Spring 1996

AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE

Journal of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc. (Founded 1909)
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Black swans breeding on Berliar Wetlands, Perth, W.A.

Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia, Inc. (Founded 1909)
GPO Box 3428 Sydney NSW 2001



'AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE'

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

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

Print Post Approval No. PP243459/00117

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REGIONAL COUNCILLORS

We would like to hear from our country members, anywhere in Australia who would like to become regional councillors.

The value to us is we would have a more intimate relationship with women and men who have local knowledge which could be valuable for conservation.

Such Regional Councillors would be sent the minutes of our Council meetings so they would know more of what we are doing. They could also submit motions for consideration and so play a part in Society decisions. By being listed in our newsletter State members could contact them in emergencies.

All articles are written by Vincent Serventy and Patrick Medway unless stated otherwise.

READ ABOUT *it...*

"Western Shield"

"Flight For The Shearwater"

"Domestic Cat Control Action"

"De-horning Rhinos"

"Senator Hill Inspects Towra Point"

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From the Presidents Desk...

STATEing the facts...

It has been a busy year for our Society. Since we are an Australia-wide organisation, indeed sometimes worldwide, I will start with State headings.

New South Wales

Our big task was to alert the public on the neglect of Towra Point Nature Reserve an internationally important wetland. Energised by Bernie Clark, some of our Council visited this neglected spot and as a result we developed an Action Plan. Our executive officer Patrick Medway took this to the RAMSAR gathering in Brisbane and our ideas enthused this international gathering. As a result of our and other groups interest the Federal Minister, Senator Robert Hill visited the region and together with State interest, action is already being taken. We will continue our work in this matter.

The Prospect Canal problem was stimulated by our Council member Alan Read and recently brought this matter to a satisfactory conclusion. Congratulations Alan and also to your local Canal Reserve Action Group (CRAG) which has worked so hard to keep these wetlands in public hands.

Other activities include wetlands habitat to the north and activities are still continuing.

Queensland

Our vital problem has been the proposed tourist development in the Hinchinbrook Channel region, that lovely passage between the mainland and Hinchinbrook Island. This is all part of the Great Barrier Reef Regional Park.

We are still trying to convince the federal government that once part of the Reef park is 'developed' it will be impossible to turn back the clock.

Western Australia

There has been immense conservation moves in this State. 'Western Shield' is the world's largest attempt to control feral animals, the scourge of our wildlife. I will be visiting this state in November and will see if it is possible to start a local branch. I will also look at other local problems including the 'Beliar Wetlands' project.

South Australia

We are concerned with the fate of the Lake Eyre Region and in particular Coopers Creek which is of vital importance to local graziers. Yes. We do care about the future of our farmlands, as sustainability is important for them. The ever increasing demands of irrigation could mean the slow death not only of our wetlands habitats but also of all our rivers. We have a local expert now on our advisory panel, Dr Puckridge from Adelaide University who will keep an eye on this region.

Victoria

Domestic cats are a problem for urban wildlife so we watch with interest 'Companion Animals Bills' in each State. NSW is considering this matter at present. We always present Sherbrooke Shire Council model as an example to follow. What they have done in one region can be copied all over Australia.

Never say we can do little. It is by small beginnings that great changes can be made.

Tasmania

From my point of view the big thing in this state is the launching of my new book; '**The Flight of the Shearwater**'. I was involved with the research since my brother was in charge. However it was as far back as 1900 when Bishop Montgomery, the father of the famous Field Marshal of World War II, laid down the first conservation rules.

Today muttonbirding is a sustainable industry and literally it was a species 'saved by slaughter'. Had it not been for the bird-take being important to the locals, most of the breeding islands would have been converted to sheep and cattle grazing with the consequent disappearance of the Shearwater birds.

Northern Territory

No important conservation arguments developed in this State, or at least were not brought to our attention. However Dr McIntosh, the vital new head of SCIRO, on television said the spread of the rabbit calicivirus is working its magic over country devastated by the rabbit. Plant species which were thought to be extinct have reappeared. Where the plants are coming, can the rare animals be far behind!

International

Through publications received we keep an eye on overseas matters. Sometimes we use them to guide local decisions but if we can offer input, we do so. For example an American enquirer asked about blindness in wild kangaroos and what she could do, we sent the information and suggested she might become a member. She has now done so and we welcome another wildlife supporter to our Society.



Vincent Serventy AM
President

The WESTERN SHIELD *by Vincent Serventy*

The Sydney Morning Herald of 5 August reported a promise that the NSW government would force landholders to destroy feral foxes and goats on their properties in Kangaroo Valley where these pests are pushing to extinction native animals such as rock wallabies.

The landholders' will no doubt report 'why not get rid of feral pests in your own national parks and State Forests?'



Woylie

Such feral pests are not only a problem in Kangaroo Valley but all over the continent. The Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc. suggests NSW authorities look at what Western Australia has been doing. Wildlife experts there have worked hard to get rid of feral pests in particular regions. As a result rock wallabies, numbats, woylies, quokkas, ringtail possums and chuditch have recovered in numbers. The woylie may soon be removed from the official threatened species list since it has become so abundant. other species will no doubt soon follow. It is expected that 30 native species will benefit, including ground-nesting birds and some reptiles as well as small mammals, the most vulnerable to attack.

The western solution is absurdly simple; baiting with 1080, a poison that will not affect native animals. Domestic dogs are at risk so landholders need to control their pets. WA's initial success is to be expanded into a great drive, named Western Shield, that will cover five million hectares. Feral animal control is co-ordinated by CALM, the State organisation dealing with wildlife matters, with assistance from landholders and conservation volunteers.

An interesting initiative was the earlier support given by ALCOA for work in 700,000 hectares of jarrah forest. Western Shield will be more expensive costing one million dollars annually with other companies assisting ALCOA, Wapet and Shark Bay Salt as well as WWF, the Australian Nature Conservancy and the SCIRO are all taking part. Surely in NSW there are also companies that would assist in this worthwhile task.

Future research may produce efficient biological controls on pests, but it may come too late to save many native species. Rabbit calicivirus can solve our major problem, the rabbit. This will create an urgent need to hit feral pests such as foxes and cats when they face starvation and are more vulnerable. CALM has devised a new bait attractive to feral cats while earlier methods can control foxes and goats. This is our great chance. Feral animals will not become extinct but we can lower their numbers by at least eighty per cent so native species can outbreed them, and populations remain secure.

To paraphrase a famous saying 'We have seen the future and it works'. Does NSW have the initiative to become active in this crucial matter? The federal government, which made feral animal control a vital part of its conservation program should also come to the party. The western initiative has shown money can be obtained without special methods such as the sale of public assets. It must be spread to all parts of Australia. The Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc. has contacted the federal Minister for the Environment with this plea, so far with no success. Surely there is enough energy from governments and goodwill from companies in all the States to spread the Western Shield over the whole continent.

Shooting Koalas

The recommendation from the Federal Nature Conservation Agency which proposed the shooting of koalas on Kangaroo Island, must have been among the most stupid, of any group which calls itself a 'conservation agency'.

For many decades we have been told by scientific and other groups that our koalas are in danger of extinction, are missing from vast areas of Australia where they were once common, that we should not allow the export of any koalas to overseas zoos because of their rarity.

Had the idea of shooting been accepted by the environment ministers it would have been a blow to all attempts for conservation of endangered species which would have taken years to recover.

The suggestion in some quarters that the Kangaroo Island animals are a different species and it would be 'dangerous' to mix them with mainland groups. Even scientists claim we should not mix races of koalas because of unspecified dangers to their survival.

Humans have been mixing races of dogs for thousands of years. The same is true of other domestic stock. While nature has always seen various races intermingling without disaster. The other claim is that the Kangaroo Island koalas are free of disease and would die of eye infections if translocated to other parts of the mainland. Even worse they would be attacked by the 'mythical' koalas which it is claimed now are in such numbers on the mainland.

We know that to see a koala in the wild today in most parts of eastern Australia is so rare as to attract crowds of sightseers.

So the 'scientific' solution is to shoot the over population on Kangaroo Island!

Strangely while many scientists claim Australia is already over populated with humans, none as yet has suggested we should shoot the extra eight million people which it is claimed are too many for the country to bear.

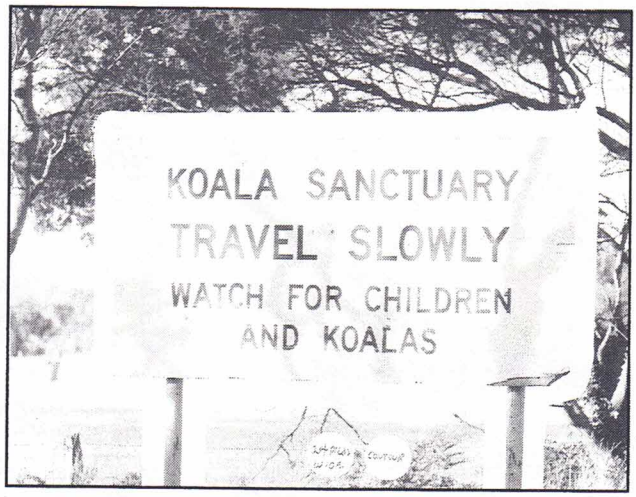
No. The scientific solution is not scientific, even more important it is bad conservation advice. How good it is to see Ministers with a sounder knowledge.

There are koala 'vacuums' in many places in eastern Australia where they can be translocated. Also world zoos which are clamouring for our animals can be supplied at some profit to ourselves.

The scientists would be better occupied researching other ways of feeding captive koalas. Some years ago there was a special biscuit developed to supply most of captive animals food needs. Earlier in our history there were cases of pet animals being fed on bread and milk.



Sick koala being fed at a koala 'hospital'.



A road sign showing community concern



A collar to prevent koalas climbing trees. This is used to stop overgrazing.

FLIGHT of the Shearwater

VINCENT SERVENTY A.M.

MORNING COFFEE TALK FOLLOWED BY BOOK LAUNCH

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 23

AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM, COLLEGE ST. SYDNEY

Vincent Serventy's latest book, Flight of the Shearwater, tells the story of the Tasmanian muttonbird, probably the best known bird species in the world. It has been studied since 1949 and research is continuing.

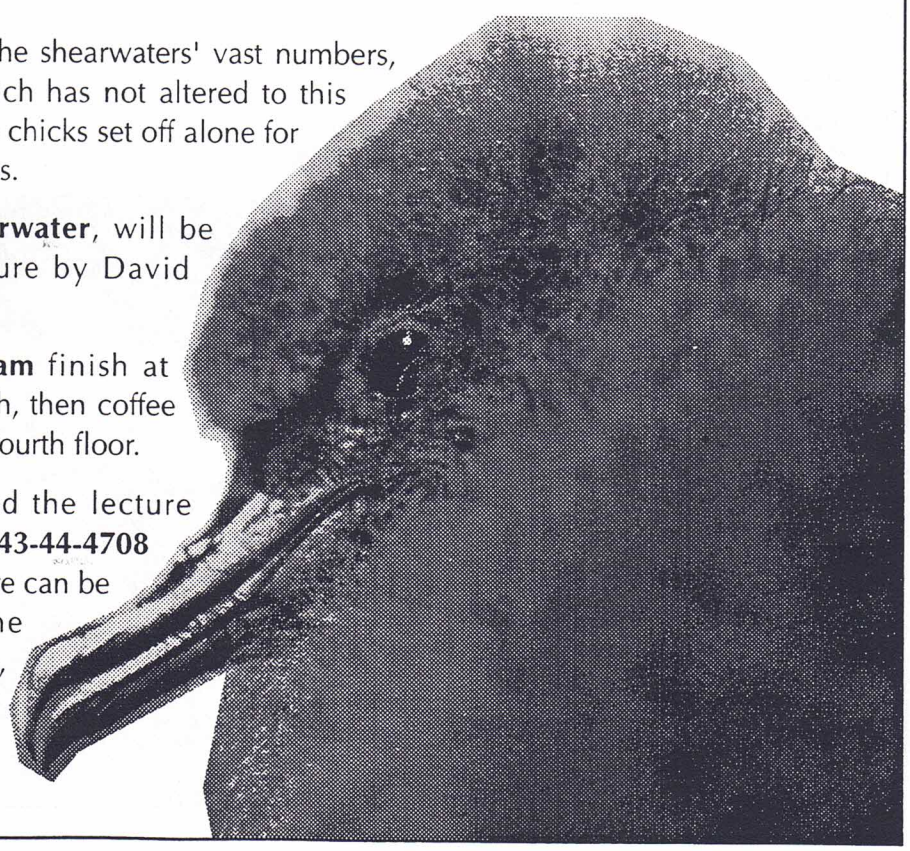
Using slides Vincent will tell us this classic story of wildlife adventure. His brother Domenic was in charge of the first research, and Vincent often took his place. Volunteers, including Sir Russell Drysdale, Sir Peter Scott, Stephen Walker, Clifton Pugh, and Alan Moorehead stayed on the island and helped the scientists.

The first settlers marvelled at the shearwaters' vast numbers, the regularity of egglaying, which has not altered to this day, and the skill with which the chicks set off alone for their summer in the Arctic oceans.

The book **Flight of the Shearwater**, will be launched following the lecture by David Williamson.

The talk will start at **10.30am** finish at **11.30am** followed by the Launch, then coffee upstairs in TAMS section on the fourth floor.

Members intending to attend the lecture should phone the President at **043-44-4708** so places in the Hallstrom Theatre can be held for those attending the launch only, there is no problem, but please book first, we only have 30 seats for the launch.



Kangaroo Blindness

Some time ago we had a query from the United States about kangaroo blindness. It might be interesting to write about the present position. For those who are happy about shooting koalas on Kangaroo Island you can be sure that the rest of the world will soon see or read about our callous stupidity.

Think of the damage it would do to our international image. The clubbing to death of Canadian baby seals would be a minor fuss compared to koala killing.

The latest information on blindness is that it is caused by a virus, but what kind is not known. Probably it is transmitted from animal to animal by insects or ticks. The disease was not caused by eating poisonous plants as hand fed pet kangaroos also caught the infection.

In some areas 30-50% of grey kangaroos were affected. Both males and females of grey and red kangaroos were infected.

Diseased animals are found mainly in the southern part of the Darling River and to the west of the Darling to the South Australian border. It appears to be spreading.

Our information comes from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. They would like more information from anyone who has seen suspected cases.

We hope our readers will help the Service in this worthwhile cause.

February 13, 1996

Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc.
P.O. Box 3428
Sydney, NSW 2001
Australia

To whom it may concern,

Approximately one year ago, I saw a program (news clip) on a news channel here in Mississippi about some grey kangaroos that were blind. It was a "mystery" as to the cause of their blindness at the time. The kangaroos were hopping around aimlessly, bumping into trees and bushes and falling into bodies of water only to drown. People were having to shoot them to "put them out of their misery." As an animal-lover, it was heart-wrenching to watch.

I was hoping you could give me some information about these blind grey kangaroos. What has become of them? Are they being helped? Has the cause of their blindness been determined?

Thank you.



Sincerely,
Marie Schultz

1 March 1996

Dear Marie Schultz

Thanks for your letter.

The enclosed material will tell you of the details of blindness in kangaroos. There is little which can be done as there is still no solution on this viral infection.

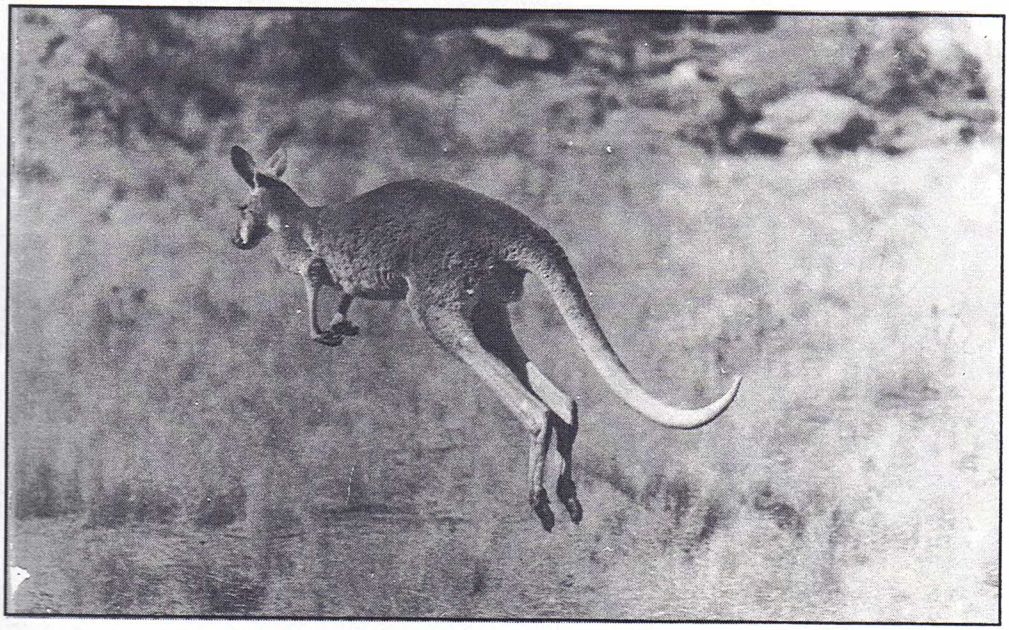
With some twenty million red and grey kangaroos over the whole of Australia not much can be done though it is reassuring that research is continuing and it seems as though the disease may have run its course, probably because drought has reduced numbers.

If you would like to help our work you could become a member or send a donation or leave a bequest in your will. We would like to expand our work. We are also the oldest conservation society in Australia and probably one of the oldest in the world.

I enclose a little information.

Yours sincerely

Vincent Serventy
President



Red Kangaroo

How the World Wildlife Fund Began in Australia...

It all began when Sir Julian Huxley visited South Aftica and on his return made a passionate plea to Europeans that the fascinating wildlife of Africa should be saved before it was too late.



A number of people were touched by this plea and one Victor Stolan wrote 'There must be a way to the conscience and heart and pride and vanity of the very rich people to persuade them to sink their hands in their pockets and thus serve a cause which is greater and nobler than any other one...'

A group of Englishmen among whom was Sir Peter Scott had already been alarmed that the largest non-government world conservation group was faced with bankruptcy. This was formed in 1928 and transferred in 1946 to Amsterdam. It was then known as IUPN later to IUNC and finally the World Conservation Union. The early organisers had the conservation ability but little in terms of fundraising.

Here was an opportunity not only to save Africa wildlife but that of the world where extinction was facing so many species of plants and animals.

It was into this new hotbed of activity that Carol and I became involved when we visited Peter Scott at Slimbridge, his wetlands sanctuary in England's west.

Peter urged we should start an Australian section. We visited the world headquarters at Gland in Switzerland, not only the new home of WWF but also of the World Conservation Union. Their leaders welcomed our interest and laid down guidelines for future action.

As the years passed it was realised that while the seeding money usually came from the rich, the real wealth was still in the middleclass. Already in England most of the help came from small amounts often aided by bequests from wills. Conservation groups were springing up everywhere in Australia and some by weight of numbers were measuring their wealth in millions of dollars a year, all from thousands of members.

I was still searching for a leader and on a lucky day met the Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser in Sydney. After a spirited discussion on the way conservation was travelling I got up to go and I did mentioned WWF. I expected to be asked to explain what these initials meant.

Instead Malcolm said 'Isn't it time we got it started. What do you want done?'

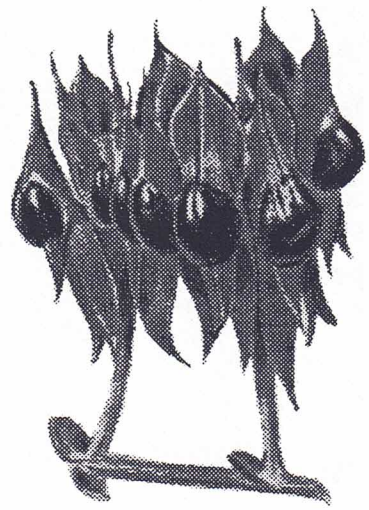
I sat down once more and poured out my ideas, promising to write these in more detail as soon as I returned home.

Malcolm's drive and enthusiasm turned my dreams into reality. He had the civil servants to do the spadework, the business contacts to enrol the rich and powerful. So WWF was started. Peter by example in England had showed us how to raise money not only from the rich but from most of the people, a million folk giving one dollar is equal to one donating a million.

That is how the Fund has prospered. Today it not only funds conservation projects but by research into new problems we have earned not only the trust of ordinary folk but the respect of governments.

So today the World Wide Fund for Nature is not only the world's largest conservation organisation but also helps fund the huge World Conservation Union which acts as the conservation conscience of nations.

This union is a happy mix of governmental and non-governmental groups around the world. In such co-operation is the salvation of the environment.



It's Time For Action on Domestic Cat Control... *by Vincent Serventy*

Cats as household pets have had a bad press lately. Conservationists tend to regard them as more pest then pets.

Fortunately we now know most of the facts, and also the solutions, as these have been tried and they work.

Some of the facts available by Petcare from questionnaire research and telephone interviews provided much valuable information. I do not automatically discard such material so long as the results agree with research from the opposing groups.

The feral problem has very little to do with domestic cats. Folklore claims that the feral population is gaining constant recruits from the domestic stock.

The usual plaint is that if only kindhearted people would stop discarding unwanted kittens in the bush, rather than drowning them in a bucket, the feral problem would soon go.

I have always thought that belief is nonsense. We do know that spreading domestic stock into the wild is not always easy. We do know that feral cats are a menace to our wildlife, but not the prime cause of their disappearance.

The top danger to native wildlife is the introduced European fox. Then comes dieback which threatens our plant life survival. Next comes feral cats, followed by land degradation caused by rabbits with feral goats last of all. Other problem animals and plants are causing disaster in particular areas.

There is no question that pets are of value to humans in terms of emotional health as well as of economic value by destroying rats and mice.

There are almost one million households in Australia which keep domestic cats, about one quarter of all homes. This represents a number of voters which governments cannot ignore.

This gives an estimate of 1,397,000 animals with some homes having more than one with a few going overboard in their love of felines, so causing troubles for neighbours and local councils.

There has been a steady decline in the numbers of cat owning households in the last few years, with a ten percent drop in metropolitan centres, so possibly the conservation message is taking hold.

The petcare research group found that every year each domestic cat caught one fiftieth of a native mammal, one-fifth of a native bird, one and a third native reptiles or amphibians. On the credit side, half of all creatures caught were mice, rats and rabbits.

However one fifth of 1,397,000 deaths is still a lot of birds and enough to remove most of the smaller ground feeding creatures such as blue wrens and thornbills entirely from areas as many home owners can testify.

Splendid Blue Wren



The belief that putting an alarm bell on a cat to safeguard birds, did not work. Indeed the reverse seems to be true.

The other factors reported were that forty percent of cats were kept indoors at night while eighty percent did not roam the day. Perhaps, that explains the low numbers of victims since owners who claimed their pets never roamed would report on wildlife taken.



This kind of personal reporting has some value but not as useful as actual collecting of the bodies of victims.

A much more reliable personal report came from an officer of the NSW National parks and Wildlife Service. He kept a record of all the animals brought to the house over a seven year period. He lived at Wahroonga, a bushland suburb of Sydney.

The total is fightening, even though this was a much loved and well fed pet.

Of the sixty one animals caught, only five rats and one mouse were taken. The rest included bats, birds of many species ranging from those as large as mudlarks and red wattlebirds, to small species such as spinebill honeyeaters. There were many reptiles including bluetongue skinks.

This leaves eight creatures each year, a much higher than the previous ones, though only from one reporter. Yet these animals identified take no account of the smaller victims eaten on the spot and not brought home.

What is the solution?

The Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia, our oldest conservation group having been founded back in 1909 organised a seminar on cats, calling in experts from around Australia. From this meeting the following policy was developed.

Only registered breeders should be allowed to sell cats and these to be vaccinated before sale. Ideally they should be desexed.

All cats to be registered, as is compulsory with dogs.

Finally there should be a curfew from dusk to dawn, with cats in secure places. (This should also apply to dogs since they are the main killers of large animals such as koalas).

There should be limits on the numbers of cats any person can keep as is done with dogs.

These regulations to apply only to urban areas, not for farmers who have special problems.

Local councils have the power to bring in such controls and an increasing number are doing so. My own Gosford City Council carried out a referendum of all ratepayers and found that an overwhelming majority did want controls on cats.

However when I asked in July of 1994 what action they intended taking, they replied they were waiting for promised State legislation. 'In summary Council's approach to cat control measures will be dictated to a high degree by the scope of legislation when enacted by the New South Wales State Parliament'.

Since then there has been a change of government but still no action.

It's time all State Governments took action on cat controls. Some are planning these and the result will be legal protection for the Councils themselves. Majority opinion backs such regulations so why not begin their speedy drafting?



Willy Wagtail



Bluetongue Skink Lizards



Red Wattlebird

WESTERN SHIELD...

bringing wildlife back from the brink of extinction

Foxes and cats are making a meal of Western Australia's wildlife These foreign predators have already contributed to the extinction of ten native mammals. Dozens more species are threatened and survive only in low numbers–six of the mammals are restricted to tiny islands. CALM has successfully pioneered programs to control foxes to prevent further extinctions. This work has now been expanded into the world's biggest campaign against feral predators, to save native animals and return them to areas where they once thrived. The campaign's name: WESTERN SHIELD

By Caris Bailey

Over the past 100 years, more mammals have become extinct in Australia than in any other country. The loss of 18 Australian mammal species is a catastrophe caused predominantly by predators and competitors introduced from overseas. Loss of habitat has also led to extinctions, and changes to other habitats make some of the remaining native animals even more susceptible to predators. Our wildlife may now be facing a new danger from the release of rabbit calicivirus–feral predators also hunt rabbits, so if the virus reduces their numbers significantly, hungry foxes and cats could turn more and more to native animals. While this threat is not expected to be serious, it will be yet another pressure on endangered species.

The native mammals most at risk of being driven to extinction are easy prey–medium-sized animals weighing between 35 grams and eight kilograms. These animals, together with the reptiles and ground–nesting birds also at risk, are found nowhere else in the world.

That's not all. We don't know what effect the loss of particular species will have on our environment, on the natural processes on which plants, animals and humans depend. Any extinction or decline of species is of great concern for a whole range of environmental, moral and aesthetic reasons.

There is strong evidence that further extinctions are inevitable unless we take urgent action to control foxes and feral cats and protect our wildlife. Western Shield is a new project by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) to do just that.

Western Shield

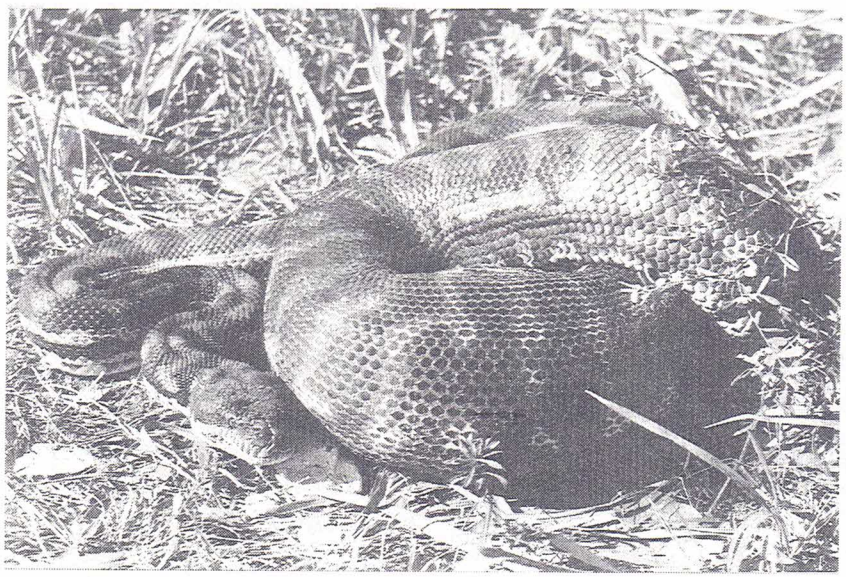
Western Shield is the name given to CALM's project to expand predator control and then reintroduce native animals to former habitats, an operation with an annual budget of $1 million. The program will cover nearly five million hectares–more than half the area of Tasmania–operating in areas as diverse as Cape Range National Park near Exmouth, Peron Peninsula at Shark Bay, the south-west forests, the south coast, the edge of the Wheatbelt and inland arid regions. Western Shield has three elements: increasing fox baiting on a scale never before attempted; substantially increasing research into feral cat control; and, as predators are controlled in target areas, returning native animals to former habitats.

Within a few years, it's expected that up to 30 native fauna species will be significantly more abundant and more widespread than they are today. Most of these animals will be rescued from the brink of extinction.

Pioneering research by CALM scientists has shown that effective fox control leads to a recovery in the number and range of many species of native animals, from mammals such as numbats, woylies, chuditch and rock-wallabies, to ground-nesting birds and some reptiles. As a result of Western Shield, people will once more be able to see mammals that are now almost extinct, such as the western barred bandicoot and boodie (or burrowing bettong), without



This beautiful and rare species is increasing steadily now that the main predator numbers have been reduced.



Carpet snakes have also increased since foxes eat all kinds of animals ranging from snails, insects, spiders, birds, mammals and reptiles. This python is sleeping after digesting a large meal and it would then be vulnerable.

having to travel to remote island nature reserves. Western Australians will be able to enjoy much of the variety and abundance of wildlife that existed before foxes and cats arrived, and new opportunities for nature-based tourism will be created. Stepping up fox control will also benefit farmers by increasing the survival of lambs on adjoinging agricultural lands.

Western Shield builds on CALM's existing programs, including Operation Foxglove. With support from Alcoa of Australia, this program is controlling foxes over an area of nearly 700 000 hectares of the northern jarrah forest. CALM also baits another 400 000 hectares of the conservation estate–most of these operations in nature reserves in the Wheatbelt. Western Shield will increase the area covered more than four times, protecting a total of nearly five million hectares, to make it the biggest wildlife recovery program undertaken anywhere in the world.

Baiting the predators, not the prey

Western Australia has a natural advantage in controlling introduced predators–a group of plants known as poison peas. These native species contain the poison sodium fluoroacetate, which is manufactured synthetically under the name '1080' (ten-eighty). The native animals that evolved alongside these plants have a natural resistance to the poison, but it's lethal in minute amounts to animals introduced from overseas, including foxes and feral cats.

This was a problem for early settlers, whose sheep and cattle died after grazing on poison peas, but it's a huge advantage in the fight to protect native wildlife from feral predators.

Tough, leathery meat baits carrying small amounts of 1080 will kill foxes (and cats, if they would take the baits) but won't harm native animals. Dogs are also affected by 1080), so prominent signs are erected wherever baiting is carried out to warn owners taking their dogs into a baited area to keep their pets on a leash and muzzle them.

Unlike other toxins currently available, research by then Agriculture Protection Board (APD) and Curtin University has shown that 1080 breaks down quickly in the soil without causing any environmental side-effects. This is demonstrated by the fact that poison peas grow abundantly on the land around Perth's dams and yet do not contaminate the water supply in any way. There is absolutely no possibility of 1080 building up in the soil or finding its way into water supplies as a result of feral predator control measures.

Controlling foxes and feral cats requires very different programs. Although 1080 is lethal to both animals, their food preferences and the way they hunt are quite different.

Fox control

The European red fox was brought to Australia in the 1860s and 1870s for the sport of fox hunting, and reached Western Australia early this century. Foxes were abundant in the south-west by the 1940s and medium-sized native mammals began disappearing.

In the past few years, fox baiting has been shown to be a very effective method of protecting some threatened native species in the south-west and in some arid areas. Foxes have a keen sense of smell and readily eat carrion. Under CALM's predator control progams, dried meat baits with 1080 poison are usually spread at the density of five for every square kilometre–that's about one for every 300 suburban house blocks. **This baiting is enough to suppress fox numbers and has led to the spectacular recovery of wallabies, numbats, chuditch, possums and carpet pythons.**

Research into long-term techniques of fox control is under way through the Cooperative Research Centre for the Control of Vertebrate Pest Populations. CALM and the other partners in this Centre hope to develop biological control methods that will stop foxes (and rabbits) reproducing, but baiting with 1080 will probably be the key weapon against foxes for another decade. If we don't bait in this time, fox numbers will quickly build up again and Western Australia will lose more of its fauna.

Cat control

Cats came ashore in Australia long before foxes; probably from early shipwrecks or trading ships. They now roam wild across Western Australia–although they are not as abundant as foxes–and pose the greatest threat to native wildlife in arid and semi-arid areas.



Known in the east as the Brushtailed Bettong Woylie is the western Aboriginal name. Since this is the only part of Australia where it is still common, the western name is coming into popular use. Controlling foxes has meant it has now been removed from the threatened species list.

Feral cats have not caused the same damage in the wetter south-west, even though they have been there much longer than foxes. However, numbers of some animals haven't increased as much as other species in areas baited for foxes, and cats are the suspected culprits. Unlike foxes, cats prefer live prey and do not readily take dried baits. Carrion is not part of their usual diet, which explains why an earlier control program in the Gibson Desert reduced the number of foxes, but left the cats.

Is there a risk that a major fox control progam will lead to an increase in cat numbers? Could cats take over the primary hunter if the foxes that preyed on them and competed with them for native animals were removed? CALM scientists believe cat numbers could increase in arid areas as a result of fox control, **but Western Shield has a strategy to prevent this: the development of a special cat bait, which will significantly reduce numbers of feral cats.**

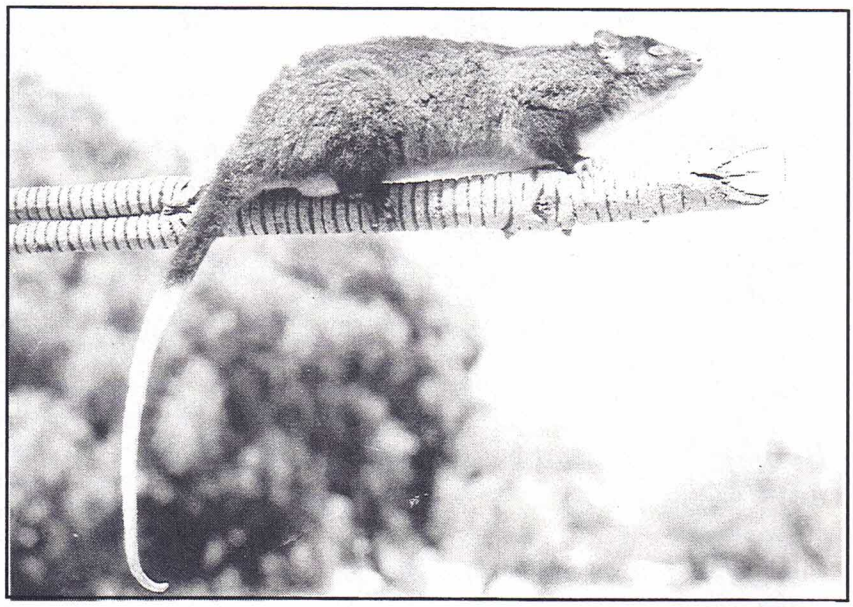
CALM researchers have recently developed a bait that puts a practical method of cat control within reach. The new bait is the result of intensive studies into cats' food preferences and some lateral thinking to make the meat-based baits more appetising. Using baits coated with natural additives, researchers have produced a combination that is much more attractive to cats than the original bait. Studies have also revealed that live prey for feral cats is scarce at certain times of the year and the hunters will take carrion during this period.

The new baits have been used successfully in experiments on the Nullarbor Plain and other trials are planned at Shark Bay and on the Montebello Island. Further work is continuing to develop an efficient technique to assess and monitor the number of feral cats; determine baiting efficiency in different geographic areas; determine the most effective time to carry out baiting programs; and examine levels of baiting intensity. This research is just one of the elements of Western Shield and will go ahead at the same time as fox baiting in the south-west target areas, where it's known that foxes are the main threat to wildlife.

Expanding feral predator control

Western Australia's wildlife has been devastated by introduced predators this century, but with the help of landholders over the past decade, CALM has shown it's possible to turn the tide. Implementing fox control programs has dramatically improved the position of threatened species. **None of this could be achieved without the work done by volunteers and farmers, and the valuable help provided by corporate and government sponsors.**

Coordinated baiting will allow surviving native animals to recover in numbers and be returned to areas they once roamed. **By the year 2000, the Department hopes to return 13 native species to more than 40 areas that once formed part of their habitat.**



Surprisingly although ringtails spend most of the time in trees where they are safe from foxes feral cats can still take their toll. These pests are also controlled in Western Shield

These reintroductions will be made with careful timing; for example, it may not be wise to return chuditch to an area where native prey, such as numbats, are still establishing.

CALM's target is to integrate fox and feral cat control by 1997 and begin to reintroduce native species in areas where feral cats are currently a problem.

Measuring success

Previous predator control programs have shown that the impact of baiting can be monitored and, best of all, that most programs have been highly successful Western Australia's mammal emblem, the numbat, has been brought back from the brink of extinction by removing foxes. Another threatened species, the woylie, has increased in abundance to the point where it has been decided to take it off the State's list of threatened animals. This is the first time on mainland Australia that a threatened list has been amended as a result of a recovery plan.

This impact of reducing the number of feral predators is measured by regular trapping and field counts. CALM staff set traps overnight, return early the next morning to record the results and then release the animals. Captured animals are often fitted with tiny radio transmitters before they are released so researchers can track them to monitor their progress.

An example of the dramatic increase in fauna populations following fox control is the recovery of woylies at Batalling. Only one woylie was caught per 200 traps laid at Batalling. near Collie, in the 1980s. In 1995, just four years after regular fox control began, 24 woylies were caught per 100 traps. At Perup, near Manjimup, it's now common to catch more than 50 woylies per 100 traps.

Measuring the success of Western Shield will obviously be a critical part of the project. This will be done through trapping and other procedures, such as radio tracking, and the special monitoring that is set up as recovery plans are put into action.

With the help of sponsors, volunteers, landholders and other members of the community, Western Shield is going to make massive difference to the recovery of Western Australia's native species.

Volunteers and landowners have a vital role to play in predator control. Each autumn, Agriculture WA, working with Land Conservation District Committees (LCDCs), provides farmers with 1080 baits to help control foxes. Dardanup LCDC has been working with the Agriculture WA and CALM to bait State forest around Dardanup and Boyanup since the early 1990s. The volunteer Malleefowl Preservation Group also sets fox baits every three months at Corackerup Nature Reserve, south-west of Jerramungup. This project has been operating since 1994 with financial support from Shire of Jerramungup, and has led to increased sightings of mature malleefowl.

De-horning Rhinos

Our honorary life member Robert Saunders keeps us informed with what is happening on the African Front. Recently there has been some complaint over the practise of cutting off the horns of rhinoceros to foil the poachers who remove the horns. These are sold to Asiatic countries for credulous patients, firmly believing that folk medicines are more reliable than western science.

There have been suggestions that the stress of chemical immobilisation kills animals. Second that de-horning does not save rhinos from poachers.

Both objections have been answered by the vet in charge of the program in Zimbabwe.

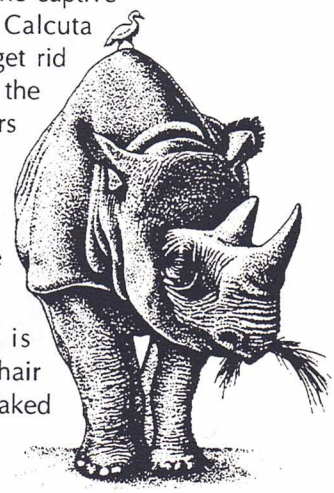
First there has been no case of poaching since the program began 30 months ago.

Second some rhinos have been immobilised two or three times since 1992 and none have dropped dead. Also three calves have been born in 1996 to treated animals. More study is continuing so what seems probable will with time, become certainty.

Immobilising is not new. Twenty years ago a friend of ours used the technology for catching emus to band and these were recovered some years later. It is also used by those working with tigers, indeed any researcher needing a way of tranquilising large animals.

There is no question that rhinos without horns are aesthetically unpleasant and this may affect their social lives in some way we have not yet discovered. So far nobody has suggested we de-tusk elephants though this would certainly save them from poachers.

Finally in India rhino urine has been sold just as effectively to patients as horn. We are not suggesting it does any good except to the beliefs of patients. Zoos and wildlife farms could supply huge quantities to the trade with no danger to the captive animals. It was used at Calcuta zoo many years ago to get rid of a large debt owed by the institution and the buyers were able to sit watching while the urine was collected, making certain they were not being duped.



Since rhino horn is chemically the same as hair the opportunities to sell faked material are obvious.

Diesel from Sewage

We have often written to the various authorities on the stupidity of flushing fertilisers into the ocean through outfalls. This is a significant waste of a valuable resource.

Even worse we use a most precious commodity, fresh water, as the carrier of sewage into the sea.

We also wrote some time ago about the possibility of coverting sewage into diesel fuel. The latest issue of New Scientist has news that in Western Australia Environmental Solutions International, may soon be setting up a nineteen million oil-from-sludge plant in the heart of Perth at Subiaco.

At present, as I can describe from personal experience, some sludge is treated in open digester tanks at times, this creates unpleasant local odours. The new treatment will be odourless.

Some years ago I was on a cruise ship and became friendly with a stock market expert who sold his knowledge to companies. He sent me his newsletter which normally would have cost a thousand dollars and the message was plain. Invest in environmentally friendly industries and particularly in those making devices to solve problems.

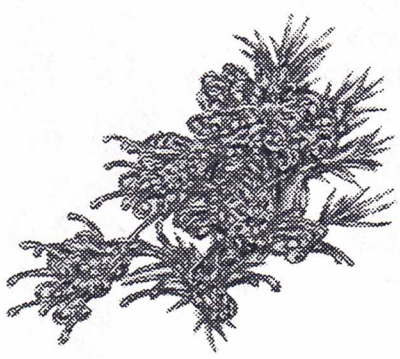
The latest issue of New Scientist writes that in the United States, Germany and Japan the world market for such technology is $200 billion and is expected to jump to between $300 billion and $600 billion in the next four years.

Sadly Australia is cutting back on spending money on brains. An educated people is our most valuable resource and every country wanting to gain a greater quality of life must not skimp.

We have seen the costs to companies such as BHP through ignoring pollution standards but already the federal government is considering pruning the environmental protection authority which is the federal watchdog.

That old saying 'those whom the gods destroy they first make mad.'

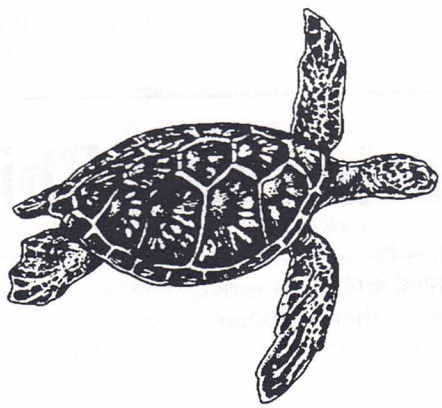
Over to you Senator Robert Hill.



Looking Back...

Thistle Stead was the third wife of our founder David Stead. She was for a time President of our Society but after the death of her husband in 1957 when she founded the David G. Stead Wildlife Research Foundation at Wirrimbirra, this became her major interest though she remained on our Council for some years. Unfortunately her prickly nature alienated many. None doubted her dedication to the conservation cause but as retiring President in 1976 she supported the motion to have our Society destroyed with the funds to go to the Stead Foundation. Timely work by Doctor Richard Mason and other defeated this attempt. Thistle resigned from the Council though many of us remained good friends, despite this unwise attempt to end one of the oldest conservation societies in the world and a lasting memorial to her husband as its Founder.

We have a letter in our files sent on April 17, 1961 appealing for a donation to the Save The Tortoise Fund. Thistle, as President at the time sent twenty pounds from the Society, a substantial donation from a group not flush with money. The appeal was successful and

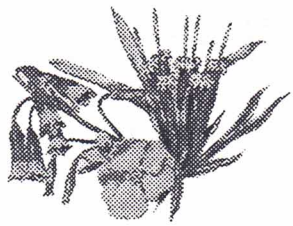


the two swamps in which the tortoise lived, bought by the government for a reasonable sum, mainly due to the generosity of A Gates who owned the land. Had this reptile, probably the world's rarest not been found due to its exhibition at a Perth Wildlife Show organised by a Society member in 1953, given it publicity, without which the swamps would have been drained for a potato crop and the world would have lost another fascinating species.

Since that time government funding, as well as a substantial donation from the World Wildlife Fund has produced research which should ensure its future.

More certainty would be gained by the government buying back some of the drained wetlands to recreate a chain of swamps of a shallow nature which dry out every summer. Those are the conditions this short-necked tortoise needs for survival, in the wild.

World Environment Day



by Vincent Serventy

Probably the world's first Conservation Day was held in Western Australia in September 1964 and our hope at the time was that.

'...By holding Conservation Day in the springtime we could have benefit of the time of the year, putting both gardens and bush at their best, and allowing for good weather for outdoor celebrations. In staging a Conservation Day we should be breaking new ground and if successful it could lead to other States following suit, and possibly the idea spreading from Australia until it became an International Day...'

The United States followed in 1970 when they celebrated, Earth Day on March 20th.

The famous anthropologist Margaret Mead wrote '...Earth Day is the first holy day which transcends all national borders, yet preserves all geographical integrities, spans mountains and oceans and time belts and yet brings people all over the world into one resonating accord...'

In June 1972, 113 nations met at the Stockholm Conference to express environmental concern and plan for a brighter future. This gathering of government servants decided on a more respectable World Environment Day for midsummer, June 5th. It should have been named Northern Hemisphere Day since midwinter in the south is usually a time when any celebrations must be in air conditioned halls, rather than in the open air.

Spring or autumn anywhere in the world are usually ideal seasons for outdoor celebrations. We have tried without success to get the date changed. There has been lordly indifference from the civil servants of the north with forelock tugging servility from the south.

It is time Environment Day was changed back to Earth Day with a date in either spring or autumn. Then it will not only be a day to be celebrated in despair as portrayed by most of the media but a day of hope, of planning how we intend to repair the earth.

It should not be a time of gloom but a celebration of what we have already achieved and our plans for a more sustainable future. Australia has already done a great deal and in many ways is an example to the world. Our group, the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc. was begun in 1909 in a spirit of optimism rather than despair. We can look back on many successes; our many failures being guides to future operations when we hope to also achieve success.

Earth Day should become what was originally intended, the time to make a declaration we are one earth and as trustees, we will plan more carefully for a brighter future.



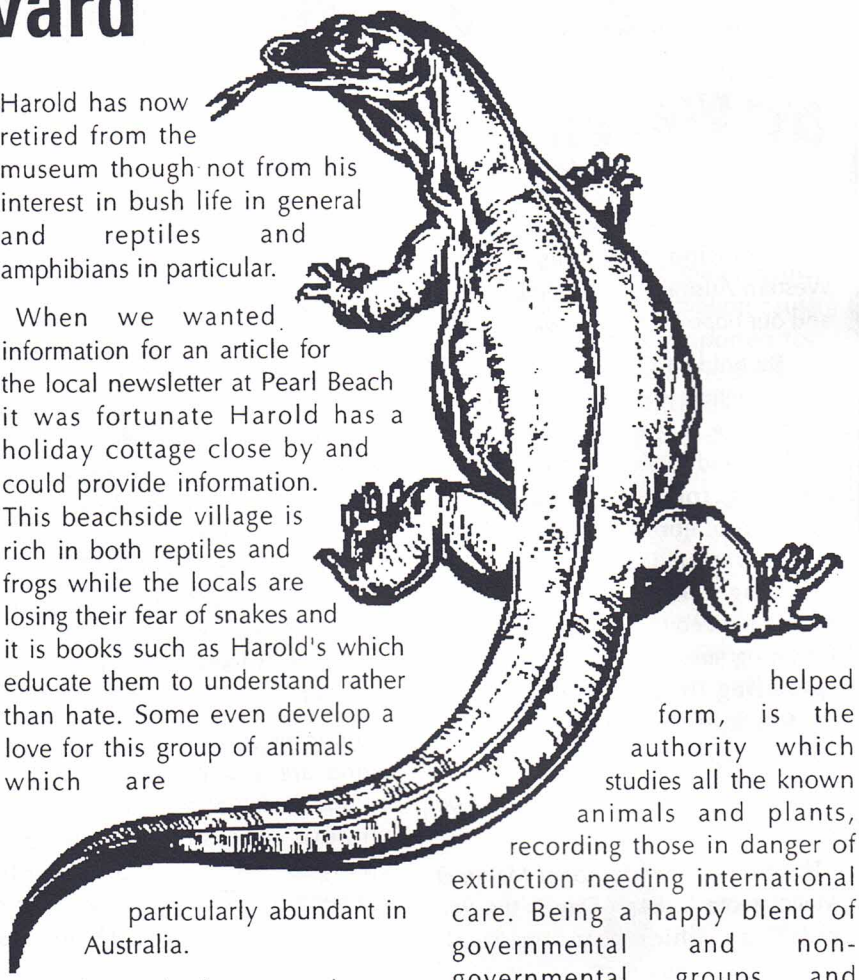
Nature education is now part of school curricula.

Looking Forward

Dr Harold Cogger has agreed to become one of our scientific panel. Although we do have a range of experts on our Council we cannot cover every field. So when a problem arises on some conservation issue and we wish to be certain we should become involved, we seek an opinion from a member of our panel.

They are all busy people so often a single phone call can be enough. With Dr Cogger any question on reptiles and amphibians is dealt with, cheerfully and quickly. He was a graduate from Sydney University in 1959 and took up his first job at the Australian Museum. Later he earned his doctorate from the newly formed Macquarie University. At the same time he had risen in the museum ranks to become the deputy-director, though still retaining his post as curator of Reptiles and Amphibians.

Many of our members will know of his book 'The Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia', a work which has gone through three editions and is a classic in its field.



Harold has now retired from the museum though not from his interest in bush life in general and reptiles and amphibians in particular.

When we wanted information for an article for the local newsletter at Pearl Beach it was fortunate Harold has a holiday cottage close by and could provide information. This beachside village is rich in both reptiles and frogs while the locals are losing their fear of snakes and it is books such as Harold's which educate them to understand rather than hate. Some even develop a love for this group of animals which are particularly abundant in Australia.

Dr Cogger is also a consultant to the Survival Services Commission of the World Conservation Union. This international group which we helped form, is the authority which studies all the known animals and plants, recording those in danger of extinction needing international care. Being a happy blend of governmental and non-governmental groups and representing more than a hundred nations it is the most powerful force in the world of conservation.





Educating children to become interested in reptiles.

LOOKING BACK

It was in 1984 Carol and I went to India to explore the Thar Desert and other wildlife reserves. At the start of our trip an appointment with the Prime Minister of India, Shrimati Indira Ghandi, had been organised. At this meeting we were to present her with some books, silk scarves and best of all, an honorary life membership of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc. This was the first time such an honour had been given outside Australia.

Who knows? Had she kept her appointment instead of postponing it from Monday to Wednesday she may still have been alive.

Sadly this fine leader was murdered the day before we were to meet her. She had forgotten the golden rule of those involved in public work. Fundamentalists of all kinds, whether religious or otherwise, have only one final loyalty. The most sacred of promises are forgotten when the time comes for the person, in a fit of fervent madness, to carry out some self appointed mission.

Here are excerpts from two significant letters. The first is from that great naturalist and conservationist Kailash Sankhala, to the prime minister's secretary. August 9, 1984

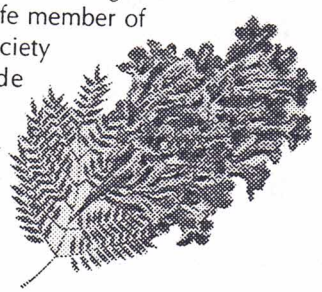
'...During March 1983 I went to Australia to deliver three lectures on wildlife of India on an invitation of the Australian Museum Society. One of the most active co-sponsors of the lectures were Mr Vincent Serventy and his wife Mrs Carol Serventy because of their love for India. Both of them were also ardent admirers of our prime minister Shrimati Indira Ghandi...Vincent has expressed his keen desire to have an audience with our Prime Minister...Vincent would like to briefly present to our Prime Minister his campaign for conservation of the Indian Ocean...He is hopeful for her blessing. But largely this would be a respectful courtesy call to have an audience with the world's greatest conservationist Shrimati Gandhi...I will personally escort Mr Serventy if the appointment is fixed...It will help us to have conservation friends of India in Australia...'

Sadly it was not to be but next year I received the following letter from Kailash.

January 10, 1985

'This morning I met Shri Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of India to present your two books, one on behalf of the Australian Museum Society and the other from the president of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc...I mentioned this is now part of history as they are inscribed to Shrimati Indira Gandhi. He accepted the books and asked me to convey thanks to the president of the Australian Museum Society and to you. I also presented two WWF scarves to him-one for his daughter Miss Priyanka and the other for his wife Madam Sonia Ghandi...I had already sent our Prime Minister your other papers regarding the honour of making Mrs Indira Ghandi, the first honorary life member of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia, from outside Australia...'

Sadly soon after Rajiv Ghandi was murdered by another fanatic, this time a female.





This photograph shows Rajiv Ghandi on the left receiving the books from Kailash Sankala.

Sensible Science

'Extinct turtle is alive and well'

Headline in SMH 19 June

So where is the turtle now?

'We had to kill it in order to take blood samples and measure its skeleton.' SMH article on 20 June

Those two items should ensure that any person finding a rare animal will make sure it is never brought to any scientist in future.

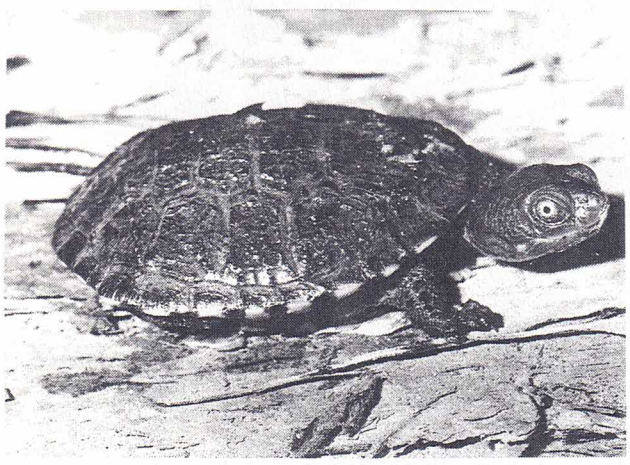
It happened also in 1953 in Western Australia. The short-necked swamp tortoise was brought alive as a pet, and the owner Robert Boyd, gave it up happily to a scientist. The next step was for the animal to be made into a dead museum specimen. The reason-to name a new species.This means the specimen R11092 was recorded in the museum collection.

In this new case the reptile was thought to have become extinct 50,000 years ago. It is still possible that like the southwest shortnecked tortoise, it was not new but had been described before.

Surely it should have been possible to keep the animal alive at Taronga Zoo and when new individuals are found, as it is certain they will be, a captive colony could be set up and used for breeding to restock inland rivers. The scientists could still name the specimen on a live animal and when it dies of old age put it into a museum.

Who knows?

It might be there are only a few dozen left alive, like the south-west tortoise!



A freshwater tortoise smiles to new species found at Lawn Hill National Park

Wright Again

For many years, at least thirty in my memory, we have preached decentralisation. Politicians, even friendly premiers, have told us 'you can't change human nature'.

When we pointed out that a study in Sydney showed that for those over thirty years of age, mostly married folk with families, would leave the city providing there were suitable jobs in smaller county towns.

The politicians were politely unbelieving but would always assure me that decentralisation was part of their policy. Which means it is dusted off before elections then put away safely until the next comes around. Meanwhile they encourage all kinds of industry from banks, research facilities, steel smelters, aircraft workshops- to mention only some that have come to our notice in the last decade, to close their small town works to come to Sydney.

Newcastle, Wollongong and Tamworth are among three of the sufferers.

All Europeans know that the cities of ancient Greece with populations in tens and at the most hundreds of thousands, reached cultural standards the envy of us today.

'Oh but they had slaves' is the usual retort. Not that many in fact but today we have our far more efficent mechanical slaves. As soon as Faraday discovered in the last century that power could be transmitted along wires the technical need for cities disappeared.

We shifted from Sydney to Pearl Beach because with a computer, a telephone and a fax machine we can work with more comfort in pleasant surroundings. By fast train we can be in Sydney in an hour. We have escaped from dangerous air, dangerous aircraft noise, traffic jams since the train drops us in the city heart. And near at hand are national parks and the ocean.

So that has been our message for three decades. Cities of between half and one million can provide every facility any normal person needs. New cities should be designed like beads on a necklace, building from already established towns. In northern Australia these in general will be along coastlines, in southern, a more pleasant summer climate will allow inland towns to grow larger.

What of the rest of the world? The New Scientist of June 8th described a recent United Nations conference on this topic. Already some megacities are shrinking or at the worst at a standstill. San Paulo in Brazil has lost two million workers as companies leave the pollution, traffic gridlocks and other problems for smaller cities. Indonesia sees a new 'polycentric zone', stretching a thousand kilometres from Jakarta and housing 120 million people.

It is essential that each 'bead' will have zones of farmland, national parks and other green belts to separate it from its neighbours yet close enough for every person to enjoy them. Or in other words the whole nation will become one vast Regional Park

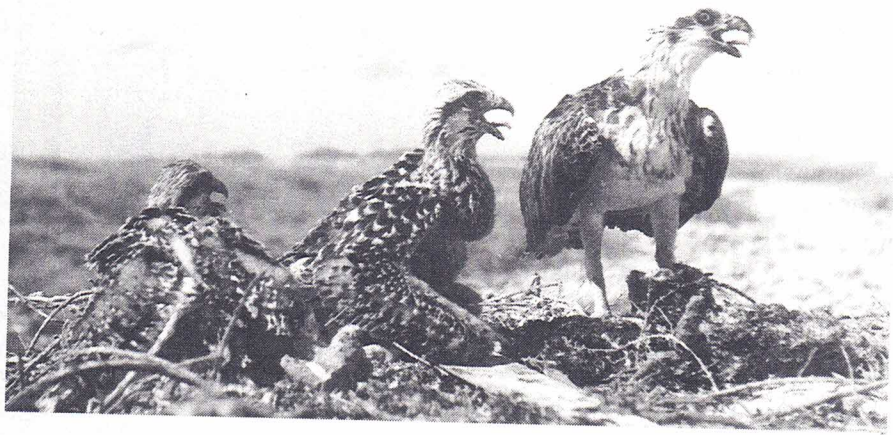
That should be our dream

Osprey

This beautiful sea hunter, which searches shallow reefs in search of fish is common along most Australian shorelines and at times found along rivers when food is plentiful.

Once it was also found in Great Britain but persecution by ignorant wildlife managers as well as those poaching for the beautiful eggs led to its extinction.

It first returned to Scotland in 1954 and vigilant protection by conservationists has resulted in 100 breeding pairs being recorded now according to the New Scientist.



Mother osprey and two chicks

England has now had its first return since 1843 in the form of seven chicks being translocated from Scotland to a safe haven on a nature reserve. Perhaps this may see a return of breeding birds to England.

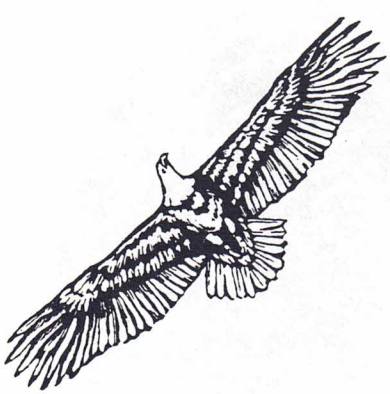
In many parts of the United States keen bird lovers build high towers in the hope that ospreys will use them as suitable nesting sites.

We often do not realise how lucky we are in Australia to have these beautiful birds often breeding close to capital cities.



An alarmed parent

I took these pictures many years ago at a nest on the Abrolhos Islands in Western Australia. The nest in this case was dead coral fragments built on a headland.





One bird returning

Facts on Greenhouse Effect

The so-called greenhouse effect has little similarity to how a glass greenhouse traps heat. It is the lack of air circulation which prevents heat escaping by convention in a greenhouse.

The heat from the sun is trapped by the variety of gases which blanket the earth. That is why the airless moon has an average surface temperature of -18 degrees C while the earth's average temperature is 15 degrees C. Which is lucky for all life on earth.

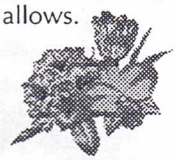
It is mainly carbon dioxide and water vapour which act as a heat blanket trapping this on our earth. In the last century it was suggested carbon dioxide might be important. The rise of industry led to the burning of fossil fuel, sunlight stored by nature from millions of years ago.



Bush walkers do little damage

It is suggested by most scientists that by the year 2100 the earth will warm by 2 degrees C and as a result the sea level will rise about, 0,5 metres, disastrous for those living on low islands or near low coastlines. These are the figures supplied by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 1996.

There are however a number of factors which need to be taken into account, including 'sinks' which absorb carbon dioxide such as growing forests and the plant life of the sea. There are other complicating factors but most of the world's conservationists hold it is better to err on the safe side by cutting down use of coal and switching to gas and solar energy as fast as research allows.



International Comment

Professor Stuart Pimm of Tennessee University sent a paper on bio-diversity written by him and three of his colleagues.

This is their conclusion from a study of world animals and plants.

'Recent extinction rates of 100 to 1000 times their pre-human levels in well known, but taxonomically diverse groups from widely different environments. If all species currently deemed 'threatened' become extinct in the new century, then future extinction rates will be ten times recent rates.'

Not very encouraging with the increase in world populations and increasing demands on the environment.

Australia has only one way to go. We must increase our national parks and marine reserves to ten percent of Australia. We must almost make sure the threat to all our native plants and animals from introduced species is kept under strict controls.

All these things are possible if we care enough.



News From the West

Further items from Western Australia. First about Kings Park the marvellous 400 hectares of land in the heart of Perth. It is only there because of the struggles of early conservationists, most of whom are now dead but not forgotten. The whole story was published in the WA Naturalist.

Early managers; 'improved' the native bush by adding eastern States trees such as lemon-scented gums, sugar gums and eastern kurrajongs.

These are now being removed and will be replaced with tuart, marri and jarrah.

Smaller shrubs will also be removed including freesias, bridal creeper and veldt grass.

Further south a local Blackwood Catchment Coordinating Group have been given $600,000 over three years as part of a Landcare project to treat land-degradtion in the catchment area.

We would like to hear from other State sections on good things happening. Not disasters because we get that kind of news more quickly.

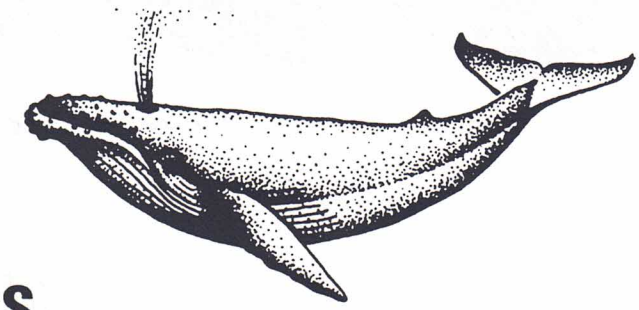
The Arctic Council

The New Scientist of 27 July tells an encouraging story of national co-operation where Canada, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, the United States and Denmark have agreed to set up an Arctic Council. It will discuss environmental and social issues affecting the region.

We would prefer it if they decided on environmental issues alone but at least it is a step in the wright direction.

We only wish our attempts to get an Indian Ocean forum, had a brighter future. With the change in government although thos 'fripperies' will die from lack of funding.

Still it was a grand idea and if only Indra Ghandi had not been murdered we may have had success.



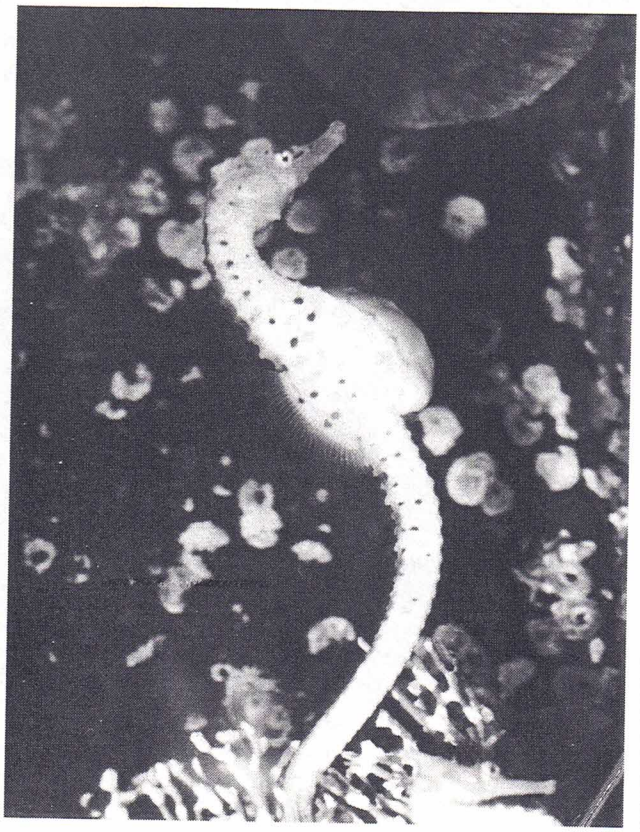
Our Marine Resources

The World Fisheries Congress being held in Brisbane brings out every day fresh disaster. On July 31 it told of how the charming seahorses are being trapped to feed a Chinese piece of nonsense. It is sad to see a nation renowned for its long history of rational life should believe in the nonsense that powdered seahorses as a cure for impotence or heart disease'.

$1,500 a kilogram means they bring riches to fishermen even if they do not help the human sufferers. These are not the only species to suffer. Shark fin soup is valued but whether this is because of the taste or medical properties I am not sure. Probably the latter since it is hard to imagine the taste being attractive.

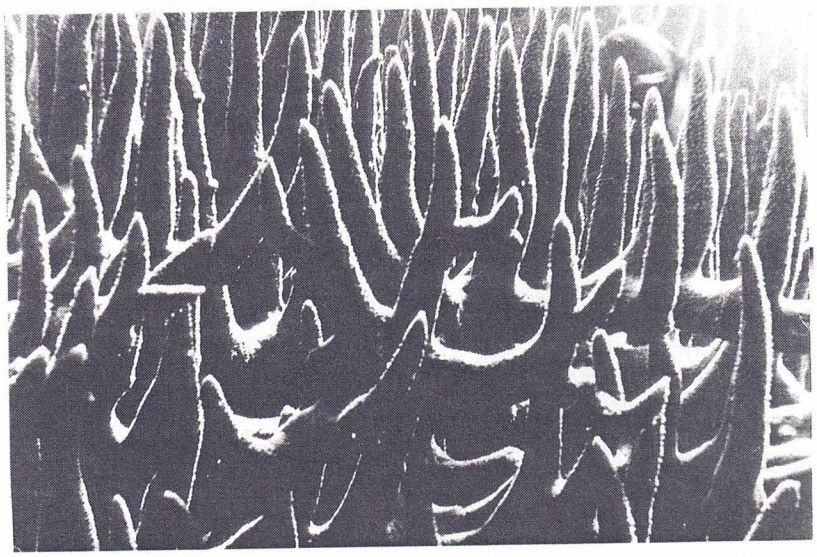
World wide useful fish such as hake and mackerel are also suffering declines. The shrinking blue fin tuna schools are well known but since the high seas belong to nobody it is impossible to protect any species caught in those waters.

As a society we have tried and still trying to have the open oceans declared as belonging to the United Nations so sensible conservation laws can protect the resource.



Seahorse

The Great Barrier Reef



Staghorn coral Great Barrier Reef. credit M. Capek

24 July 1996

The Prime Minister

Dear John Howard

Many years ago an old sailor speaking to Professor Wood Jones said 'Nobody can sail through the Hinchinbrook Pass and not believe in God.' The professor at the time thought it might be worthwhile letting the whole population of Australia have this experience.

However the old sailor was expressing the same kind of belief which is held by most about the Great Barrier Reef, of which Hinchinbrook is one of many regions of both scientific and natural importance. Rightly regarded as among the natural wonders of the world the Reef was soon given world heritage status and its care is now in the hands of the Commonwealth government.

To manage the world's largest marine regional park is the professional Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. We include a photocopy of 'leaked' government document which only says what the vast majority of competent conservationists have already stated.

The Great Barrier Reef is too precious to be left to developers. It does not belong to them or the folk of Gladstone but to all the people of Australia.

As the oldest conservation society of Australia we ask you to honour this trust.

Yours sincerely

Vincent Serventy
PRESIDENT

Reef politics

The Federal Government is giving a strong impression that it wants a $100 million Port Hinchinbrook development to go ahead before the completion of a promised regional management plan for the Hinchinbrook Channel. This undue haste is suspicious. The developer of the $100 million project, Mr Keith Williams, has argued that the Federal Government needs to water down the powers of the World Heritage legislation. This casts the argument into the context of a good development being hindered by dark green environmentalist.

The facts about the development, however, do not fit this convenient interpretation. What we really have is a determined developer, aided by complacent Federal and Queensland Government ministers, who is prepared to push his development forward despite warnings from scientific reviewers of the development that it will cause significant damage to the local environment of the Hinchinbrook Channel and the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area.

The sequence of events illustrates the problems facing the development. In November 1994, for instance, the then Federal Environment Minister, Senator Faulkner, used his constitutional powers to halt mangrove clearing on the development despite approval for the work from the then Queensland Government. His Coalition opponent, the shadow Environment Minister, Senator Kemp, last August gave only tepid support for the development: "Any proposal has got to meet strict scientific and environmental criteria to ensure that any development does not have an effect on World Heritage values."

An unreleased Federal Government-commissioned review, obtained by the Herald, found that the risk assessment of the development – which was funded by the Queensland Government and by Mr Williams – lacked scientific credibility. Another leaked document, sent from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to the Federal Environment Department, raises serious questions about the future of seagrasses and dugongs in the area if the development is allowed to go ahead. There is a likelihood, too, that the development will fail because Queensland currently has an oversupply of resorts and this is making them uneconomical. The Federal Government needs to conduct a full review before it allows this development to proceed.

Sydney Morning Herald
25th July 1996

Warning on resort

By James Woodford
Environment Writer

Leaked documents show the Federal Government announced its support for the $100 million Port Hinchinbrook development after being warned it could have a serious long-term impact on the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The documents, obtained by the Herald reveal that senior bureaucrats and a panel of scientists recently raised several major concerns with the Federal Environment Department regarding the proposed development

The $100 million resort, to be built by the Queensland developer Mr Keith Williams, would cater for around 1,500 guests and is first major development that has been proposed for the Hinchinbrook Channel.

The Federal Government was also warned that a risk assessment of the development – funded by the Queensland Government and Mr Williams – lacked scientific credibility.

The assessment, which found in favour of the development, was of insufficient scope to determine whether it was environmentally acceptable, said a specially appointed team of reviewing scientists.

An unreleased Federal Government-commissioned document prepared by the review leader, marine scientist Dr Russell Reichelt, says: "Various reviewers (of the assessment) found much to criticise and if it were a paper intended for publication in a scientific journal, it would probably be rejected."

In spite of a number of criticisms of the development in Dr Reichelt's report, the Federal Environment Minister, Senator Hill, quoted selectively from it in a press statement released on July 9.

Senator Hill's release quoted a statement in the second paragraph of the report which after making mention of scientific inadequacies, said: "(The development) could go ahead without significant environment around Oyster Point, that is within a few hundred metres, provided best practice engineering approaches are used."

But Senator Hill makes no mention of a quote in Dr Reichelt's report a few paragraphs down the same page: "Attention is drawn to significant uncertainties about the impact of the proposed activities along with the many other activities already operating (aquaculture and agriculture) when they are set in a broader context of the regional environment, and in the context of society's goals for the region in relation to its World Heritage status."

In his July 9 statement, Senator Hill said he was "inclined to give consent to the development".

Conservationists have criticised Senator Hill for this signal of support before the completion of a promised regional integrated management plan for the Hinchinbrook Channel.

Another leaked document, sent from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority chairman, Dr Ian McPhail, to a Federal Environment Department executive director, Mr Philip Toyne, raises serious concerns about seagrasses and dugongs.

It warns that dugongs are critically endangered and the Hinchinbrook Channel is an important stronghold of the marine mammals.

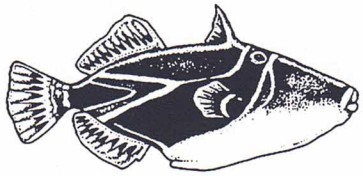
A third document, sent from Dr McPhail to the Environment Department's World Heritage Unit, says that while no significant impacts would be made to the environment within a few hundred metres of the development, the wider implications have not been considered.

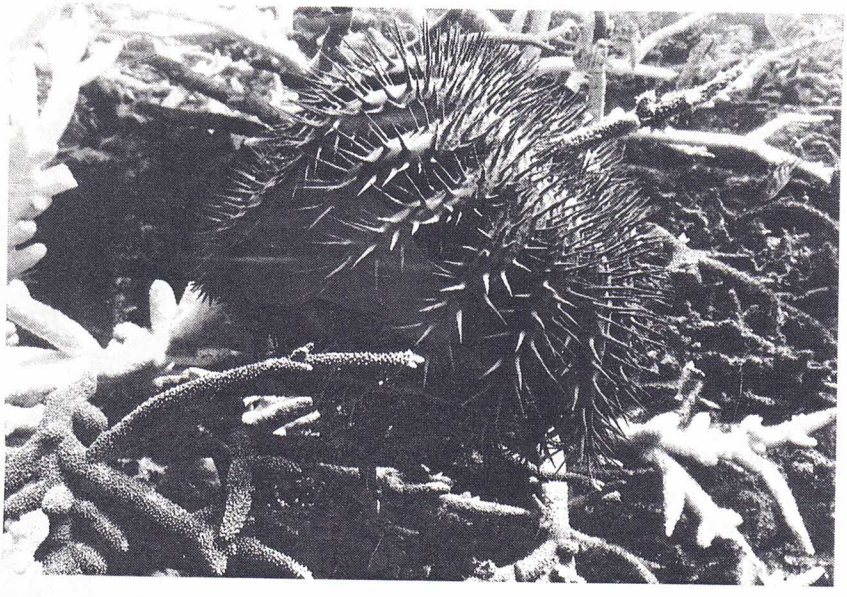
In the document, the authority has also called for an assessment of reasonable and prudent alternatives to the development under Section 30 of the Australian Heritage Commission Act.

Mr Williams told the Herald that the Federal Government needed to water down the powers of the World Heritage legislation. "You are never going to stop the greens," Mr Williams said. "They're out to stop everything going ahead."

But the Hinchinbrook campaigner at the North Queensland Conservation Council, Ms Williams's development was "a dinosaur development that belongs in a past era"

A spokesman for Senator Hill said the Government would not comment on the document.





Crown-of-thorns seastar which ravages coral reefs around the world. This is an unsolved problem for reef managers. credit M. Capek

Wildlands League

Conservation Director,
Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia

Information on Park Policies

Preliminary research has indicated to us that the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc. can help make a model of Ontario's Algonquin Provincial Park and the surrounding region. We would appreciate it greatly if you would send us any information on park policy, tourism opportunities, and development opportunities which relate to protected and natural areas.

The Ontario government is considering resort and large campground developments within Algonquin Park. These proposals are seen by the current government as ways to generate increased park revenues – even though 1995 gate receipts earned the park $800,000 in profits.

To encourage alternatives to developments in the park, the Wildlands League will be producing a report outlining the environmental and economic benefits of limiting development, and its attendant infrastructure, to areas outside parks. As part of this project, we wish to present examples of management both inside and outside protected spaces that provide for local economic needs without compromising the integrity of the protected space. We believe that the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc., as an advisory group concerned with the protection of fauna and flora, can offer positive examples for Ontario's premier park to follow.

About Algonquin Park...

Algonquin Park is southern Ontario's last remaining hope for maintaining the vast forests that once blanketed the area. It is home to moose, rare lake trout, towering red and white pine old-growth forests, and is the site of the last stand for the timber wolf in southern Ontario.

The Wildlands League believes that the government's development policy will not benefit Algonquin Park, its visitors, or the surrounding communities. Many people visit Algonquin Park because of its wilderness qualities, not its facilities. In 1993, a new wilderness zone (where roads, logging, and hunting are prohibited) was designated in the park's interior; visitor use of the closest access point has increased 20% since then.

It is the League's position that all future development should take place outside Algonquin Park's boundaries. Developing resorts and car camping facilities inside Algonquin will only serve to draw people away from surrounding towns, impeding local tourism potential, and further threatening the park's natural values.

Yours truly,

Marc Lange, Algonquin Watch Education Program
Wildlands League, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society

About us...

The Wildlands League is a nonprofit, conservation organisation, dedicated to the protection and preservation of Ontario's parks and wilderness areas. First established in 1968 as the Algonquin Wildlands League, the League affiliated itself with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society in the early 1980s, and is now one of its chapters. The League has taken a leading role in efforts to stop resource extraction and industrial tourism in Algonquin Park. It is the lead Ontario conservation organisation working to implement World Wildlife Fund Endangered Spaces Campaign.

16 July 1996

Dear Marc Lange

Thanks for your letter with regard to Algonquin Regional Park. You do not say if this is a regional park in the international sense, how much is natural and what are their surrounding buffer zones.

The fact that $800,000 was earned last year we take it that came from gate receipts which could be increased by having more attractions.





Currumbin and wild rainbow lorikeets

I enclose what we understand by a regional park and one which we encourage where people live in some numbers so we can keep both human made beauty and interest as well as natural beauty. Unless there is a conservation umbrella over the region we will slowly lose both.

In Australia the Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest marine regional park while on the west coast the newly formed Shark Bay World Heritage Regional Park is developing nicely.

To encourage visitor attendance without harming natural values we suggest the following:

1. Encourage free wildlife attractions. The Monkey Mia wild dolphins attract hundreds of thousands of visitors a year. On the other side of Australia the Currumbin Bird Sanctuary with tens of thousands of visiting wild lorkeets has become world famous. It has been copied with success in many other places. Is there any wildlife which can be encouraged to come for food without interfering with their normal life patterns. In England it has been estimated that feeding of wild birds probably increases the urban bird population by about one quarter. It would seem deer, racoons and the like might be attracted.
2. Walking trails with naturalist guides prove popular in many parts of the world. In general we discourage any buildings in natonal parks but do allow car parks, camping grounds etc. These must be skilfully sited to do the least damage. Visitors must be enticed out of their cars so they can enjoy nature close at hand. Where long distances are concerned talking trails with speakers to be hired at the entrance while comments come in at select places. We saw this done well at Concord and also an Arboretum near Chicago. Here a person walking nearby activated a voice describing a particular tree of interest.
3. Horse trails in similar fashion
4. Trails can begin and end at camping grounds. Also educational rooms near every camping ground which should also stimulate visitors to examine the country nearby.
5. We would not allow hunting in any park. Logging should be handled so it becomes an educational tool and exciting at that. Tall trees and old trees lend themselves for nature trails.
6. The wilderness core idea we also use. Marvellous to attract visitors to enjoy the wilderness experience.
7. I agree about having all the usual motel, hotels being built outside the park. Friends of the park would help educate visitors and locals on the economic value of the park. My wife is an expert on Friends, being in charge of our Triennial Congress in Sydney in 1999, just before the Olympic Games. A good time to visit so you can see local examples.

Give our regards to Sally Ranney whom we met at the World Wildeness Congress in the States about four years ago.

Regards

Vincent Serventy

Lake Pedder News

Although this lake was flooded 15 years ago the Lake Pedder committee still works to have it reborn. The House of Representatives Committee found against restoring the lake though they did agree the power from the lake dam was not needed and also restoration was feasible.

For those who want to help their address is Pedder 2000, 130 Davey Street Hobart Tasmania 7000.

Probably the saddest news has been the death of Peter Dombrovskis at the age of 51 years. He died of a heart attack in the West Arthur Range, the high country which he loved and, laboured to save.

As a photographer and artist he helped our work, following in the footsteps of the great Olegas Truchanas who died in a canoe accident while gathering more material for the conservation battle.

Bob Brown said he was one of the great wilderness artists of the twentieth century while Christine Milne said of him, that his was a unique and gentle talent that will be remembered for all time.



Lake Pedder was flooded due to the State government lack of conservation interest. Recent studies have shown the wave formations on the beach are still undamaged. Should the lake be drained, it could be restored with its old beauty and scientific interest.

Photo J and S Brownlie

RAMSAR Update ...

The RAMSAR Congress held in Brisbane was an outstanding success and additional photographs are included to indicate the wide diversity of the meetings. More than 1000 delegates came from all over the world to plan and organise a better understanding for the future responsible use of our international wetlands. Each country is faced with different problems, but there is now a concerted effort to enable all parties to be included in the management process for their wetlands.



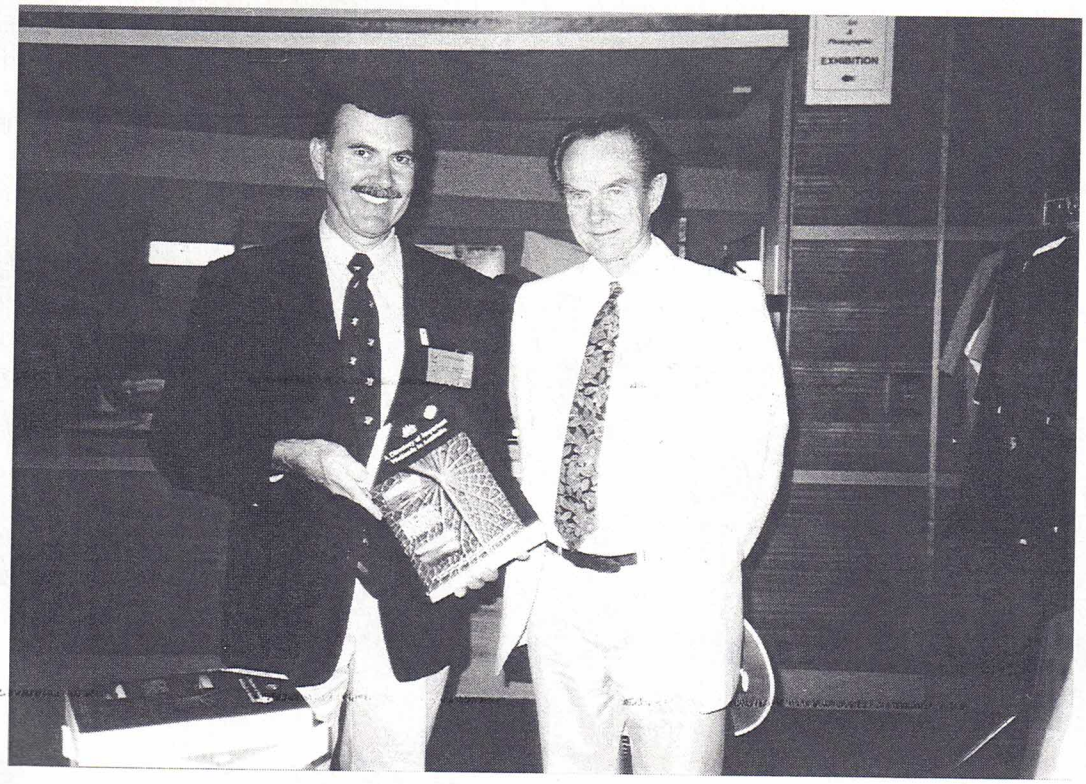
RAMSAR 1996 International delegates attending the Brisbane Congress were escorted by local National Park Rangers on tours of Brisbanes wetlands to see migratory birds in local protected habitats.



Conference official held daily Media Conferences for local and international journalist to report on Congress decisions and announcements.



The RAMSAR Congress ended with a magnificent Official Dinner hosted by the Australian Government where more than 1000 delegates and official guest were entertained and farewelled after a very successful Congress.



Patrick Medway showing Dr Geoffrey Mathews, an original member of the RAMSAR organising party of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust of the UK, copy of the newly launched Directory of Wetlands in Australia book.

Senator Hill Inspects Towra Point

After intensive lobbying by Councillors of our Society, Federal Environment Minister, Senator Robert Hill visited the Botany Bay and Towra Point Nature Reserve area on Tuesday 30 July.

Senator Hill expressed a great interest in the work we are doing and indicated that he would set up a special select committee of interested parties to make final representations to him for consideration.

Bernie Clarke explained the full implications of the effects of the work at the Airport and Port Botany on the water erosion along the face of Towra Point and the detrimental effects to the migratory wadering birds habitat.

Joining Senator Hill on the visit was a delegation from local conservation organisations and various government departments responsible for the water ways and wildlife in Botany Bay. Dr Bill Phillips, Director of ANCA Wetlands and Migratory Birds also attended and spoke with members of the delegation.

We look forward to hearing from Senator Hill and his proposals to protect this important RAMSAR habitat for migratory birds.

Separately our Society has been working with the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre to bring about some improvements to the Nature Reserve. We have now held two meetings with the local conservation groups and are working closely with the local National Parks and Wildlife Service officers at Kurnell.



Member and Scientific Advisory Expert, Bernie Clarke welcoming Senator Robert Hill to Botany Bay prior to the site inspection of the Towra Point Nature Reserve.

Through our negotiations with the new District Manager of the National Parks and Wildlife Services, Peter Stevens, a local NPWS Ranger (Jamie Erskine) will be appointed to Towra Point Nature Reserve from 3 September 1996 for full time duty.

A local Action Committee formed at our instigation and called 'EVAC' (Environmental Volunteers Action Committee) has met and planned three working bees to remove the weeds from the wetlands of Towra Point lagoons. We have also applied for a Coast Care grant to assist us in employing a project manager to find and train Volunteers to carrying out this work in 1997.

We have developed a close working relationship with the Director and team from the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre at Sutherland. There has been much cooperation and support from the conservation groups in this area and they are very active in local wildlife preservation.



Bernie Clarke indicating to Senator Robert Hill the extent of the Sand erosion off the front of the Towra Point Nature Reserve.

Working bees to remove weeds from the lagoons

Saturday 19 October from 9am to 1pm

Saturday 26 October from 9am to 1pm

Saturday 3 November from 9am to 1pm

Extra volunteers are required to assist on the working bees and members requiring more information on our work on Towra Point should contact the Secretary on 9556 1537.

dear editor...

12 August 1996

Dear Mr Serventy

Thank you for your letter of 26 June regarding the status of land to be transferred as light station reserves to the people of New South Wales.

I am pleased to be able to inform you that the New South Wales Government is committed to placing all light station reserves which are transferred from the Commonwealth to the State in one of either two conservation categories. Either the land will be gazetted under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 as a national park addition or other reserve category as is suitable given its condition or it will be a reserve declared through the Lands Act 19??.

The Australian Heritage Commission, in instructing the Australian Maritime Safety Authority regarding the disposal of light stations made this a condition of transfer, and the State has concurred with this decision.

I trust that this clarifies the State Government's approach to providing public ownership of these significant and prominent sites.

PATRICK HOLLAND
Policy Adviser
to the Minister for the Environment

7 August 1996

The Editor
New Scientist

Dear Sir,

Your heading 'alien animal culls backfire' may alarm many conservationists. There is not scientific argument as far as I know that the removal of all feral animals and invasive overseas plants will not be a good result for the conservation of native species.

If the Aborigines do not regard feral animals as pests the aim should be education of the people, rather than any cessation of the programs.

For example in northern Australia the cull of ferals did not 'force Aborigines to hunt native prey'. They always have done so since wallabies and magpie geese are abundant and still hunted. That the culling will also force 'driving them to kill rare animals' is also untrue. Rare animals are hard to catch. Why hunt bilbies when kangaroos are common? Crocodiles are no longer rare in the north. Turtles are still common while dugongs are gradually recovering in numbers in some region. There is little evidence that Aboriginal hunting is threatening any species though the destruction of seagrass beds is far more alarming. Conservationists, which also includes Aborigines, are fighting the developers wanting to move into the Hinchinbrook Passage, one of the dugong strongholds.

We have enough conservation difficulties in Australia without such reports as published in your issue of 3 August.

VINCENT SERVENTY
President

2 August 1996

The Hon Minister for the Environment

Dear Pam Allen

In this morning's Herald there is an article about dealing with feral animals in Kangaroo Valley in order to save animals such as rock wallabies and other threatened species.

May we suggest you send a national parks officer to Western Australia to discuss with CALM how they dealt with this problem some years ago. At present they are working on Western Shield, a massive project to deal with feral pests on a large scale. I include a news article on the topic.

You will note this million dollar project is largely funded by private enterprise and you would earn the thanks of all conservationists if you initiated talks in this State to fund a similar project.

Yours sincerely

VINCENT SERVENTY AM
President

19 August 1996

Dear Mr Serventy,

The Hon. Craig Knowles, M.P., Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, Minister for Housing, has asked me to reply on his behalf to your letter concerning the proposed development of the Warnervale airport.

As you are aware the Parliament recently passed a Private Members Bill, "Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Bill 1996", which imposes a curfew; limits take-offs, landings and the length of the runway; and requires the Minister's approval of the runway site. It was assented to by the Governor on 1 July, 1996.

The Minister advises that he has noted your concerns and assures you that any development application for the site referred for his consideration will be thoroughly examined.

Yours sincerely

P LEVINS
Chief of Staff

Membership form...



WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA, INC.

G.P.O. Box 3428 Sydney NSW 2001

Membership

Why not become a ***MEMBER OF THE WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA, INC.?*** Simply fill out this form.

Name:.....

Address:.....

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

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

Membership category *(please circle)*

Ordinary: $20.00 Pensioner & Students: $10.00 Corporate: $35.00
(Corporate membership is open to Schools, Associations and Institutions.)

Cheque/Money Order *(please circle)* $..... enclosed. Donation $.....

Mail to the WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC., GPO BOX 3428, SYDNEY NSW 2001.

Consider - A Bequest

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

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

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

"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."

VINCENT SERVENTY AM
President