SPRING 1997

AUSTRALIAN Wildlife

Journal of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc. (Founded 1909)
$2.50 (for non members)
Print Post Approval No PP243459/00117



President Vincent Serventy AM, presenting a special membership certificate to radio personality, Bob Rogers of radio 2CH at his home at Mosman, Sydney.

Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia, Inc. (Founded 1909)
GPO Box 3428 Sydney NSW 1043

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Pensioner/Student:.....$10
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(Corporate Membership is open to Schools, Associations and Institutions)

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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.

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From the Presidents Desk...

Annual Bird Count

Our New Year's Day Garden Bird Count is our highest profile event for the year. We urge every member to take part so our Councillor Ros Gordon will be able to produce an even better report next year. Remember you can also count birds flying over or heard calling. If you want a Report on the 1998 Bird Count put in a stamped addressed envelope with your entry.

If there are any birds you cannot identify write a description referring to its size compared to common birds you do know, its general shape, and anything else you think may help us to identify it.

Remember also to put in your Postcode as well as the address as Ross needs this to put the results into her computer.

Our first counts were carried out on the old Australia Day. Then in 1991 our Council decided that the foundation of New South Wales by a boatload of convicts might suit that State but had no meaning anywhere else in Australia. Here is the letter published on June 10, 1991 in the Sunday Telegraph.

On the evening of World Environment Day the Government and Opposition in Canberra joined to pass a Bill to establish the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

Yet later this year both parties will urge Australians to celebrate the invasion of this country on 26 January when England sent soldiers and settlers (most involuntary) to establish their control of this vast continent from the vantage post at Sydney.

For the Aborigines it represents a bitter day; for new Australians it has little meaning.

Yet there is one day all of us can celebrate, the day we became a nation. That took place on January 1, 1901 when we changed from a number of States to become a nation.

Let us start 1992 by celebrating a New Australia Day.

Vincent Serventy President, Wild LIfe Preservation Society of Australia.

Earth 2000

All the newsletters for this conference will be published in future magazines to keep members posted on how arrangements are progressing, and allow ideas from you to be sent to the secretariat. We want the best possible celebration of that great event.

Letter to The Minister for the Environment Re: Public Liability and National Parks

One of the problems of national parks and local governments is the question of public liability. Some States have to pay a great deal of money to be covered for this protection.

At the next meeting of State Environmental Ministers it would be worth discussing the need for State and Federal changes to the law to reduce the amounts of such liability.

While in America I obtained documents which discussed the same question in a two year study under the 'President's Commission for Americans Outdoors'. All these papers are now deposited in the National Library archives in Canberra, however I have the summary of this section which may serve as well.

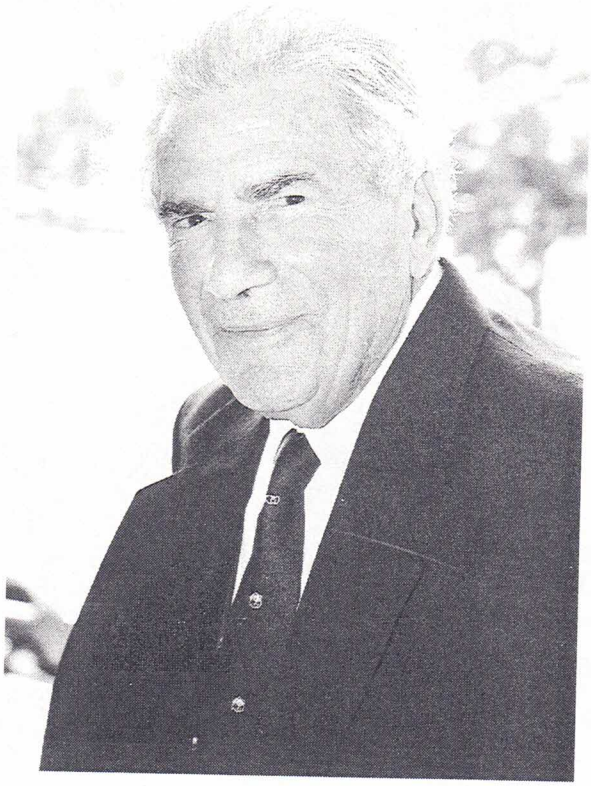
An article in the Australian Geographic suggests a new law. The State Environmental Defenders Offices could assist in this matter.

All the best for your work.

Yours sincerely

Vincent Serventy

PRESIDENT



Vincent Serventy, AM
President

Conservation in Action - Earth Sanctuaries

by Murray Hunt

Islands off the coast of Australia have often helped in the conservation of Australia's unique animals. An example of the benefit of islands includes Barrow, Bernier and Dorre Islands, off the coast of Western Australia, which are the last remaining habitat for the Burrowing Bettong, which used to be common on the mainland. A main reason why islands often become the last remaining habitat for many species includes the absence of predators such as cats, foxes and dogs to these areas. Other factors may include reduced roadkill, reduced agricultural practices and the existence of natural stands of vegetation on many islands off the coast of Australia.

Native animals have also been intentionally translocated to islands. Reasons for these introductions include conservation, aesthetics, and recreation. Some introductions of native animals have been outside the animal's historic range. Koalas introduced to many islands off the south coast of eastern Australia, and particularly Kangaroo Island, is one of the most well known examples of this questionable practice.

New islands have effectively been created on the mainland by the activities of Earth Sanctuaries, inspired by Dr John Walmsley. The barrier to protect native species from threatening processes however, in this case is not water, but the use of physical and electric fencing. The aim of Earth Sanctuaries is to obtain large tracts of land, and fence these areas to protect them from the effects of agriculture, as well as introduced domestic and feral animals. After the area is protected, selected animals and plant species are reintroduced. A prerequisite for a species to be selected is that the animal or plant must have at some time existed naturally in the area. The overall aim of Earth Sanctuaries, as stated in the Yookamurra Sanctuary Plan of Management is "to create through the re-introduction of selected animal species and the positive management of the vegetation, a balanced ecosystem, that is representative, as possible, of the type of ecosystem which existed 200 years ago, before the advent of European settlement". It is interesting to note that Earth Sanctuaries has no interest in conserving European impacts and heritage as is the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

I had the pleasure of an extended visit to Yookamurra Sanctuary in January 1997. Yookamurra is situated in mature mallee woodland that has only had light agricultural activity in the past. Extensive work was performed in its creation to ensure the sanctuary is vertebrate pest free.

Wombats

Wombats were initially removed from the area in the process of fumigating and ripping of rabbit warrens and fox dens. Baiting and shooting of cats and foxes were some of the measure employed to eradicate these introduced predators. Yookamurra was officially declared fox free in 1992 and a systematic regime of baiting is still in place to ensure its predator free status.



Common wombat (vombatus ursinus).

The boundary fence is designed to prevent entrance to cats, foxes, dogs, rabbits, goats, sheep and cattle, and not allow the smaller native animals to vacate the protected area. However, the boundary fence is designed to allow passage for the larger marsupials - the Red Kangaroo and the Western Grey Kangaroo. This allows kangaroos to maintain their natural movement and prevents the danger of inbreeding amongst those kangaroos within the sanctuary. In this manner, the sanctuary is not acting as an 'island'.

Yookamurra has had success in the conservation of Australia's native species through reintroduction. Several species including Numbats (Myrmecobius fasciatus), Western Brushtailed Bettongs (Bettongia penicillata), Burrowing Bettongs (Bettongia lesueur), Plains Rats (Pseudomys australis) and Greater Stick Nest Rats (Leporillus conditor) have all been determined to have once occurred in the region of Yookamurra and each has been re-introduced.

The numbat has a national population of approximately 1200 individuals. They survive in two main populations in Dryandra and Perup forest in the south-west of Western Australia. Fifteen individuals (6 male and 9 females) were translocated to Yookamurra and have now increased to 40 or 50 animals. Burrowing Bettongs (commonly called Boodies) are unique in that they are the only macropods to use burrows. They too were introduced from Western Australia. The Boodies have increased in number from 20 to 80 animals. Similarly Western Brushtailed Bettongs (commonly called Woylies) have increased in number from 35 to 150 individuals. Greater Stick Nest Rats have also been introduced but are rarely seen, due either to failure of the re-introduction or the nature of these rodents.

Captive breeding programs have been initiated for the Bilby (Macrotis lagotis) and for the Plains Rat. They have had great success with Bilby breeding and a short period after producing a litter of two male offspring the same mother emerged from her burrow whilst I was there with her newest offspring, a baby girl! Plains rat numbers are also increasing. However, reintroductions of Malleefowl (Leipoa ocellata) and the Bush Thick-knee (Burhinus magnirostris) have been unsuccessful. These failures have been partly due to the birds being captive bred and hence having no survival instincts, and the inability to protect the birds from the aerial assault of birds of prey. Future reintroductions listed as probable in the Yookamurra Plan of Management include Western Barred Bandicoots (Parameles bougainville), Brush-tailed Phascogales (Phascogale tapoatafa), Bridled Nailtailed Wallabies (Onychogalea fraenata) and Western Quolls (Dasyurus geoffroii). All these animals lived or are representative of animals that existed in the area 200 years ago.

If animals introduced to Yookamurra or other sanctuaries breed successfully and overcome the carrying capacity of the sanctuary, animals may be relocated to other sanctuaries. Maintenance of the genetic makeup of both populations could be facilitated by the occasional transfer of animals between sanctuaries and the addition of new genetic input from populations in Western Australia. These aspects further reduce the similarity of Earth Sanctuary operation to that existing on islands.

However, the success in the breeding of some of Australia's endangered species by Earth Sanctuaries Pty Ltd has often been overshadowed by its controversial founder Dr John Walmsley. He is well known for his views against cats and foxes and has also been criticised in certain quarters for his alleged attitudes to the recent koala problems on Kangaroo Island. His alleged view, and one with which I do not disagree, is that all koalas should be removed from the island for they were not present in this habitat originally. Controversy also surrounds his successful breeding of platypus in man-made lakes at Warrawong Sanctuary.

The end results of his, and his associates' efforts however, is not controversy, but the successful creation of protected populations of many of Australia's unique and endangered animals, and for this Earth Sanctuaries should be applauded. Earth Sanctuaries has also provided a graphic illustration of the ability of native populations of animals to increase once the burden of predator load (and grazing pressure) has been removed. It has also provided awareness of the vulnerability of many of our species and personal motivation to myself, and hopefully to many others, in efforts to conserve our unique native species.



Councillor Murray Hunt with a Bilby born at Yookamurra.

Towra Point Nature Reserve

Only 16 kilometres south of the centre of Sydney lies Towra Point Nature Reserve, one of the most important wetland areas in New South Wales.

A wetland of world importance

The Ramsar Convention is a treaty for protection of wetlands of international conservation significance. Towra Point Nature Reserve was declared a Ramsar site in 1984. The importance of Towra Point Nature Reserve is mainly as a habitat for migratory wading birds.

Towra Point is also subject to other international migratory bird treaties with China and Japan. At least 34 species of wading birds have been recorded from Towra Point.

Towra Point is the largest remaining wetland in the Sydney region.

Long distance voyagers

Some of the birds that feed on the intertidal flats around Towra Point migrate over 12,000 kilometres from as far away as Siberia, China and Japan. These include the endangered plover (Pluvialis dominica) and little tern (Sterna albifrons). Towra Point is also used by many non-migratory waders, such as the endangered pied oyster-catcher (Haematopus longirostrus).

Wading birds prefer a combination of sand and mud, which supports small invertebrates such as worms, crabs and shellfish on which the birds feed. Some birds probe deeply into the sediment, others take food from the surface. Feeding differences are reflected in the shapes and lengths of their bills.

The little tern nests on low areas of sand and shingle. An island adjacent to Towra Point is one of the major remaining nesting sites for little terns in New South Wales.

Stinking swamps?

Once people thought of wetlands as unattractive swamps of no value. We now know that they are important habitats for many aquatic animals. Mangroves produce large amounts of leaf litter that breaks down to feed many invertebrate animals. These are eaten by fish and birds.

Towra Point has two species of mangrove, the grey mangrove (Avicennia marina) and the river mangrove (Aegiceras corniculatum). The grey mangrove has numerous upright roots that poke out of the mud so that the plant can breathe in the unoxygenated muds. Both species excrete salt out of their leaves.

The Towra Point reserve protects about half of the mangroves and most of the salt marsh left in the Sydney region.

Aquatic pastures

The waters around Towra Point support meadows of seagrasses. The main species around Towra Point are eelgrass (Zostera), strap weed (Posidonia) and paddle weed (Halophila).

Seagrasses are very important habitat for small aquatic animals and feeding and nursery grounds for fish. Seagrasses have been lost from much of Botany Bay due to development and erosion. Boat chains and anchors also damage seagrass.



Mangroves and salt marshes form important habitats on the reserve.

The land and the sea

Towra Point is a place where the land meets the sea. The intertidal habitats fall within the Towra Point Aquatic Reserve which is managed by NSW Fisheries. The Aquatic Reserve restricts fishing, prohibits gathering of bait species and protects seagrasses.

The land is low lying and supports woodland of Casuarina, Banksia and Eucalyptus trees. Small groves of littoral rainforest support the magenta brush cherry (Syzygium paniculatum), a 'vulnerable' species in NSW.

Several small freshwater ponds were once scattered around Towra Point. The largest, Towra Lagoon, supplied freshwater to the crew of Cook's Endeavour in 1770. Today, the freshwater ponds are at risk. Towra Lagoon has become brackish due to seawater contamination.

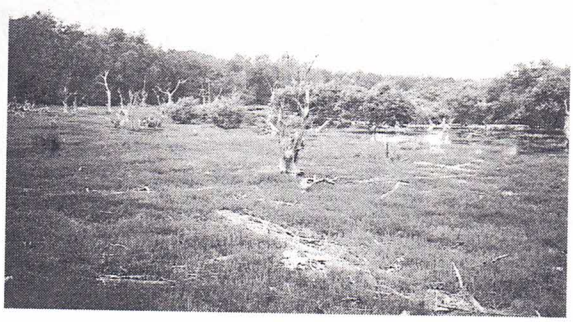
Erosion along the beaches of Towra has been accelerated by changes in wave energy in Botany Bay. Sand is being removed from Towra Point and moved westward by the currents.

People and Towra

Aboriginal use of Towra Point is evidenced by middens containing the remains of shells and tools. The area was rich in seafood and the ponds provided drinking water.

The surrounding waters are still used for oyster farming. In the mid nineteenth century, Towra Point was also used by one of the early white settlers, Thomas Holt, for grazing sheep.

In 1982, Towra Point became a Nature Reserve managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). Access is restricted to reduce the impact of people on the natural systems. A permit is required before entering the Nature Reserve. Permits are available from NPWS at Kurnell.



Salt marshes on the reserve.

The reserve provides opportunities for bird watching, nature observation and research. Dogs and horses are not permitted in the Nature Reserve because of their impacts on native animals and plants.

Volunteers assist NPWS with management activities at Towra Point, such as weed control, bush regeneration and litter removal.



Working together: volunteers assist NPWS.

Visitor's Code

Before visiting the Nature Reserve, remember:

- You need a permit to enter the Nature Reserve (including Weeney Bay).
- Dogs, horses and spearguns are not allowed.
- All plants, animals and other things are protected. In particular, do not disturb wading birds.
- When boating in the waters around the Nature Reserve, please do not cause a wash or travel within 100m of feeding or roosting birds.

Additional information or permits:

Towra Point Nature Reserve: NPWS, Botany Bay National Park, phone (02) 9668 9111.

Towra Point Aquatic Reserve:

NSW Fisheries, phone (02) 9529 6021.

To report oil spills or illegal activities (24 hrs)

NPWS, phone (0419) 428054.

NSW Fisheries 'Fishwatch', phone 1800 043536.

For teachers and students

- Towra Point Nature Reserve Plan of Management. (NPWS, 1989)
- 'Towra Point'. B. Clarke in Discovering NSW Wetlands. R. Breckwoldt (Ed). (Total Environment Centre, 1992)
- Wetlands and Heaths Activities Book. D. Pugh. (Rainforest Press, 1987)
- Wetlands Teachers Kit. C. Pettigrew & P. Laing. (NPWS, 1984)

Towra Point Nature Reserve Update

We were recently successful in gaining the assistance of the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers for special work at Towra Point.

Seven volunteers helped remove weeds from a grove of endangered trees near Weedy Pond.

Weedy Pond is one of four freshwater ponds on Towra Point Nature Reserve which help maintain a small remant rainforest group of trees.

The endangered Lilly Pilli tree Magenta Brush-cherry is growing near Weedy Pond but cannot compete against the invasion of exotic weeds.

By removing the lantana and bitou bush from the Reserve, the native plants and trees have a better chance of recovery.

We are grateful to the ATCV for their kind assistance under the coastcare program.



Volunteers of the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers working on Towra Point Nature Reserve.



Member for Cook, Mr Stephen Mutch, MP with the NPWS sub-district manager, Gary Morgan and Ben Garret supervisor of the ATCV teams.

National Parks Foundation Visits Towra

Recently the Community Programs Manager, Ms Jo Ridley, from the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife visited the Towra Point Nature Reserve to see at first hand the work being done by the 'Friends of Towra Point NR' which is sponsored by the Society.

The Foundation is active across the State encouraging community groups to support their local national parks and nature reserves. In forming the new 'Friends' group and having it officially launched by the Minister was a good model for other to follow.

There is a possibility that the Foundation may be able to assist the new Friends group with advice and information on how best to proceed as we manage to do more to clean up the Reserve.



Jo Ridley, Community Programs Manager of the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife on her visit to Towra Point and inspecting the first trees to be planted by the Minister at the official launch in February.

Sydney Metropolitan Wildlife Services Inc.

The new native wildlife charitable organisation licensed by National Parks and Wildlife Service to rescue, rehabilitate and release sick, injured and/or orphaned native animals.

Located at:

"Jenkins Kitchen", Lane Cove National Park
Lady Game Drive West Chatswood NSW
PO Box 78 Lindfield NSW 2070
Phone: (02) 9413 4300
Fax: (02) 9413 4399

Specialising in:

- **Species specific brochures and information.**
- **Training in the rescue and care of native wildlife.**
- **The promotion of community education, advice and awareness.**
- **Native animal rescue services.**

If you find a sick, injured or orphaned native animal, place it in a box in a warm, dark, quiet place or if it is a baby mammal, first wrap it in a woollen garment and then phone:

Sydney Metropolitan Wildlife Services Inc.
Tel: 9413 4300

Steering Committee Appointed for Towra Point Nature Reserve

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has appointed a special Steering Committee to oversee the development of a new Plan of Management and an Erosion Mitigation Plan for the Towra Point Nature Reserve.

Following Senator Robert Hill's visit to the Reserve in 1996, he promised assistance in restoring the Reserve and has contributed a grant of $100,000 towards the review to develop a new Plan of Management and options to prevent further erosion from Towra Point Beach front which was where the migratory waders use to feed and roost during their stay in Botany Bay.

Recently the media visited the area and noted the work being done by Bernie Clarke with a Coastcare Grant to build a sandbag wall to protect the famous freshwater Towra Lagoon from invasion by saltwater from high tides and storms. The wall is approximately 150 meters long and about 1 metre high and will protect the Lagoon until a more formal engineering solution is found to prevent the beach erosion.

The bags were filled by volunteers from the Society and the local conservation community with ages ranging from children to grandparents. The special working parties were ferried out to the Point by oyster barges from Bona Point and worked from 8.30am to 3pm in the afternoon to fill and tie off some 2000 bags on the first day.

As the bags are quite heavy when filled with sand it has been necessary for strong adults to be involved in carrying and packing the bags in the wall. Various groups have been involved including members of the Green Corps, Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers and members of the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre.



Some of the 85 volunteers helping to fill the sand bags on Towra Beach to help save the famous freshwater Towra Lagoon from which Captain James Cook drew freshwater for his crew in 1770. The sand bag wall will prevent the saltwater from high tides and heavy seas invading the lagoon until a permanent engineering solution can be found.



Bernie Clarke (Program Leader) showing members of the Steering Committee the detailed layout of the special sandbag wall at Towra Lagoon.



Members of the special Towra Point Nature Reserve Steering Committee meeting at N.P.W.S. Headquarters. The Committee is chaired by Peter Shadie (Operations Manager).

New Bird Count Compiler & Councillor

Rosalind Gordon has volunteered her services as our Bird Count Compiler. Rosalind has a Bachelor's degree in science from the University of New South Wales and has had many years experience working in various divisions of the C.S.I.R.O. and was recently in the Department of Medicine in the University of Queensland.

"For the bird count though, it's not scientific knowledge that's important - the main prerequisite is patience"! says Rosalind.

Rosalind has been fortunate to have the help of a professional database creator - Mark Snell of 'Open Windows' in Woy Woy on the Central Coast. Mark has generously volunteered his time and expertise to make the job much easier.

We are grateful for Mark Snells assistance and copies of his computer disk program for the bird count are available for a small fee. Contact the secretary on (02) 9556 1537.



Rosalind Gordon, the new garden bird count compiler.

Bird Count Database

Open Windows

The program used by the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia to collate its annual New Year's Day urban bird count was donated by Open Windows Computer Consultancy of Woy Woy.

"We have been very happy to be able to help the society in its good work," said Open Windows' managing director Mr Mark Snell.

Written using Microsoft Access, the program has been designed to record observations throughout the year and in a variety of habitats in addition to the urban environment.

It has been pre-configured with the common names of about 800 species of birds observed in Australia and 20 standard habitat descriptions, which may be edited, added to or deleted.

It also provides for "equivalent" names to be used. So, pee-wees, magpie-larks and mudlarks may all be considered "equivalent" under the name of Grallina cyanoleuca, for example.

Mr Snell said: "We believe the value of this program is that it provides a standard format for recording bird observations throughout Australia throughout the year.

"Organisations such as the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia may then collect this data electronically and combine it to form a much more comprehensive survey than is currently available."

The program provides a high degree of sophistication for those observers who wish to record more than the simple details required in the New Year's Day bird count.

It allows date and time to be recorded and birds to be identified by sex and maturity. A locality may be recorded as well as postcode and habitat description.

Provision is made for the bird's activity, leg bands and vegetation detail to be recorded as well.

Significantly, the observer may record his degree of certainty of identification, where a positive identification is not possible.

Several people may use the program to record their observations within the one database. The program allows the observers' names and contact details to be recorded for later verification by organisations using the data.

The program will run under Windows NT and requires at least 8Mb of memory. It is available from Open Windows for $25, to cover packaging and postage costs.

Bankcard, Visa and Mastercard orders may be placed by phone on (02) 9956 7310 or (0243) 42 5333. Mail orders may abe posted to PO Box 585, Woy Woy NSW 2256, accompanied by cheque or credit card details (number, expiry date and name on card).

New Parks for NSW since April 1997

Abercrombie River National Park (19 000 ha) has the largest remaining intact patch of low open forest in the Blue Mountains area.

Bellinger River National Park (2 860 ha) on the New England Escarpment just south of Dorrigo, is an area of steep cliffs and deep valleys with old-growth forests and rainforests.

Bents Basin State Recreation Area, a deep waterhole forming part of a gorge on the Nepean River between Camden and Penrith, is a popular retreat for Sydneysiders.

Brindabella National Park (12 050 ha) at the northern end of the Australian Alps, with its stringbark, scribbly gum, sub-alpine snow gum and mountain gum forests provides habitat for numerous threatened fauna.

Chaelundi National Park (10 060 ha) has significant old-growth forest that supports populations of threatened fauna.

Coolah Tops National Park (10 644 ha) is a scenic area of waterfalls and lookouts with views to the Warrumbungles and Mount Kaputar.

Dharawal State Recreation Area and Nature Reserve (6 115 ha) is important for conserving a number of threatened species in the Sydney sandstone region and for its Aboriginal sites.

Dooragan National Park (670 ha) is centred on North Brother Mountain, which is associated with the Aboriginal legend of Dooragan.

Dunggir National Park (2 500 ha) has steep terrain with ridges of eucalypt forest, ravines of rainforest and old-growth forest which is home to yellow-bellied gliders, koalas, and glossy black cockatoos.

Eurobodalla National Park (2 180 ha) on the south coast has spotted gum forest, wetlands and estuaries.

Fortis Creek National Park (7 747 ha) has extensive old-growth forest habitat for threatened fauna such as the koala, common bent-wing bat and great pipistrelle.

Goobang National Park (46 600 ha) has examples of eastern and western NSW flora and fauna.

Lake Macquarie State Recreation Area (452.93 ha) contains coastal and lake foreshore forest habitat to kangaroos, wallabies, gliders and many birds.

Mount Royal National Park (5 530 ha) has rainforest and other forests, which provide habitat for the threatened Hastings River mouse.

Mr President, distinguished guests and members of the Society.

Thank you for your invitation to address the 88th Annual Luncheon of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia. I am delighted to attend this special occasion and welcome the opportunity to speak to you about the Government's response to the pressing environmental issues that we face today.

Today in NSW, as across the whole of Australia, we face serious environmental problems as a result of human impacts on the natural environment. These impacts not only threaten to maintain and increase appalling rates of species extinction and loss of natural vegetation, but also to significantly impact on our own livelihoods and perhaps even more so on the livelihoods of future generations.

At the same time as impacts on the environment are becoming increasingly severe, approaches to conservation have been changing and it is now understood that we need an holistic ecosystem management approach. **This means decision-making based upon scientific knowledge of ecological relationships operating within the social and economic framework of communities to achieve ecologically sustainable development and to protect natural ecosystem integrity over the long term.**

With such an approach parks and reserves are critical but it is recognised that they alone cannot ensure the long term viability of our natural environment and ecosystems. We must look further than individual disputes and quick fixes. What is required is a broad strategy spanning all levels of government and the community to integrate ecosystem management into everyday planning and decision making.

The Government is meeting the challenges posed by ecosystem management and already significant progress and achievements have been made.

Biodiversity Strategy

Biodiversity is the variety of all living organisims, including all species, the genes they possess and the ecosystems they form. In recognition of the threats to biodiversity and the significant benefits that biodiversity provides, the Government brought forward the Threatened Species Conservation Act, which came into force in January 1996.

This Act represents the most comprehensive threatened species legislation in the nation and is recognised as international best practice. Consistent with this Government's commitment to endorse and implement the National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy, which requires that jurisdictions develop their own biodiversity strategies, the Threatened Species Conservation Act requires the development of a NSW Biodiversity Strategy. I am pleased to inform you that the draft Strategy has recently been released for public consultation and I would, of course, welcome a submission from your Society.

The Strategy proposes a comprehensive framework for the conservation of the biodiversity of NSW, and emphasises the need for a collaborative approach that integrates government and community efforts and ensures that resources are used efficiently and effectively.

I note that at your 87th annual luncheon, the Hon Bob Debus, MP, who attended on my behalf, also talked about the Threatened Species Conservation Act, you will be pleased to know that other aspects of the implementation of the Act are now well underway. Already the Scientific Committee, an independent body established by the Act, has made determinations on a number of species and populations to be listed as endangered or vulnerable. The Committee has already listed the Southern Corroboree Frog, and several invertebrate species, including the Lord Howe Island Phasmid (giant stick insect), the Golden Sun Moth, the Bathurst Copper Butterfly and the first non-insect invertebrate species - the Land Snail, as endangered. The Southern Hairy Nosed Wombat and the Painted Burrowing Frog have been provisionally listed as endangered species and will be subject to review after a twelve-month period.

The Scientific Committee has also identified and listed three populations of endangered species - the little Penguin colony at Manly Point, Squirrel Gliders at Barrenjoey Peninsula and the long-Nosed Bandicoots at North Head, and has proposed the first listings of endangered ecological communities - the Cumberland Plain woodland and the Eastern Suburbs Scrub Banksia - both of which are currently out on public display. The Committee is currently considering a number of other species, populations and ecological communities for listing.



Straw-necked ibis.

WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC.
GPO BOX 3428 SYDNEY NSW 1043

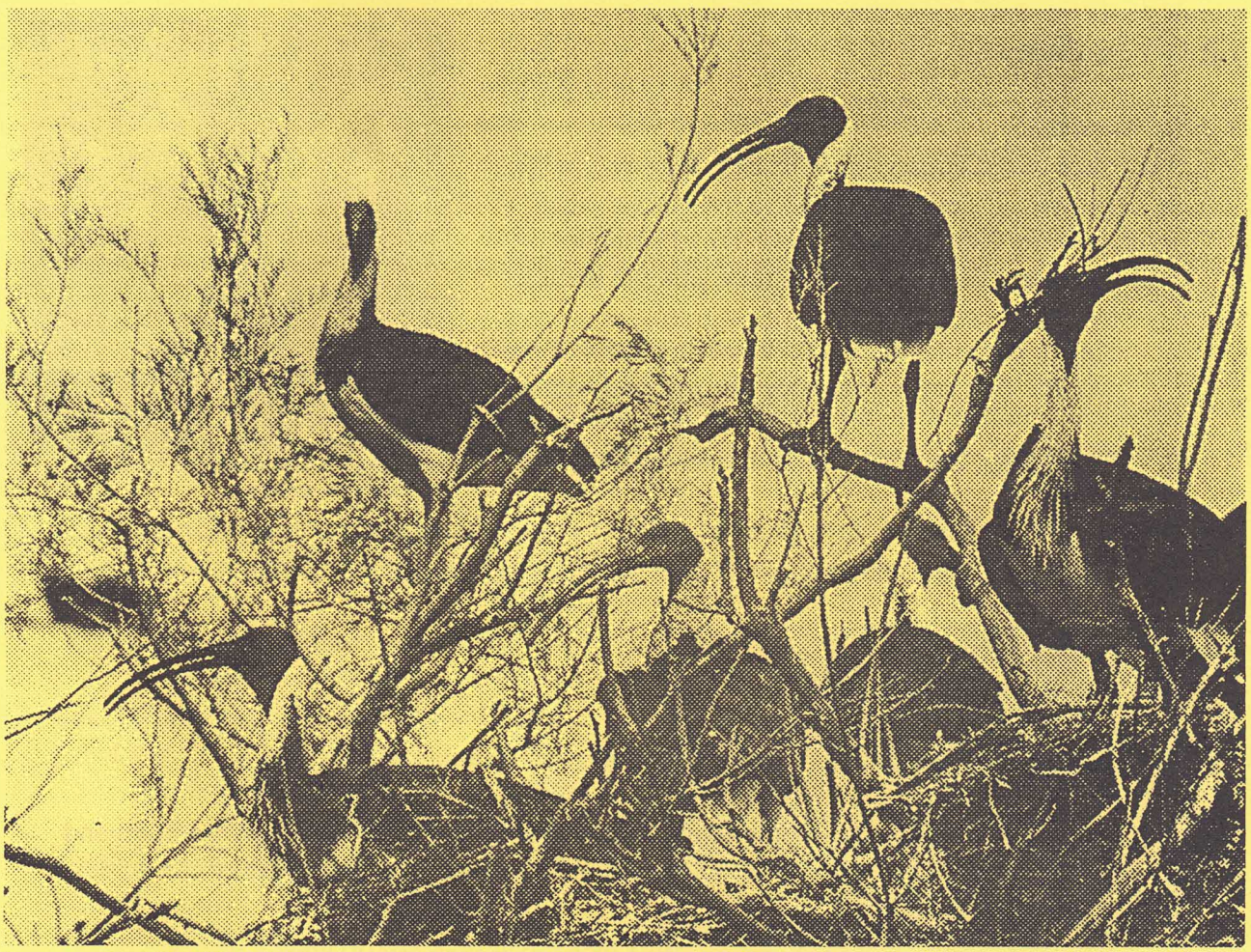
CONFERENCE NEWSLETTER - Progress Report - No. 2/1997

"EARTH 2000"

"In wildness is the preservation of the world... "

Henry David Thoreau (1817 - 1862)

A Conference on Australia's Conservation Future



Straw-necked Ibis (Threskiornis spinicollis), nesting in swamps in SW Western Australia.

A major international conference on conservation
to stimulate a world-wide interest in conserving our wildlife.

To be held in Sydney, Australia in the year 2000 prior to the Olympic Games.

EARTH 2000 CONFERENCE - 3-11 June, 2000, Sydney, Australia

'A CONFERENCE ON AUSTRALIA'S CONSERVATION FUTURE'

Our second newsletter outlines the first draft program assembled by the Executive Committee for your consideration. We invite comment and suggestion to the draft program and look for your active participation in the preparation for this important environmental conservation conference set down for the Year 2000.

FIRST DRAFT PROGRAM FOR CONSIDERATION

YOUR IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENTS AND AMENDMENTS WILL BE WELCOME.

It is proposed that the Conference will run from 3 June to 11 June 2000 with a daily program of events designed to appeal to all sections of the conservation movement.

This is a plan from the weekend before World Environment Day 2000 (5 June 2000) to the week-end after. Some delegates may wish to attend the whole conference, while some only on the day of their special interest/topic session is discussed.

DRAFT PROGRAM



Spotted Thornbill-All of our small birds suffer from predation by cats and foxes.

3 June, Saturday:

Visit sites of old conservation battles. Transport will be organised. Delegates may go to the places which interest them. Key figures in the original struggles will be present to speak on how they won the battles.

1. Kellys Bush, Hunters Hill/ Woolwich: Site of the world's first green ban. Meet the original battlers.

2. The Rocks, Sydney: Visit to be led by a key leader.

3. Centennial Park, Paddington: Visit to be led by key leader.

4 June, Sunday:

Bus trips to important regions around Sydney.

1. Australian Reptile Park, Gosford and Forest of Tranquility

2. Pearl Beach: This small community fought to save its quality of life. Arboretum and dune success. Meet local personalities showing what a small community can achieve.

3. Kuring-gai Chase National Park: Study aboriginal rock engravings.

4. Royal National Park: Australia's first and world second national park. The park tours will be organised by the National Park and Wildlife Service.

CONFERENCE FORMAT

Morning - Keynote speakers, with time for questions.
Afternoon - Break into workshops to provide answers to basic questions, and back to the full group for voting on these.

Resolutions will be issued to the Media.

5 June, Monday: World Environment Day

1. Saving plant diversity: To be led by Dr. David Given, at present Chair of the World Conservation Union Survival Commission's Plant Conservation Sub-Committee.

2. Saving animal diversity: Present position and solutions. Sir Robert May. Distinguished scientist at present Chief Scientific Adviser to the British Government.

3. Official World Environment Day Ceremony

After the keynote speakers, workshops will come up with conclusions for use by governments. We need not just a talk fest but tough statements and aims to be achieved.

6 June, Tuesday: Town and country.

Papers to be presented, ten to fifteen minutes each.

1. Greening nature's 'quarter-acre block' and our cities and villages.

2. The role of conservation groups.

3. The Prime Minister's Commission on Australians outdoors.

4. The ecological home and workplace.

5. The country. Led by Professor Goldney, head of the Environmental Studies Unit at Charles Stuart University at Bathurst who has prepared booklets for landholders.

6. Regional parks. An urgent need in Australia, home of some of the most urban of people. Keeping quality of life where people live and work.

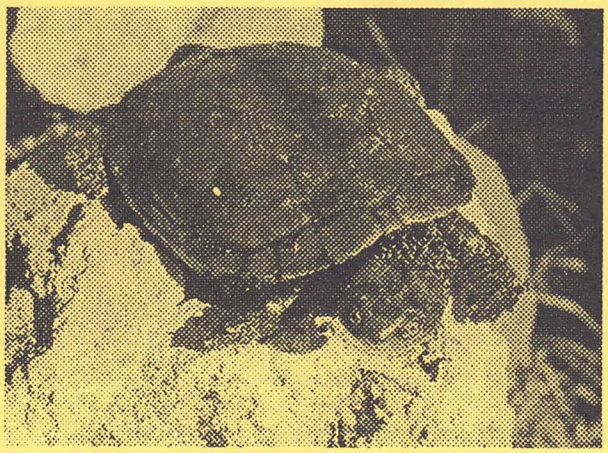
7. Wildlife corridors.

7 June, Wednesday: The role of the United Nations.

1. We hope Maurice Strong, Scientific Director of the Rio Conference, will give this talk.

2. Ecotourism.

3. Antarctica. Dr Suter



The southwest short-necked tortoise, the world's rarest reptile. The turning of the winter swamps into potato farms meant this once common tortoise was doomed until a public appeal and a caring government turned its two last remaining swamps into nature reserves. A breeding programme together with the creation of new swamps could save it for the future.

8 June, Thursday: Religions and peace within nature.

1. The Bisnoi. Keynote speaker Professor Mohnot from Jodphur University will describe a group in Rajastan, India, which 500 years ago developed an ecologically based religion, a world first. Bisnoi country, as arid as two-thirds of Australia, has evolved to create prosperous farmers with the wildlife surviving.

2. Aboriginal speaker. What can we learn from their at least sixty thousand years of experience, particularly in their use of plantlife, not only for food but for medicines. The world is learning how we have a treasure-house in the wild.

3. The need for a new value system.

4. Industry, mining and conservation. The need for co-operation.

9 June, Friday: A United Nations Bill of Environmental Rights.

Gro Harlem Brundtland is invited to speak on this topic. Workshops will discuss the ten green commandments, based on the UN book 'Our Common Future', that are needed.

10 June, Saturday:

Earth Day celebration festival in Botanic Gardens and the Domain.
Speaker Al Gore, Vice President, United States of America or his representative.

11 June, Sunday:

Bus to the opening of the Towra Point Nature Reserve walkway. Visit Botany Bay National Park at Kurnell, Joseph Banks garden and Bicentennial Park.
Close with hope for a peaceful and fruitful Olympic Games and a green thousand years to follow.
Message from the Society.

CONCLUSION:

Future newsletters will provide details of these and further suggestions, as well as background notes on speakers and workshop leaders, both international and local. We hope the speakers will also give public lectures during the week and perhaps visit other states to spread the conservation message.

Conference Delegates 1000 maximum.
Keynote speakers from 9-12 noon each day
Workshops from 1-4pm. These will be in three groups each to produce a plan for the future. Plenary session to accept, amend or reject the details from the Conference groups.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

EARTH 2000 Conference

Executive Steering Committee - President: Vincent Serventy AM, Tel: 043 44 4708
Preliminary work will be funded by the Society, but we would welcome any donations either privately or from commercial or government agencies which will be held in a special EARTH 2000 Conference Trust Fund.

Pre - Conference Newsletter

Special Progress Reports will be published from time to time to keep people informed of Conference developments and keynote speakers. You can be added to the Mailing List by sending a cheque for $20 together with your details to: The Secretary, EARTH 2000 CONFERENCE, WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC., GPO Box 3428, SYDNEY NSW 1043. Tel/Fax: 02 9556 1537.

Biodiversity Survey Program

Of course, it is hard to conserve something if you don't know it's there or what it may be threatened by. Accurate and comprehensive information is crucial for the effective conservation of biodiversity and scientific research that is well planned and well executed is a basic prerequisite for developing new policies and practices to conserve biodiversity.

The Government is addressing this need through the establishment of a biodiversity survey program which aims to provide leadership in gathering, analysing coordinating, communicating and disseminating the biological information we need to manage biodiversity. Several projects are currently underway as part of the Biodiversity Survey Program, including the Western Region Biodiversity Conservation Project, the Urban Bushland Biodiversity Survey, the Blue Mountains Bio-Indicators Project and biodiversity surveys of Eurobodalla National Park. Some of the programs are undertaken with institutions such as the Australian Museum and Charles Sturt University.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has been nominated as the lead agency for Biodiversity work in the State and a Biodiversity Survey Coordination Unit has been set up to implement the program. A Steering Committee has been formed to guide the progress of the Biodiversity Survey Program and has representatives from tertiary education and research bodies, local government, other relevant government agencies, community groups and other non-government organisations including the Nature Conservation Council, Farmer's Association and the National Parks Association. The Steering Committee is currently finalising the strategic plan for the program and this will be available for public comment very soon.

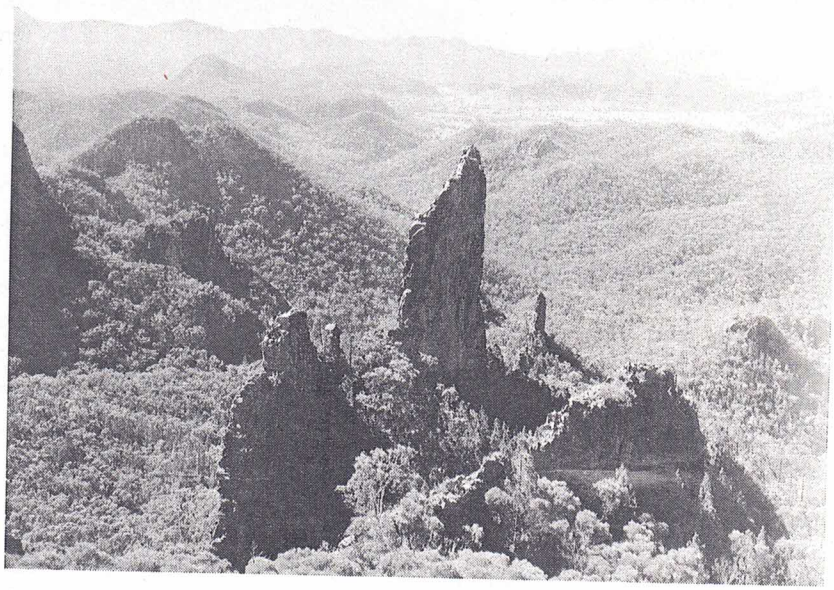
Future work of the program will include setting up processes to document best practice in field surveys and develop survey standards and guidelines, documentation of existing survey information to avoid duplication of effort, coordinating training and skills development for biodiversity workers and encouraging the involvement of the wider community in scientific programs. In addition, attention will be focused on increasing the scope of biodiversity studies to take more account of little-known groups such as insects and other invertebrates, and examining mechanisms for improving the study of genetic diversity and ecological diversity.

New Parks and Additions

In conjunction with these initiatives the Government has also already considerably strengthened the reserve system. Since March 1995, when the Government commenced its term in office, a total of thirty seven new reserves and additions totaling some 496,000 hectares have been established. New Parks include:

Coolah Tops National Park at the western end of the Liverpool Range, the park contains a variety of forest communities within the Biogeographic region which has been historically under represented in the reserve system;

South East Forests National Park, which has substantial stands of old growth forest, threatened koala, owl and potoroo populations as well as high scenic, water catchment and wildlife corridor values;



Warrunbungles national park, N.S.W.

and Gunderbooka National Park in the west of the State, which is a highly scenic landscape with species and habitats typical of the northern Cobar Peneplain Biogeographic region. The Park has significant Aboriginal cultural values and a large number of threatened species, including brush-tailed phascogale and little pied bat.

The inclusion of ecological types previously under-represented in the park system in important for the establishment of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CRA) reserve system.

Wilderness

Wilderness is another matter being addressed by the Government. There is a widespread and strong feeling among members of the public that wilderness areas should be protected. A recent Australian Heritage Commission survey of NSW residents, living outside the major centres of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong, found that ninety eight percent of people surveyed believed that wilderness should be conserved for its own sake, and ninety seven percent considered that we have a duty to conserve wilderness for future generations. The Government has responded significantly extending designated wilderness in NSW.

In two years in office the Government has declared approximately 500,000 hectares of wilderness. Three areas of wilderness originally proposed by the Government remain outstanding: Wollemi; Pilliga; and additions to the Deua wilderness. Declaration of these areas is expected later this year following public consultation.

Together with existing wilderness areas, these additions will play a vital role in protecting large expanses of substantially modified native habitats where natural processes can continue unhindered. In this way, these areas will not only protect already threatened plants and animals, they will help ensure that other species are less likely to become rare or threatened.

Forest Policy

One of the most critical environmental issues in Australia today concerns the future of our forests. The NSW Government's Forest Policy has been driven by a commitment to implement the initiatives of a reserve system protecting wilderness and old-growth forest, in addition to the establishment of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative reserve system for forested areas. In relation to the forestry industry, the Government aims to encourage the development of a viable and valuable adding timber industry.

The Government has been determined to undertake a rigorous assessment of NSW forests and in this regard, unilaterally enhanced the forest assessment



Snow gums in the Kosciusko national park.

process set out in the Gommonwealth's Deferred Forest Agreement, by implementing an Interim Assessment Process. This process identified forest areas that need to be set aside for potential inclusion in the CAR reserve system to ensure their protection pending further assessment under the joint State and Commonwealth Comprehensive Regional Assessment/Regional Forest Agreement process.

The Imterim Assessment Process is now complete and more than 800,000 hectares of State Forests have been set aside in this manner, including some parks which have already been declared, such as the South East Forests National Park. The more detailed Comprehensive Regional Assessments will further assess the deferred areas and will ensure a considered and balanced outcome.

The Government will attempt to involve all stakeholders in this comprehensive assessment process which is the cornerstone of the NSW Government Forestry Policy. We are confident that through this process, we will achieve the long term protection of the State's native forests and the development of an ecologically sustainable timber industry, a legacy for future generations to value and enjoy.

Marine Parks

A large percentage of the populations of NSW live near the coast, and the conservation of the marine environment has also been a focus for concern. The nature values of our marine ecosystems attract many thousands of tourists every year and also support industries such as commercial fishing. For all of these reasons the Government is committed to ensuring that the State's marine environment and all its life forms are managed in an effective and balanced way.

Jervis Bay and Solitary Islands Marine Parks were among the 24 new parks named in the Government's pre-election commitments. These will be the first marine parks established under the Government's soon to be introduced marine parks legislation. The process of determining appropriate management options for marine parks will involve close consultation with relevant stakeholders in defining plans of management, zoning and other relevant matters relating to marine parks.

These two marine parks represent the first stage of a Comprehensive Adequate and Representative reserve sytem for the marine environment.

Urban Parks

The social benefits of green space for urban populations is well recognised and the creation of urban parks is a substantial new initiative of this Government which will improve the lifestyle of people living the greater Sydney area.

An amendment to the National Parks and Wildlife Act has enabled lands to be reserved as regional parks. The purpose of the Regional Park designation is focused on the provision of open space and recreational opportunities to regional populations, with a secondary focus being the protection of nature conservation values. Areas suitable for reservation as regional parks are usually large pieces of land with potential for a high level of visitation.

These urban green spaces are also significantly for conservation and often contain areas of remnant bushland which contribute to the maintenance of biodiversity in our local surrounds. This was confirmed in the results of situations contribute to the effective management of parks and reserves.



Senator Robert Hill, Federal Minister for the environment with Bernie Clarke looking out over Botany Bay N.P.



Wellands at Towra Point nature reserve.

These Agreements are entered into voluntarily by landholders who may nominate to conserve parts of all of their property. Landholders can receive financial assistance from the Government for work such as fencing and feral pest control. There are more than 30 agreements in place across the State covering a variety of ecosystems and habitats, a further 100 agreements are currently under negotiation.

In closing, I would like to emphasise that community consultation plays a significant role in the Government's nature conservation strategy. Generating awareness of the issues and concerns among our communities for the protection of the environment is crucial to the success of any program and representative bodies like the Wildlife Preservation Society contribute greatly in this regard. I hope, for everyone's benefit, that your enthusiasm, dedication and contribution to the protection of Australia's environment will endure for many years to come.

Stage one of the Urban Bushland Biodiversity Survey which covered twelve Government areas in western Sydney and found fifty one plant species of national and/or State significance and several threatened bird, frog and reptile species. Subsequent stages of the program will extend the servey over the rest of the metropolitan area.

Areas currently scheduled for declaration as Regional Parks include: Western Sydney Regional Park; Rouse Hill Regional Park; Leacock Regional Park; William Howe Reserve and portions of land currently occupied by Rozelle, Gladesville and Concord hospitals.

Karst Conservation

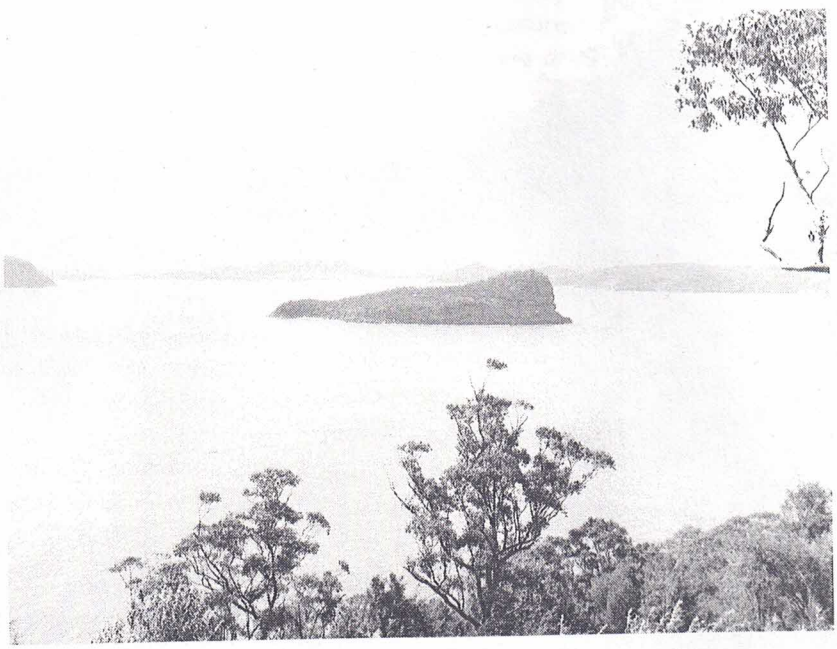
Formations, for example caves, that occur in rock such as limestone or dolomite are known as Karst formations, and are often highly valued for their natural and cultural heritage values. Improved protection of cave sites has been a priority for the Government.

In the last session of Parliament, legislation was passed to reserve Jonolan Caves, Wombeyan Caves and Abercrombie as Karst Conservation Reserves under the National Parks and Wildlife Act to be managed by the Jenolan Caves Trust. The Trust has an excellent track record in the management of karst sites, and reservation of the sites will provide enhanced protection to these often heavily visited and technically difficult to manage areas.

Park Restoration and Improvement Program

Establishing new reserves would be pointless exercise if provisions were not put in place to ensure that the values for which they were declared are maintained and managed in an appropriate manner. The Government's Park Restoration and Improvement Program has established an accelerated program of management planning for the reserve system.

Since March 1995, the Government has adopted eleven plans of management covering fourteen areas reserved or dedicated under the National Parks and Wildlife Act. A further four plans are currently being considered for adoption and twenty-four are expected to be finalised in the next few months. It is expected that nine plans will be put on public exhibition during this year.



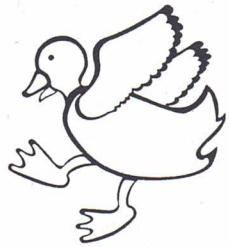
Lion island is an important nature reserve.

In addition, the Government has committed to undertaking a periodic State of the Parks Report. This will enhance the effectiveness of reserve management by alerting managers to actual or potential degradation of any conservation values in the reserve system.

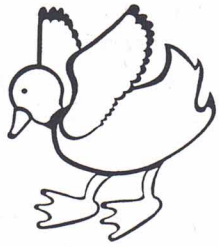


Voluntary Conservation Agreements

The appropriate management of land adjacent to parks and reserves can significantly enhance and assist the management of the reserves themselves, for example, by controlling weeds and feral animals. Voluntary Conservation Agreements are an excellent example of an initiative where the community can protect biodiversity and in some situations contribute to the effective management of parks and reserves.



These Agreements are entered into voluntarily by landholders who may nominate to conserve parts of all of their property. Landholders can receive financial assistance from the Government for work such as fencing and feral pest control. There are more than 30 agreements in place across the State covering a variety of ecosystems and habitats, a further 100 agreements are currently under negotiation.



In closing, I would like to emphasise that community consultation plays a significant role in the Government's nature conservation strategy. Generating awareness of the issues and concerns among our communities for the protection of the environment is crucial to the success of any program and representative bodies like the Wildlife Preservation Society contribute greatly in this regard. I hope, for everyone's benefit, that your enthusiasm, dedication and contribution to the protection of Australia's environment will endure for many years to come.





Friends of Towra Point Nature Reserve work to protect the reserve.

Senate Inquiry

HERITAGE ACCESS

On Tuesday 26th November, 1996 the Senate resolved that the Environment, Recreation, Communication and the Arts References Committee inquire and report on:

. . . The question of balancing public access with the principle of 'user pays' in order to defray the public costs of maintaining natural and cultural assets such as national parks and museums with particular consideration to issues of fairness and equity . . .'

The President, Vincent Serventy attended the inquiry on 16 September, 1997 and presented the following submission to the Senator.

General

Philosophically our Society would prefer free access to all national parks and museums. Sadly this is not a perfect world.

We would regard the obvious costs of running museums and parks as being offset by the public benefits of such items for the public good. Some nations such as Kenya have been able to work out the public value of animals such as elephants and lions. Both run into tens of thousands of dollars. The same would apply to most nations both in terms of natural assets and cultural assets. Museums such as the Smithsonian in Washington, San Diego Zoo in California, the Great Barrier Reef Regional Park in Australia, the National Art Gallery in Canberra, the Taj Mahal in India are all economic assets in terms of tourism alone, not even taking into account their value in public education.

Because these costs are difficult to rate for particular places, governments tend to regard all the charges to the public purse as being paid for out of taxes and therefore needing to be recouped.

Since tourism is already the world's greatest industry and likely to rise higher in the decades to come, governments must realise that without such natural and cultural assets far fewer people would pay the costs to travel.

Canberra is a classic example as it is one of the most important of tourist targets with the Australian War Memorial Museum, and The National Art Gallery being obvious attractions. The new National Museum with its outside displays may soon outrank these two examples.

However as already stated this is not a perfect world and in Australia we already charge for items of the public good such as education, health, many museums and national parks, and all zoos. Most of these are State responsibilities and the federal government could change this pattern by offering to meet at least some of the costs of running these projects.

Accepting that these are our prime views on fairness and equity as well as the greater economic good the following points seem reasonable, accepting the present system.

National parks and regional parks (for definition of these see 'Saving Australia' by Serventy).

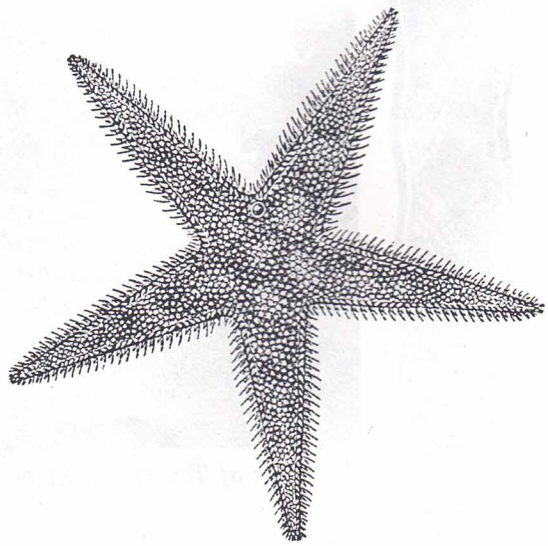
Where governments provide facilities such as roads, toilets, camping facilities, information centres, rubbish removal etc then a charge could be made. The amount should never be enough to discourage visitors, in particular families.

For a wilderness style park where little is provided and the best management is to do nothing, there should be no charge, any incidental costs to be regarded as for the public good as already described.

Cost of collection. In many cases the costs of providing staff at entry points is more than the money collected so some other method is needed.

Some States provide money boxes but without supervision, but these are only temptations for the dishonest.

The Great Barrier Reef Park puts a charge on all tickets to take advantage of various attractions. In this way the visitors pay without realising it, though the suppliers of the service complain of this cost to their own profitable running.



The Great Barrier Reef Park puts a charge on all tickets to take advantage of various attractions. In this way the visitors pay without realising it, though the suppliers of the service complain of this cost to their own profitable running.

Tickets to visit all such parks may be issued on a casual or yearly basis. This is also done in many countries such as England where an admission ticket can be obtained to visit all National Trust properties, historic sites such as Stonehenge, and the like.

This might be extended to make membership of particular groups apply to visiting museums as is done with members of ICOM visiting all museums without charge. In Australia, there are national park associations based in every State and presentation of a membership card could allow free admission to all parks. Since members often do a great deal of volunteer work in parks this could be a stimulus to more of the public joining the associations.

For visitors coming on buses admission tickets for such ecotourists in each State could be charged in similar fashion to the Great Barrier Reef. This would make those running the business the collector of fees.

The first step before making a decision would be to find out if the present money obtained for each park covers the cost of staff to handle the collection of the fees. Our own casual information would give the impression it is not cost effective at present.

For most national parks the number visiting by car alone would not be enough to our mind to justify admission charges since walkers could not be forced to pay when a stroll through the bush would solve the entrance problem without paying.

In general it would seem the costs of licensing restaurants, food shops etc in the park should be high enough to offer a reasonable return to the government for costs of running the park.

Volunteers

We were told that work by volunteers over a ten year period had saved the Victorian National Park Service one million dollars in costs if the work had been done by paid staff. The same applies to museums and zoos. Without such help the smaller museums and zoos could not continue and evidence around the world reinforces that opinion. The larger institutions often obtain hundreds of thousands of dollars in gifts from such Friends groups and details could be obtained from the Federation of Friends of Museums who are also affiliated with the World Friends of Museums.

World Friends of Museums Conference

An international conference, these being held every three years, is planned for 1999 to be held in Sydney at which might be worthwhile for politicians and Senate members of staff to attend the lectures to obtain a better appreciation of the importance of such groups.

Conclusion

We reiterate that the educational and recreational work of such places as well as their scientific importance justifies these to be granted free access in similar fashion to education. At least this is free at primary and secondary levels and in some States was also free at tertiary levels.

The virtues of a highly educated people should not need stressing and the returns of such expense both at an economic and cultural level are well worth the cost.

1. A study by Dr Powell of the University of New England showed that the Dorrigo National Park provided four million dollars each year to the local economy. Part came from the 160,000 visitors each year while 71 jobs were also created.

2. The Australian of 21 January 1997

   This article highlights the grave dangers of national parks depending on public admission to pay for the costs of the service. Plans for Wilsons Promontory include 150 new lodges and fun rides.

We have similar plans for Wilpena Pound in the Flinders Range in South Australia which included tennis courts; plans for Kosciusko National Park in NSW which included apartments which would be for sale to private folk and a host of other moneymaking schemes.

Museums are also tempted in the same way to make visiting 'fun' rather than educational, although we do admit these can be combined.

The N.S.W. Art Gallery has an acceptable solution. Admission is free, as it should be, since taxpayers money provided both buildings and objects of art.

When exhibitions are imported from other places a charge is made to defray the cost of having such an extra show, not paid for by local folk.

We regard this temptation to cater for money raising ventures as the most insidious danger of charging for admission and using these funds to 'save' the government money.

Such privatisation goes far beyond the valuable purpose of some of these exercises.

Vincent Serventy, AM
President

Saving Centennial Park

March 1972. A harsh voice on the phone. 'I'm Patrick White. They tell me you know a lot about Centennial Park and a lot about how to fight conservation battles. We need your help.'

It was the classic NIMBY reaction, sneered at by so many of our opponents, yet it has often started far more important struggles and for Patrick, conservation became a consuming interest.

We met and planned the campaign. At the gathering in the park on 18 June 1972 there was a panel of four speakers, Patrick White, Jack Mundey, Harry Miller and myself. We spoke our pieces, although Patrick read his, and later gave me a copy to publish in the magazine I edited.

Now we have a new battle to save Centennial Park. This time the threats are more subtle. A public enquiry organised by the Trust found that 50% of people responding put 'getting close to nature' as their main reason for coming to the park. The management however, according to the Director, decided that a new structure must be built to cater for demands for the staging of functions. A friend has told me confidentially that this new building will be only the first step, and will be enlarged to encroach on the Lachlan Swamp.

Our Australian park is being turned into an English model. 'Pizzen neat' we used to describe those gardens, with lawns mown to cricket pitch smoothness. Ponds have been 'beautified' while the resident ducks are farmyard birds, though there are some wild species. The Intruders need to be removed.

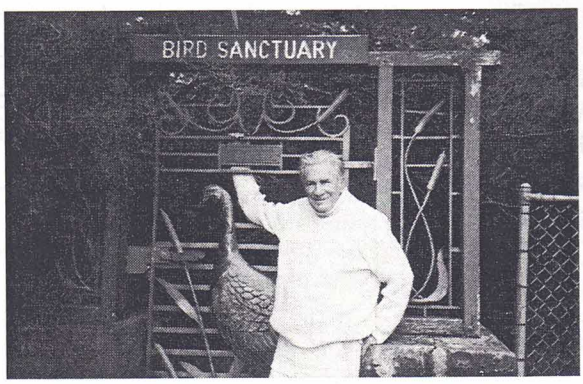
The Sydney Botanic Gardens has managed to cater for such functions as staging plays, opera in the park, carols by candlelight, weddings and other activities without the need for buildings. There are entrepreneurs who can create all the facilities needed, almost overnight, which are taken away once the affair is over. Centennial Park can do the same.

None of the trustees is skilled in the art of creating biodiversity. It is saving the wildlife which interests me as President of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia. Our aim is not only to conserve national parks on both land and sea, but also keep wildlife where people live and work. Our motto we took from the great American nature philosopher Thoreau who wrote 'in wildness is the preservation of the world'.

Trustees and directors are being pressured to make money. This is a change favoured by governments both state and federal. Such demands are being made on great scientific bodies like the CSIRO, museums of natural history, art galleries, botanic gardens and all those other bodies depending on the public purse. Governments forget that the various 'friends' of such institutions already carry out hundreds of thousands of dollars of voluntary work for the bodies they were formed to protect and nurture. Many of the smaller ones could not continue without the dedication of such volunteers.

On that day in 1972 Patrick White closed his speech with these words. 'Protect your parks from the pressure of political concrete.' Will enough Sydneysiders now be willing to help the small group that is trying to stop the concrete trucks?

Vincent Serventy, AM
President



President Vincent at the Gould League Memorial gate to the bird sanctuary.



Protest march to save the park in 1972.

Policy on Centennial Park

We accept this in not a national park or a wildlife reserve but one version of a regional park, modified since it is in the heart of the city.

Yet it is also an important wetland and allows a variety of wildlife to survive.

For most visitors, though not all, it is the quality of naturalness and of harmony with nature which attracts. The measure of the success of the trustee is not in the number of visitors who come. A pop concert can attract two million visitors as in Central Park in New York. Yet how did those millions enjoy the park setting? They would have been equally happy, perhaps happier in a sports stadium since that is well equipped with seats and toilets.

The night time film shows are a smaller version which cause a great deal of anguish among those who live in homes which have to suffer the loud speakers.

So folk should be attracted to Centennial Park as a natural place where they can come to walk, take the dogs or ride horses, have a barbecue lunch or a picnic on the grass and wildlife watch. Too many people will destroy the amenity and Centennial Park cannot cope with the whole of the nearly four million people of Sydney. Every suburb needs its own park to offer similar places for recreation.

To that end we suggest the following principles.

1. No more new buildings except to replace old ones destroyed by age or accident. Function centres attract folk who are adequately catered for by other venues.
2. A strong friends group has been created to provide leaders for various activities. They do need the function room for a central spot for their activities.
3. Trustees to be appointed for various skills, not raising money, though sometimes this can occur for special needs as with other Friends groups.

We suggest the following pattern.

a) Two trustees skilled in retaining biodiversity. Folk like Ernie Hoskins who has given advice for many years though age may not allow his appointment. The Nature Conservation Council should be asked to suggest names.

b) Another professionally skilled in urban parks but not one trained on European styles but having an Australian slant. Probably the Urban Parks Authority may suggest a suitable person.

c) A person appointed by the National Park and Wildlife Service .

d) A trustee representing the Friends, ideally their chairperson.

e) A Ministerial representative.

All other skills can be hired and do not need to be represented as trustees.

f) Some lay person of the quality of Jill Wran who is keen on nature conservation and knows the people with power.

3. A look at the road system. This should not encourage short cuts through the park. Most roads should be dead ends so only those coming to enjoy the park will enter.

Conclusion

We were impressed by the plans to plant more native trees and also the present abundant wildlife. Long may it continue.

Those words of Patrick White, spoken when he was one of the four who protected the park many years ago.

' . . . We must preserve the park from the pressure of political concrete . . . '



NSW Wetland Policy

At least it can be said the new policy is a start though the government lost its nerve and refused to set ten percent of the average flows for the environment to come into force immediately but decided to wait a year while local groups can be consulted.

The same delay has been used to stop remnant vegetation policy being implemented for the same reason-local consultation.

Two years ago when the problem was water for the Macquarie Marshes the government decided to allow a ten percent of the water for the wildlife. The irrigators stormed Parliament claiming this would cost a thousand jobs and lose production of $60,000. The government kept its nerve and the sky did not fall. The next year assisted by good rain there was a bumper crop.

Let's hope this time the government will also keep its nerve and realise we cannot take from our river systems forever without a loss of biological diversity in our wetlands which depend on a steady flow from the rivers.

Roll on the dust bowl !

by Vincent Serventy

The WIK 10 point plan has number of 'Activities relating to 'primary production' which would be allowed on pastoral leases while native title would be extinguished.'

Also extinguished would be the protection that leasehold offers on how the land should be managed.

Pastoral leases cover about forty percent of the most vulnerable land in Australia, that arid centre with variable climate. For two hundred years keeping leasehold rather than freehold meant that governments could exercise control over unwise management.

This control varied from State to State and in some was not often strictly enforced. A few years ago there was a media item approving how one sheep farmers was beating the drought. He was using a bulldozer to flatten mulga trees on which his flocks were thriving. We contacted the minister and pointing out how this was against the conditions of the lease. Long experience had shown that clearing arid country led to later ecological disaster not only to the health of the land but also to any economic success of the grazier owners.

The minister blandly replied 'it was impossible not to feel sympathy for the grazier who could not be expected to watch his sheep starving . . .'

That was the kind of conservation stupidity which worldwide has led to the loss of the American cod fisheries, the collapse of our tuna and abalone fisheries, the salination of vast areas of inland Australia. A study of the whole of our land showed that 52 percent of our soils in rural use needed some form of treatment for land or plant degradation.

The same survey found that of the five million square kilometeres used for agricultural and pastoral purposes 23 percent needed treatment with better land management practises.

Mulga and mallee are two of our most valuable tree groups. While the first is found across a vast area of arid Australia, mallee grows mostly across southern Australia though some large patches are also found in the central regions.

Our soils sadly lack the fertility found in other lands. Some ten years ago a Queensland Department of Agriculture carried out a study on the State's mulga country. Western Queensland makes a major contribution to the pastoral production, which at the time was estimated at 15% of its whole pastoral production, 49% of the fruit and vegetables and 29% of the principal cereal crops.

The conclusions of the study were that the degradation of the mulga lands be reduced through proper management.

The first necessity was control on stocking rates. This was needed with reducing the number during dry periods. There should be no attempt to feed mulga to hungry animals.



Volunteers planting out native trees on the Towra Point Nature Reserve to hold the sand dunes after the removal of exotic weeds.

Saving the Paroo

A three day workshop was held at Hungerford in mid-July. From this came a demand that all governments should keep this region free from intensive agriculture, including irrigation. It is not only conservationists who are concerned. Our free range cattle industry is important. More and more countries are finding meat from healthy cattle is better for human health than those unhappy beasts bred in paddocks where they are fattened like machines.

The improvement is not in taste, only in bulk. Here is an area where farmers and conservationists can work together.

The world's first National Park

This has been a long running controversy. Our Society accepts the widely held view that Yellowstone was the first. We think it is important in terms of intention. So many other contenders were set aside for human recreation, including sports of various kinds, Yellowstone first encapsulated the modern national park concep.

It was around the campfire in 1870 that after discussion of the possibilities for this remarkable place of natural grandeur the majority came to the modern view it should be kept as it was for the benefit of humankind.

They didn't just sit on their bottom but worked hard writing articles, giving talks and convincing governments.

Two years later the first national park was created, not only by the nation but more important, in terms of intend.

Other countries followed suit, England with no natural areas left since humans had altered the whole country, though often creating places of great beauty set aside their own 'national parks' though these are what we call Regional Parks, places where humans lived and worked but which had a conservation umbrella put in place to control future development.

In 1864 Congress had given Yosemite Valley to California for use as a public park because of its natural beauty, long before Sydney's Royal. It was not added to the national park system until the 1890's.

So no more of this nonsense. Too often NSW claims to apeak for the whole of Australia with titles such as Australian Museum and National Botanic Gardens. We are part of a federation.

Wasting Resources

The Club of Rome have published a new report which we hope is more accurate than the wilder prophecies of disaster which led to the public loss of face.

The years passed and the world survived.

Did you know that 97% of the energy obtained from the coal burned at power stations is wasted sending it to our homes and in the inefficiency of most electric light globes.

Why is so little research and publicity given to this problem. The reason is that engineers are not rewarded for what they save but for ideas of increased consumption.

We know that in Australia with all them problems of greenhouse warming, power companies encourage us to use more. Why not build houses which do not require much heating?

Good design in terms of siting trees and proper insulation would save home owners money but that does not put profits into the power companies.

Wingiecarribee

Our battle to save this wetland and its valuable peat swamps is still in the melting pot. However the last issue of the National Park Journal had another wildlife reason for its saving.

Nearly two hundred million years ago there evolved in the swamps of those days while dinosaurs still roamed, a huge species of butterfly. It had a wingspan of fourteen cetimetres and a body size as thick as a human finger.

Unlike most modern dragonflies it did not swim in water but roamed the surface of the swamp to catch its food at night. Also they lived in a burrow as shown in the diagram.

Also they are longlived with a time span of between 20 to 30 years according to scientist John Trueman.

By great good fortune the species have survived in some countries. Australia has four species, New Zealand and Chile one each with two in North America and one in Japan.

So unless human greed destroys Wingiecarribee it will survive in Australia.

Letters to the Editor

Wildlife Corridors

Dear Jennifer Saunders

Richard Hobbs thoughtful article on wildlife corridors will stimulate interest in this concept. As our Society pioneered the idea about thirty years ago perhaps our reasons might be worth considering.

It was spider expert Barbara Main who interested me in the value of roadside verges for preserving trapdoor spiders and I helped her dig out a number of specimens. Before that we had only considered such fragments of nature from an aesthetic point of view.

Then Jared Diamond at a conference in Canberra discussed island extinctions. Long before that we had realised national parks and other bushland reserves were 'islands' in a sea of change so it seemed that linking such islands with strips of natural bush would have value in increasing the chances of saving wildlife, both plants and animals.

To interest the public we called these 'koala corridors' to make the idea popular though we realised if we could save koalas by keeping or regenerating bushland linking reserves all would benefit.

USA - Web of Greenways

Then in the United States came the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors, one of the few valuable ideas from President Reagan. I talked to one of the civil servants involved and he explained that one of the key recommendations, submitted in 1987, was to create a 'web of greenways' across the nation.

This was to be a citizen sponsored movement and cost the government nothing. That was the key to its success. That National Geographic of June 1990 in an article titled 'Greenways Paths to the future' outlined its tremendous success which is still growing. They called it grass-roots effort across America.'

A letter to the RSPCA Executive Officer Re: Removing Indian Mynar

One of our members has been experimenting with removing Indian mynas from his garden. Like many introduced species this has become a serious problem in urban areas but his method of killing may cause disquiet. He traps the birds alive, then drowns them.

Is this a humane method? Do you know of any other more humane method?

We do know one case of a friend of ours who 'drowned' in the Swan River and was rescued several minutes later, being brought to life by resuscitation. He told us it was a most pleasant why to die since he drifted off to sleep.

We do not want to publicise this matter in our publications until it has been cleared from the humanitarian angle.

Yours sincerely

Vincent Serventy

Dear Sir,

I acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 28th May 1997 in relation to humane methods of bird destruction.

I am glad that you decided to consult with the RSPCA in relation to this issue, as I can assure you that any person/s involved with destroying birds or any animal in this manner, may very well find themselves being convicted of section 6 (1) of Cruelty to Animals Act. This section relates to committing an act of aggravated cruelty. This can attract penalties of $4000.00 and/or 12 months imprisonment upon conviction.

Humane methods of destruction for birds are by cervical dislocation by an experienced person, or the administration of a lethal injection of sodium pentibarbitone. This of course must be administered by a qualified veterinarian.

Thank you for bringing these matters to my attention.

Steven Coleman
Acting Chief Inspector
RSPCA (NSW)

15 June 1997

Dear Tony,

My letter and the response from the RSPCA is attached. It seems the only acceptable method is the old way of chopping off the head, or cervical dislocation. A long study showed that a gunshot to the brain was also painless, or at least acceptable

Since mynas are urban birds that is not an acceptable method now.

We will discuss it again at Council.

Regards

Vincent Serventy

President

Bitou Bush

This introduced invader has taken over much of our coastline dunes, all 70,000 hectares of this region. It was brought in to bind sand dunes destroyed by sand mining with the miners not willing to use native bushland to do the job. Modern methods make sure the natives are assisted in the task so bitou bush has been outlawed.

Except of course the plant does not get the message and is expanding not only from the dunes but into bushland, inland from the coast.

At Pearl Beach a local group rooted out the invader along a kilometre of beachfront and replanted the whole area with native beach plants so today the front is a delight of natural bush. Perhaps other groups such as the Friends of our coastal national parks might make that their task for the next decade.

Introduced weeds of all kinds cost agriculture six hundred million dollars in lost production so conservation makes good economic sense.



Volunteers cutting out exotic weeds from reserves.

Rabbit Stupidity

For various reasons some folk, including officials are opposing the use of calicivirus to destroy our Public Enemy Number One, the rabbit.

The most stupid excuse is that once the rabbit is gone foxes and feral cats will attack our native animals.

In the Sydney Morning Herald of 23 August appeared the following item ' . . . At Hattah in Victoria, mallee fowl monitoring has shown a higher level of nest abandonment and egg predation by foxes since RCV arrived . . . '

First I doubt if there ever was any monitoring before the virus got loose. With myxomatosis only a few studies were made on the rabbit drop and the effect on the numbers of native wildlife.

As one would expect there was no change in native mammal numbers. When the main food of foxes and feral cats crashes, so too do the numbers of the predators so pressure is lessened.

Getting rid of rabbits has seen a miraculous recovery of plants, not seen for generations and the increase of the plants the native animals will soon follow.

What is important is that warren ripping and poisoning with 1080 should be increased when the rabbits go. Laziness in the past lost the advantages of mxyomatosis.

The Hon. David Wotton SA Minister for the Environment

Dear David,

Having just returned from a tour of the Coogie Lakes region as well as other parks in the desert. I was favourably impressed by the various service personnel I met and the conditions both in the national and regional parks.

Senior Ranger Phil Srachan filled me in with details of your intention to make the desert region planning a single unit based at Port Augusta.

We were also impressed with the cleanliness of the camp sites. We brought in our own firewood but suggest some long term plans should be made so local station owners can create suitable tree farms to supply firewood for campers.

Allowing local farmers to profit from tourism seems to us to be a good way to gain local co-operation.

The proposed exploration for oil and gas by Santos did disturb us since this is a RAMSAR protected site. I enclose the fact sheet from the SA Conservation Council which gives all the details of their importance. Such desert wetlands can be destroyed easily through unwise changes.

Our Society sponsorship of Regional Parks is a major reason why this concept is becoming more popular around Australia. Though normal activities are allowed to continue such as farming and mining this is always under a conservation 'umbrella'.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, the world's largest Regional Park shows how this can be carried out. However on this coral kingdom certain reefs are given total protection, even visits from tourists being limited. We suggest the same should apply to Coongie Lakes.

The Conservation Council indicates these are only one percent of the total area in the region leased by Santos. Surely this company should be generous enough to forgo exploiting this wetland for the sake of a little more profit. This would gain them wide public support.

More than twenty years ago Rupert Murdoch was granted equally generous rights to mine the jarrah and wandoo forests for bauxite. Among these was Dryandra Forest, an important haven of wildlife in general and numbats in particular. Our Society wrote to Mr Murdoch who at the time was the managing director of the mining company and said if he destroyed Dryandra it would be act of sacrilige.

To our pleasure a week later he wrote to say he had written to the West Australian premier saying his company was relinquishing their mining rights to the forest. This kind of generosity is not common but we hope Santos will be equally responsive when we appeal to them.

All the best in your future work for the SA Environment.

Vincent Serventy, AM
President

Two letters to Pam Allan, NSW Minister for the Environment

Dear Minister,

Before raising an 'enormous injection of funds to save the eastern bristlebird' as suggested in the SMH of 12 August our Society suggests a better way would be to offer a smaller injection of funds to Birds Australia, the premier scientific body on our bird species, to do some preliminary research on the best conservation methods.

The solution may lie in Western Australia. In that State vast advances have been made but these tend to be ignored in the east. For example the equally endangered and closely related western bristlebird has had the populations in one reserve raised from 80 pairs in 1876 to 100 pairs in 1982. Perhaps they have the solution to the problem . . . '

' . . . Congratulations on the work being carried out to save the wildlife of the Cumberland Plains. It would be good to see the whole of the Silverwater Nature Reserve being created at last.

Also as stressed before though tending to be ignored even by some conservationist popular writers, the loss of plant and animal species is not due so much to the spread of suburbia but by competition with introduced species such as rabbits, foxes and feral cats. In the suburbs the main damage to remnant bushland is through domestic cats and dogs which ravage these.

The sooner we can get an Eastern Shield underway the better for our wildlife.

Quoll Vadis

Zoologist Tim Flannery told the sad story of the disappearance of the eastern quoll around Sydney. He also described the destruction of other wildlife which he stressed and causes noted as long ago as 1879. The culprit. Housing spreading like a lava flow to devour the bushland.

Suburbia has spread even more rapidly since then yet what are the facts? There can be few world cities which have Sydney's area conserved as national parks. There can be few cities which have saved slabs of bushland from development even closer to the city heart.

When we came to Sydney we found the bushland lining the Lane Cove River ran almost to our front garden. Our friendly next door neighbour told me how on moonlit nights he roamed with his spade to kill bandicoots digging in his pristine lawn. In vain I pointed out that the diggers were interested in the insects in the soil, not his lawn. Fortunatlely most of the folk in our little enclave were not keen gardeners so the bandicoots survived. So too were the ringtails which had a sleeping nest in a tree in our garden, while brushtail possums thumped on our roof at night as they foraged for food. Fortunately our house was possum proofed so they could not use it as a commodious and comfortable artificial tree hollow.

I have a great admiration for Tim Flannery's work as a zoologist. However that does not extend to his conservation ideas. Not all scientists are also good conservationists.

In this article towards the close he mentions how we can save our urban wildlife yet the bulk of the text tells of disaster. Most readers will lose the tiny message at the end.

Tim Flannery's story of destruction is echoed by governments, even by many conservationists and by wildlife authorities.

The Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia has often been a voice crying in the wilderness. We have tried to educate our political masters with little success. Blaming humans is much easier.

The major reason for Sydney wildlife going is not the creep of suburbia but attacks by domestic cats and dogs, with in the patches of bushland, feral cats and foxes.

These have brought disaster to our ground living marsupials. Those three ecological enemies the rabbit, the fox and the feral cat are responsible for our shocking wildlife losses. Most mammals cannot fly. Our birds have suffered few losses, even with all the clearing for houses because we have kept our islands of bushland. Even the platypus is safe since cats and dogs do not swim in our streams.

Tim Flannery wrote at the close of his article 'control of foxes and cats along with judicious reintroductions could see the come back of many lost species.'

In the last decade we have watched what is happening in Western Australia. Here we have seen our future and it works!

All governments have ignored our advice with one notable exception, Western Australia. Not that I am claiming our Society changed the minds of their scientists. Perhaps there is something in the western air which makes folks risk their arms and have a go at dealing with wildlife problems. To slightly change a famous poetic phrase 'A human reach should exceed his grasp or what's a heaven for'.

The western reach is long and extends over millions of hectares of bushland.

A letter from Syd Shea, Director of CALM writes 'We have done the ground work that the rest of Australia should be building on'.

The ground work has culminated in the programme known as Western Shield, this is a bold attempt to reduce the numbers of foxes and feral cats to about twenty percent of their present totals. At this level the native species can outbreed them.

All those animals, or closely related species mentioned by Tim Flannery, have recovered in test programmes in the West. Chuditch, the western quoll, woylies, a small pademelon once on the threatened list, numbats, ringtail possums, rock wallabies are all returning in large numbers.

Perhaps developers might also go west.

There must be something in the air. Western companies are helping to fund Western Shield. Even twenty years ago the same conversion happened to Rupert Murdoch.

At the time he was managing director of Alwest granted mining leases over much of the jarrah and wandoo forests. One of these was Dryandra, a beautiful woodland, the sole surviving home of that most handsome of all our marsupials, the numbat.

We wrote to Murdoch, stating that to destroy Dyranda would be sacrilege. To our pleased surprise he agreed and told the premier his company was relinquishing the right to mine that forest, sacrificing millions of potential royalties in terms of bauxite mining.

We have written to Santos suggesting they should follow that good example by giving up the one percent of their lease area which holds Coongie Lakes, a desert wetland of immense wildlife value.

We are waiting for Santos reply with interest and hope.

NOTE: All the work we do trying to save patches of bushland is a waste of time. Removing pest animals is the first step in all our bush while the second is to reintroduce what we have lost, from the few remaining spots where luck has enabled their survival. The first is the essential first step, which also applies to our national parks as well as smaller pieces of bushland.

The rabbit calicivirus
The Editor
Sydney Morning Herald

In the SMH of 23 August there was an article titled 'Nature is winning the war against the rabbit virus'. The implication is that this is a good thing, not a disaster for our native plants and animals.

The article also trots out an old myth.

'. . . But in arid and semi-arid sites where RCV rabbit mortality is as high as 95 percent, feral cats and foxes, deprived of their traditional prey, are decimating native animals and birds . . . '

I know of no solid evidence for this statement. Indeed from many years ago with myxomatosis, when rabbit numbers collapsed, so too did the number of the predators. Commonsense indicated that such a drop is to be expected on an abundant food supply goes, in this case the rabbits which provided the staple food of both cats and foxes.

It is important that measures to control the remaining feral cats and foxes should continue, as is being done most effectively in Western Australia.

Vincent Serventy, AM
President

Membership form...



WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA, INC.

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

Membership

Why not become a member of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc?

Simply fill out this form.

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Address: .....

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

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Consider – A Bequest

Another way 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

President