our roads. During the year the Society Councillors attended a workshop organised by Austroads; awarded grants into research on roadkill; sponsored Sydney Metropolitan Wildlife Services at the 2003 Animal Expo which enabled them to recruit new carers, raise money and lift awareness of their organisation; as well as write, research and lobby government, insurance agencies and the media about the danger to Australian fauna and our roads.

In conjunction with The Linnean Society of New South Wales, the Society held a ‘Reduction of Roadkill Seminar’ on 18 November 2003 in the Maiden Theatre, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney.

The guest speakers were:

Peter Buckley, President, Sydney Metropolitan Wildlife Services

Dan Lunney, National Parks and Wildlife Service
Dr Daniel Ramp, University of New South Wales
Natasha Arens, Roads and Traffic Authority.

A message of support came from the Hon. Bob Debus MP, Minister for the Environment:

‘I congratulate the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia in addressing this complex issue. Roads have a significant impact on many native species and I support this initiative. The enormity of this task in a country the size of Australia is a daunting prospect, however many great things come from small initiatives and I hope from this conference a way forward may be developed.’

Dr Daniel Ramp, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of NSW, introduced his presentation at the seminar by saying:

‘Research has an important part to play in our efforts to tackle this very serious issue of collisions between wildlife and vehicles. It is only with comprehensive and reliable data that we can hope to tease apart the complex factors that contribute to this devastating problem. What I hope to clarify herein are what I believe are the gaps in our knowledge and the questions that we should be trying to answer.’

(The complete account of Dr Ramp’s talk can be found in *Australian Wildlife*, Autumn 2/2004.)

Peter Buckley explained that the Sydney Metropolitan Wildlife Services is a community based volunteer organisation which receives over 12,000 calls a year from people seeking assistance or advice about Australian native wildlife. The phone is answered seven days a week, 24 hours a day so messages are never left on answering machines. Sydney Wildlife was launched in May 1997 by the Hon. Pam Allan MP, the then Minister for the Environment:

‘Animals cannot be isolated from the rest of the environment. Urban sprawl and loss of habitat are the major contributors to the demise of native animals, closely followed by domestic and feral animal attacks, and road strikes. Accordingly, education at all levels of the community should be a primary objective as it is the only truly effective weapon in the long-term conservation of wildlife and its habitat.’

STRATEGIC PLANNING DAY IN 2004

Australian Wildlife reported in the Winter 3/2004 issue:

‘The Society held its annual Strategic Planning Day on 11 May. Councillors reviewed the 2003 year and planned and organised the direction of the Society’s work over the coming year. Our immediate past year was one of outstanding growth and commitment to wildlife preservation with some real wins recorded – Barrier Reef protection extended to 33% in the new green zones; extensive research into reduction of roadkill of native animals; major submissions to Environment Australia

and National Parks and Wildlife Service on wildlife habitat protection; and an increase in research grants to university research.'

Planning outcomes were addressed – the Councillors focused on membership growth, new branch development, increased research funding for wildlife preservation and habitat protection, plans to increase bequest and investment funding, plans for a new national headquarters, increased efforts to promote environmental education and school programs, better quality publications, promotional material and modern technology equipment to promote the work of the Society. Over this coming year the Councillors planned to develop programs and activities to reach these new goals for the work of the Society.

2004 AGM OF THE NCC

The National President, Patrick Medway, reported in *Australian Wildlife* in the issue of Summer 1/2005:

'A great gathering of conservationists and environmentalists from across New South Wales came together at the Royal Botanic Gardens Theatre in October for the Annual General Meeting of the Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales. Many issues were discussed and some very interesting guest speakers from major government departments responsible for native vegetation and wildlife management were featured.

'We were fortunate in getting our three motions passed by a majority of the delegates. We proposed an integrated system of marine sanctuaries around the whole coastline of Australia for the maintenance of marine biodiversity within marine environments with around fifty percent of the total area of marine parks to become marine sanctuaries; the establishment of a South Pacific Whale Sanctuary which would protect the breeding grounds of most of the species of migratory great whales that are found in the region; and support for the establishment of the Hunter Wildlife Corridor Regional Park from the ocean to the mountains along the Hunter River System.'

At the NCC meeting, the WPSA was invited to sponsor an environmental education seminar in 2005. As environmental education is a primary focus for the Society this was worthy of consideration, but the Society's Council decided it did not have sufficient resources to mount a seminar of this kind.

COMMUNITY WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AWARD

In 2002 the Society announced the inauguration of a community wildlife service award to recognise organisations which make a significant contribution to the preservation of Australian wildlife. Seven nominations were received, all worthy projects and geographically located in metropolitan Sydney, regional NSW and interstate.

The recipient of the inaugural award in 2004 was 'Bringing Back the Flashjack Project' of Emerald in Central Queensland. Flashjack is the name given in the Emerald district to the bridled nail-tailed wallaby. These beautiful little animals were once plentiful on the western side of the Dividing Range from Charters Towers in North Queensland right through NSW to the northern districts of Victoria. However, the usual culprits of foxes, feral cats and heavy destruction of habitat led to their severe depletion. In fact, they were thought to be extinct, but a remnant population was discovered on a station property at Dingo in Central Queensland in the mid 1970s. Subsequently the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) bought the property to preserve both the colony and the habitat.

Following that, a captive breeding programme was conducted at the BHP Gregory mine site, with the cooperation of scientists from the University of Queensland and the QPWS. It was important to establish colonies at other sites so that the animals would not be so vulnerable to natural disasters. Local landholders in the Emerald district, Hugo Spooner and his wife, on their property 'Avocet', had set aside over 1,100 hectares as a wildlife refuge. QPWS examined the site and determined it was a suitable habitat. Emerald Shire Council appointed a special officer to co-ordinate the project, volunteers were recruited and the local Gindie Primary School became involved. Eventually animals were able to be released and local TAFE students, scouts and volunteers were involved as well as the school children.

This was a project which had involved a university, a government department, a shire council, a mining company, local landholders, a school, a TAFE college, scouts and numerous volunteers. 'Bringing Back the Flashjack Project' was a worthy winner of the inaugural Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Community Wildlife Conservation Award. At the 95th Anniversary Luncheon on 18 February 2004, Janelle Lowry of the QPWS and community volunteer Yvonne Thompson, received the award on behalf of the project from Her Excellency the Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir.

In subsequent years the award was presented to other worthy community projects, such as the Mareeba Wetland Foundation in Queensland (2005), Friends of the Koala, Lismore, NSW (2006) the Natural History Society of South Australia (2008) and Australian Ecosystems Foundation Inc. of Lithgow, NSW. It has been encouraging when reviewing applications for these awards to see how much community activity is abroad in Australia.

THE SERVENTY CONSERVATION MEDAL

The inaugural Serventy Wildlife Conservation Medal was awarded in 1999 to Mrs. Margaret Grace Thorsborne for her commitment to saving the native pigeon. Mrs. Thorsborne came from Melunga Creek, Cardwell, Queensland. The medal, awarded each year since 1999, was established to commemorate the conservation work carried out by members of the Serventy family – Dr. Vincent Serventy, Dr. Dominic Serventy and Lucy Serventy. Each member of the family gave a lifetime of commitment to the conservation and preservation of Australian wildlife.

ANIMAL EXPO, NOVEMBER 2005

The Society began participating in the annual Animal Expo in 2003. Each year the Society featured a different theme.

Carol Nolder, the Society's Councillor in charge of displays and exhibitions, designed and organised a major promotional display at the November 2005 Animal Expo at the Rosehill Gardens Showground near Parramatta, Sydney. The theme that year was the desert and preservation of reptiles. She invited Crocodile Encounters, an organisation promoting the preservation of crocodiles through public education, to feature reptiles on the stand. Mark Richmond, a herpetologist from Varanid Research and Information Centre brought along a 1.5 metre crocodile, a turtle, two carpet pythons and a very large diamond python to attract visitors to the Society's stand and help promote the work of the Society to preserve and protect native wildlife in all its forms across Australia.

The exhibition was staffed by a number of Society Councillors who freely gave of their time and effort to answer the many questions posed about the work of the Society on wildlife preservation.

SOCIETY POLICIES

Prior to 2000 the policies of the Society were not officially recorded and presented as a single document. At a Council meeting in early 2000 Dr. Clive Williams and Dr. Mike Augee formed a committee to research and formulate policies for the Society. As each policy was developed, they were presented to council meetings, discussed and formally adopted before publication on the Society's website. The policies are continually reviewed and updated where necessary.

Once the policies are formally adopted by the Society, it is beholden on the Executive Officers to comply with the agreed policies in all public statements and media releases.

In the Centenary year, the policies are:

- Habitat preservation – loss of wildlife habitat presents the greatest threat at the present time to the preservation of biodiversity in Australia.
- Control of feral animals and feral plants – the Society supports efforts to control introduced weeds and feral pest animal species.
- Use of native species for human needs – the Society has no objection to the use of native plant or animal species for human needs provided:
 - that harvesting is at sustainable levels
 - that the decision to allow each use is made on the basis of scientific evidence
 - that levels of exploitation are checked frequently
 - that in the case of animal species, harvesting is carried out in a humane manner, by licensed operators under the control of relevant wildlife authorities.

- Feeding native animals – the Society discourages the artificial feeding of native wildlife in the bush or backyards, except under conditions of severe environmental stress, such as bushfire or drought.
- National Parks - control of National Parks should never be vested in any organisation or group other than the state or federal national parks authorities.
- Prevention of roadkill – the Society supports continued research into ways of reducing roadkill of native wildlife.
- Keeping native animals in captivity – the Society is opposed to taking native terrestrial vertebrates from the wild into captivity except as necessary for educational display and research purposes.
- Marine sanctuaries – the Wildlife Preservation Society believes that an integrated system of marine sanctuaries is essential for the maintenance of marine biodiversity within the marine environment. The Society believes:
 - all states should have a comprehensive network of marine sanctuaries to protect marine wildlife,
 - there should be no ‘take’ of any kind in a marine sanctuary,
 - fifty percent of marine parks should become marine sanctuaries.
- Climate change – the greatest single detrimental effect of human activity on the environment has been the destruction of ecosystems and habitat. Climate change is now threatening to accelerate this process and, since scientists now accept that human activity is responsible, we must do all in our power to change human behaviour.

TOURS AND OUTINGS FOR MEMBERS

- March 2004 – Wellington and Dubbo (four days)
The eighteen Society members who went on the Central Western NSW Wildlife Tour in March 2004 voted it an unqualified success and eagerly looked forward to the next Society organised tour. Councillor Mike Augee did an excellent job with arrangements and members were most impressed with the Wellington Caves and the Wellington Caves Fossil Centre, the Western Plains Zoo and Burrendong Arboretum were also on the itinerary.
- June 2005 – a one-day trip to Waterfall Springs Wildlife Sanctuary, NSW Central Coast. Waterfall Springs was a winner of the Society’s Community Conservation Award, home to four endangered species of wallabies – brush-tailed rock wallaby, yellow-footed rock wallaby, bridled nail-tailed wallaby and tamar wallaby. The Society group experienced a unique behind-the-scenes tour of the Sanctuary and enjoyed morning tea and lunch with the manager Debbie Breen, President Lloyd Oldfield and the volunteer staff.
- July 2005 - a one-day visit to Cape Solander headland in Botany Bay National Park to whale watch. At the whale watching station Society members met Wayne Reynolds, the co-ordinator of the whale watching volunteers and recipient of the Serventy Conservation Medal for 2004. While there members also viewed the volunteers’ caravan that the Society purchased and loaned for four months each year to the whale watching volunteers.

- October 2005 – Wildlife tour to the Warrumbungles (five days)
Mike Augee was the tour guide and driver of the hired bus for the Society members, with trip details worked out by Councillor Carol Nolder. Walking in this rugged area near the town of Coonabarabran, NSW, was the order for each day, with one particular highlight being a guided walk with an Elder of the Gamileroi people, Bill Robinson.
- October 2006 – Sawpit Creek, Kosciuszko National Park (five days)
Mike Augee was coach driver once more and colleague Christine Robinson did a great job with the catering as she had done on previous trips. The five-day trip included a day of bitterly cold wind and snow, but visits to the Education Centre, Fish Hatchery, Guthega, Charlotte Pass and Thredbo still took place during the days in this wonderful alpine area.
- October 2007 – Kangaroo Island (six days)
A wonderful place for wildlife! Fur seals and their pups, Cape Barren geese, the occasional platypus and echidna. Sea Lion Beach with a knowledgeable ranger was a highlight on the Saturday, followed by a tour of the famous Kelly Hill Caves. Huge grass trees captured attention, as well as a visit to a koala sanctuary. Not just wildlife but stories of the lighthouses and shipwrecks and some days of violent winds made this a memorable trip.
- June 2008 – North Queensland (six days)
Carol Nolder wrote an informative report on this trip in *Australian Wildlife*, Spring 4/2008, with a big ‘thank you’ to Mike Augee, Christine Robinson and Chris George (who drove the backup vehicle).

PERMANENT HOME FOR THE SOCIETY -

Patrick Medway explained his dream for the future of the Society:

‘My long term aim is to have a permanent base for the wildlife conservation work of the Society. After researching possibilities along the East Coast of Australia from Cairns to Melbourne, we finally found opportunity in the Rockdale Wetlands Corridor in Sydney. The Society responded to an Expression of Interest from the Rockdale City Council for a proposal to develop a fauna and flora park in the area similar to that which some other councils had done in other locations.

‘ECOWORLD Gardens Project

The ECOWORLD Gardens Committee researched extensively both in Australia and overseas to see what was happening in the field of modern environmental education centres so we might plan for long term sustainability. As our core mission was to educate the next generation of young people about the environment and its native wildlife, the Committee focused on developing a sustainable wetland environmental education centre set in a reclaimed botanic garden setting. A proposal was later added to include a climate change centre to the project to keep up with the current trends and the effect of global warming on our environment.

‘A full Development Application was submitted to the Rockdale City Council in May 2008 for approval to establish a modern and sustainable environmental education centre in a botanic garden setting to appeal to all ages.

‘After a very successful fund-raising campaign officially launched by the Premier of New South Wales, Morris Iemma MP, at our 97th Annual General meeting in 2006, we have now raised some \$1.5m for this project.

‘Our Society now waits patiently for the formal assessment and approval to come from the Rockdale City Council to lease the site around the Brighton Ponds to establish the new centre as a future base for our Society and its national wildlife conservation work.

‘As our focus has always been to educate the next generation of young Australians about our native wildlife in all its forms, from our rare and endangered fauna through to our delicate and exotic flora, we set out to plan for a fully fledged wetland environmental education and climate change centre to do just that.’

The Rockdale City Council refused to issue a lease over the parcel of land on 6 May 2009, insisting that the Society should first provide a ‘security and performance guarantee’ over the full \$3.4 million capital outlay in case the project was not successful. The Society reluctantly put the whole project on hold at its meeting on 3 June 2009, pending further advice.