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Journal of the Wildlife Preservation Society
of Australia Inc. (Founded 1909)

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Wildlife



The Federal Member for Cook, Bruce Baird MP representing Senator Robert Hill officially launch the Draft Plan of Management for the Towra Point Nature Reserve. (See full story on page 16)

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



'AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE'

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

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

Print Post Approval No. PP243459/00117

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REGIONAL COUNCILLORS

We would like to hear from our country members, anywhere in Australia who would like to become regional councillors. The value to us is we would have a more intimate relationship with women and men who have a knowledge which could be valuable for conservation.

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

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

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From the Presidents Desk...

I was talking to a West Australian friend and she complained.

"I get very bored seeing all those Tasmanian blue gums farmers are planting these days."

"Bored?" I replied. "Those are fascinating trees. One of the most famous of our eucalypts. Admired by the French explorers and the Dutch".

"Too much of a good thing", was her response.

I then gave my stock reply.

"Are you bored with fields of wheat. Fields of pasture with sheep and cattle grazing. Paddocks of yellow sunflowers and canola?"

"That's different. We need those for food."

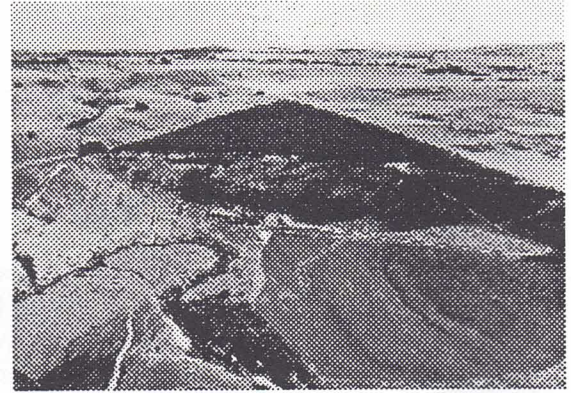
"They're all foreign imports. What's wrong with farmers replacing them with timber crops which pay better and the Japanese pay cash now not in a few years time.

I went on to explain about carbon credits to counter greenhouse gases since trees are marvelous carbon-dioxide sinks. Also the more such plantations the less the use of native forests. My old friend Dame Rachel Cleland who was a sturdy helper when we did battle together to save Kings Park and the Swan River.

We saved the first but not the second but in conservation you don't win them all.

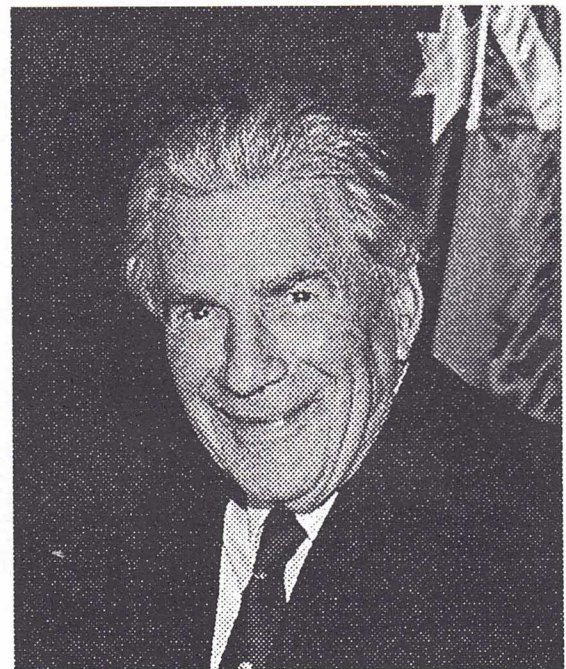
Also we cannot expect to keep all our bushland. Ten thousand years ago most of England was covered with oak trees. Most were cleared by English gather-hunters to make game more plentiful. Later fire was used to grow foreign crops. Every nation should whenever possible grow all its own food and material for clothing. Australia does grow enough and exports food and clothing materials for another thirty million folk as well as catering very well for our own eighteen million.

Nature conservation is all about sustainability and farmers as well as Landcare groups are busy repairing the mistakes of the past so we can continue to do so in the future.



Pine plantations are not as useful for most native wildlife but they make good carbon sinks and provide timber for houses. Also food for black cockatoos.

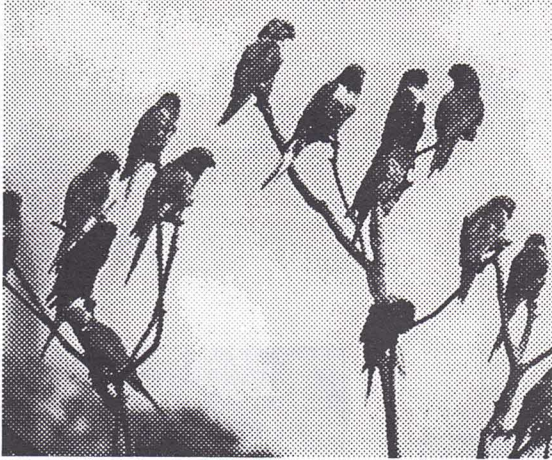
Not everyone loves our animals. Listening to a radio broadcast I heard a New Zealander describing how they were hunting the few hundred lori-keets which had escaped and were flourishing in this foreign land. The wildlife officer explained they were forcing out native birds and though only a few now, they should soon become pests.



Vincent Serventy, AM President

Just as the brushtail possum is a major destroyer of forest plantations as well as farm crops. Forty million dollars a year it was costing the government.

I remembered how the rainbow lorikeets in the west began with a single individual at first, then a few years later found a mate and soon the birds were in large flocks. It was then decided to remove them before it was too late. The west had plenty of the parrot tribe of their own and did not want these eastern interlopers.



Rainbow lorikeets are problem birds to farmers in the Darwin area.

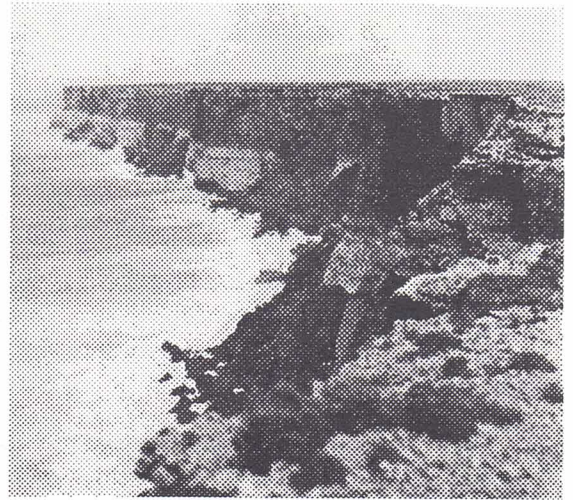
Good News on Blue Whales

Many years ago blue whales, the largest animals that live today were so common they made fortunes for the whalers who slaughtered them. 360,000 were killed in the Antarctic.

Then came a more humane period to allow whales of all kinds to recover. The gray whales of the North Pacific are today back in their old numbers, creating a new industry, whale watching. The same is happening in other parts of the world particularly in Australia where right whales and humpbacks are the ecotourism targets.

It was feared the blue whales which once grew more than thirty metres and weighed one hundred and fifty tonnes were gone. A report by Bob Beale in the Bulletin has encouraging news. The recently declared regional park in the Great Australian Bight appears to be a stronghold for some blues.

In this region south-easterly winds in summer and autumn blow away the surface warm water, allowing cool water to rise. This creates conditions for the breeding of krill in huge swarms. This is ideal food of blue whales.



A viewing platform for Blue Whales on the Great Australian Bight.

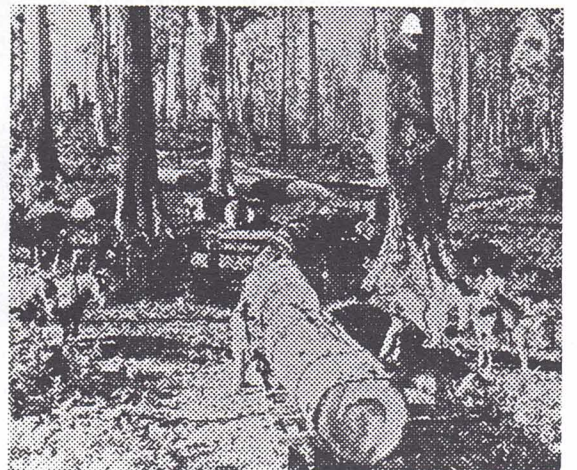
This may be the only place outside the Antarctic which provides ideal feeding grounds since some of the krill schools have been estimated at one kilometre in length.

The world has been given a second chance to save the most magnificent of creatures. We must not fail the blue!

Clearfelling

Have you ever wondered why there has never been any conservation argument about native forests in Queensland?

Here is the reason sent in a letter from Rod Wilford, the Minister for the Environment in that State.



Selective logging, a picture from 1895.

Dear Mr Serventy,

Thanks for your letter in relation to clearfelling in State forests. I understand your question about clearfelling relates specifically to native forests and not plantations. Since these are planted for wood production these may be clearfelled.

In Queensland unlike other States of Australia the wood production in our native State forests is managed through a selection system rather than a clearfell system.

Individual trees are selected consistent with logging rules which specify the size and type of trees to be logged and the spacing of trees to be retained. You can be assured that I have no intention of permitting clearfelling to occur in Queensland's State owned native forests.

PS. It was a pleasure to receive your support.

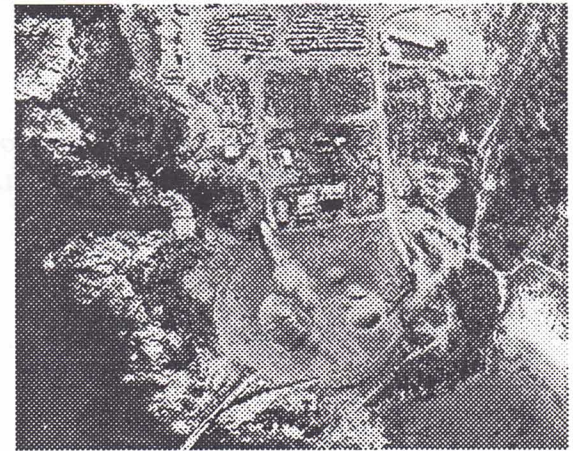
Congratulations. It is to be hoped other States will soon follow.



Boneseed flower. An attractive plant but it takes over all the surrounding bushland.



Clearfelling in NSW; a picture taken in the 1970's.



Woodchips at Eden; our forests heading overseas to make paper.

Plantations

ECOS in its last issue discusses how plantations are the way of the future. The current global estimate is about fifteen million hectares a year while some countries are controlling destruction of present forests.

Australia has its regional forest agreements. Farmers are being encouraged to plant trees as a new source of income and also to help counter salinity. Aborigines in arid areas are being encouraged to plant acacias for their nutritious seeds. Many towns are developing tree farms nourished by sewage effluent. Soon carbon credits will be in full swing and at our EARTH 2000 conference we will have a special session dealing with this method of curbing greenhouse warming.

Weeds

One of our major problems. Some are beginning to be as disastrous as prickly pear was years ago. Scientists at the CSIRO are busy searching for biological controls.

These are the ones at present being studied. Water hyacinth. Mimosa pigra, a potential problem at Kakadu, bitou bush brought to Australia from South Africa to stabilise sand disturbed by rutle morning and its close relative bitou bush which has invaded bushland areas. Scotch broom, a problem in the Barrington Tops and other farming areas. Arum Lily, bridal creeper and St John's wort, though some of this is being harvested for sale by farmers since it has medicines.

All these activities at least show we are doing some good things for the environment.

Fire

Prescribed burning is common in many native forests. Usually a six year interval is used to get rid of fuel loads to counter wildfires. However often eight to ten years is needed to allow nutrients to build again after a fire.

Also in heathlands need their own treatment if the quality of the ecosystem is to be kept. Or in other words each type of habitat as with each national park needs careful study to produce the best results in terms of why the land was originally reserved.

World Population

According to the Times of London, India's population will top one billion by the end of August. One stupid UN Indian economist stated that was no problem. "We don't need a one child policy." China is pushing that with western do-gooders complaining loudly but remaining silent when asked should the Developed World take all those extra babies. And the Indian ones and the African ones. Why should our cultures sacrifice quality of life for the thoughtless?

Perhaps the Indian economist is looking for a clash between India and Pakistan. Wars were the old method of trimming the surplus of children. It is not a solution which appeals to conservationists.

A Great Man Dies

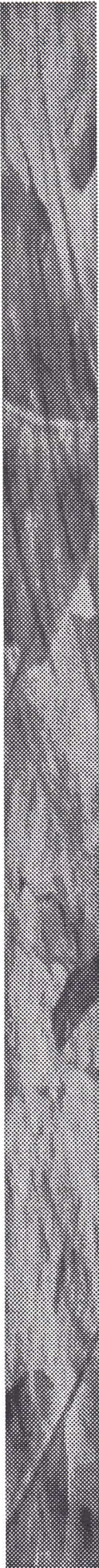
Australia's greatest landscape architect and also a great conservationist, being the first president of the WA Conservation Council died in August. John Oldham was fearless and risked his government job fighting for his beliefs. He is survived by his wife, a co-worker for the cause. His best memorial would be the funding of an annual talk 'The Oldhams'. There one of the younger professional could show the way ahead.

Saving Old Growth Forests

This has a long history in Australia. In 1866, an educated Irishman, John Boyle O' Reilly joined the fenians, a group trying to save his home country from ethnic cleansing, was captured and sentenced to death in England. Even in those days there were enough Englishmen shocked at what their governments were doing so this was commuted to twenty years gaol as a convict. Luckily for O'Reilly he was sent to Western Australia where discipline was less severe.



Karri forest.



Put on a chain gang to clear a road from Bunbury to Vasse he saw a wonderful tree, probably a karri. He pleaded with the warden to save this magnificent specimen which stood in the way of the new road. He told his wife about the audacity of this convict. She had a look at the tree and agreed so the road direction was saved.

All this back in 1868. We are indebted to Dr Gallop, the leader of the opposition for this piece of history. He was speaking in Parliament in an attempt to save modern old growth forests in 1999.

O' reilly escaped from the west, became a famous author in the United States, that haven of all wanted freedom from the oppression of Europe, helped rescue six fellow Fenians from Western Australia in 1876, wrote many books including one on the history of convict life in WA, travelled the United States lecturing on the needs for freedom for Ireland to die worn out in 1890, only 46 years old.

Surely we can save the old growth forests a hundred years on!

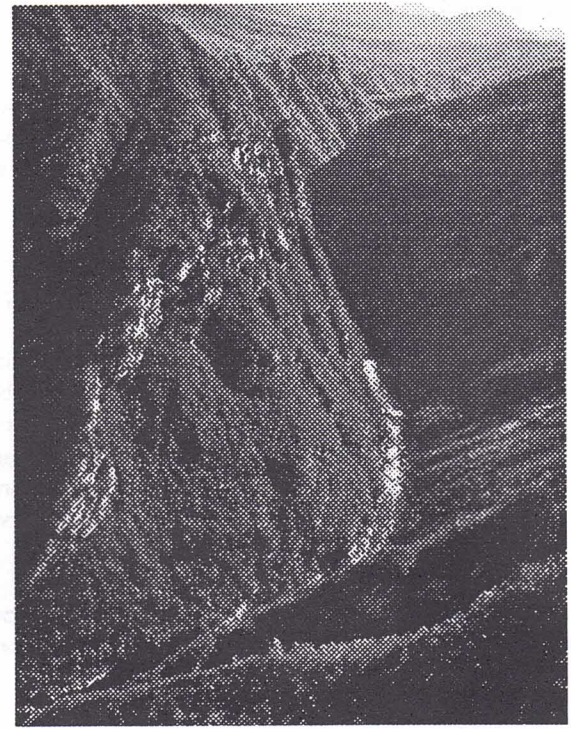
What is Wrong with the New Laws?

Most of the powers on the environment have been handed back to the States. In the past international conventions like that of dealing with the World Heritage sites saved the Franklin, Tropical Rainforests, the Great Barrier Reef and Sharks Bay. Now no new convention can be signed unless the States agree. Can you imagine the Petersen's of the future signing away any power over the Great Barrier Reef! He refused to hand over control of Reef Islands.

Professor Bob Fowler, the Director of the Australian Centre for Environmental Law at the University of Adelaide wrote " ...the amended Bill is still inferior to the existing schemes of ad hoc triggers for Commonwealth assessment and approval in relation to environmental matters..."

If it's not broke don't fix it!

In the next issue we will deal with changes to the GST organised with great acclaim by the Australian Democrats. Has anyone managed to keep any politician honest? By honest we read keeping their promises, even those not 'set in concrete' in the Prime Minister's words.



The Franklin River.

Regional Water Supply for the Clarence Valley

We have had a reply to our letter supporting the request from our regional councillor Ralph Berman. As this letter indicates Ralph will be giving evidence. Later when he gets in touch we will indicate in our magazine progress or otherwise. Here is the response from the general manager.

Thank you for your letter dated 2nd April 1999.

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Project has been on public exhibition and the exhibition period closed on 1st March 1999. The Lower Clarence County Council received ninety-one submissions and the issues raised will be addressed in a Response Report currently being prepared. The Report will be available to the public at the time of determination of the Project, when written responses will be forwarded to all parties who lodged submissions.

The local community members named in your letter, Mr Ralph Berman and Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition, have lodged EIS submissions and issues raised by them will be addressed in the Response Report, and in separate written responses which will be forwarded to them. You may wish to then liaise with Mr Berman and the Coalition regarding responses to the specific issues raised in their submissions.

I have enclosed for your information a copy of the Project's EIS summary brochure, together with a brochure which outlines the two major components of the Regional Water Supply Strategy, namely the Regional Water Supply Project and the Regional Water Efficiency Program. The Strategy has been developed by Local Government, State Government and the community, working together to ensure the region has a sustainable, secure and affordable bulk water supply.

Extensive studies have been undertaken in the development of the Regional Water Supply Project, including investigation of various alternatives to taking freshwater from the rivers - such as desalination, household rainwater tanks and use of treated greywater.

The Project has been designed to meet water consumption demands to 2021. This allows more flexibility to use technologies in the future and to achieve Council's commitment to pursue alternative water sources as a way of reducing future demands on the river system beyond the year 2021.

During the Project investigations, community consultation has played a major role and has significantly influenced the development of the Project. Various consultation tools have been utilised to facilitate two-way communication between the Council and the community, and these tools are outlined in the enclosed EIS Summary brochure. Notable outcomes of the consultation include the introduction of the rigorous Regional Water Efficiency Program, a change of the proposed storage site from Kangaroo Creek to Shannon Creek, a reduced design horizon from 2046 to 2021 and commissioning of additional studies examining issues of particular concern to the community.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact the Project Office.

Yours faithfully

Ian Preston
General Manager LCCC

The Torres Strait Pigeon

We have had a plea for help from Margaret Thorsborne regarding the nesting islands of this beautiful bird. We looked up our files and found a story from the war years when one of our members was returning from a visit to a coral cave, when a fog came in and they did not know where the mainland was.

Suddenly out of the mist a group of pigeons flew over the boat. Knowing it was near dark they knew these all white pigeons were heading for their nesting island. Other people had used them as a compass. An article written by an old friend, Michael Sharland published in the old wildlife magazine told the story of their nesting while an article in the Emu for 1988, the scientific publication of Birds Australia had been written by Margaret and her late husband.

She was alarmed that the management plans for Hinchinbrook and the nesting islands had been prepared '...still have not been released after three years in their present form and after some twelve years altogether...'

We have written to the Minister so hopefully something may finally be done.

The picture was taken by Stan White who was a member of the party with Michael Sharland.



The Torres Strait Pigeon.

The Seas

WWF has begun a new campaign to restore the beauty and value of the oceans of the world. Australia must take care of our own extensive coastline and adjoining seas we control.

First for some comments. Had dolphins the naming of planet Earth they would have called it Oceanmus. Seventy percent of our globe is covered with water. The seas contain half of our biodiversity and supply much of the protein needs of humans.



Mangroves like seagrass beds are the nurseries for much marine life.

WWF records that one hectare of seagrass beds in the United States can produce a million dollars of products annually. Our own seagrass and mangrove areas are just as valuable.

WWF have produced a score card for each State. Here is their list on sewage only.

New South Wales. Most of Sydney's sewage has primary treatment only and is discharged into the ocean.

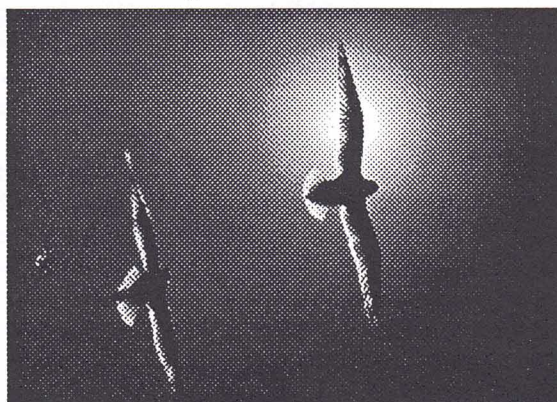
Victoria. The position is fair with most sewage given secondary treatment.

Queensland. Fair with sewage discharge in the Brisbane region a major cause of total pollution load.

Tasmania. Most sewage given secondary treatment. Large sections of coastline unpolluted.

South Australia. Poor sewage discharge causes large scale loss of seagrass beds and an increase in algal blooms.

Western Australia. Perth discharges sewage into the ocean but the rest of the State is in good condition, mainly due to a small coastal population than wise management.



Silver gulls in flight.

Follow up on the Poisoning of Cockatoos in Victoria



Corellas collect in huge flocks. In some parts of Australia they are highly regarded since they eat the seeds of pest weeds.

Dr Bill McInnes wrote.

"Further to my phone conversation here is some more information regarding the Kennet Government's action to use off label insecticides and other chemicals to poison long-billed corellas, sulphur crested cockatoos and galahs in the Wimmera of Western Victoria".

The Minister, Mrs Tehan, has used a loophole in the law clauses of the 'Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994' or the Wildlife Act 1975 to circumvent the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986. She has authorised the 'off label use of insecticides as such as organophosphates and carbonates, examples of former being malathion. Off label use is normally illegal.

Poisoning birds or other animals with these chemicals is extremely cruel and is also indiscriminate. Other sister society Birds Australia has issued a media release stating this action is a threat to our wildlife. The official government reports there is no reason to change the policies advocated in that report. Frankly if that is the only way particular farmers can survive, the sooner they took up some other occupation the better. One farmer writing in protest stated '...damage caused by corellas, cockatoos and galahs is only sporadic... The overall affect of this legislation is likely to be an increase in crop losses rather than a decrease, as well as the death of protected wildlife...'.
 10



Galahs are among the most beautiful members of the parrot family. They have now spread from the outback and are common in several capital cities.

Control Measures

The first method used was with some shooting to establish the link between loud noises and danger. Several hides were also built so shooting could be done from the shelter. The person wears bright clothing and become as obvious as possible before entering the hide. Scarecrows are also used.

Scare guns are introduced only early and late in the day when birds are likely to be feeding on the crop. Shooting was also added to this method.

People were given education material and encouraged not to feed birds. Also spillage during transport controlled. A huge variety of ideas has been studied yet it appears no adequate study has been made on damage in terms of monetary loss caused by bird attack compared to loss through other causes including drought, insect attack, loss while harvesting etc. Also no mention of use of alarm calls as with other bird pests, 'white noise' to blanket contact calls made by birds when feeding.

The planting of screening plants to offer alternative food has been trialled with some success as well as the use of screens for valuable crops. Nylon netting is now used in many parts of Australia with great success against a variety of wildlife attacks on various crops.

Letter to the Victorian Minister The Hon. Marie Tehan from our Society.

Dear Mrs Tehan,

Further to our previous letter, we have now been able to study the report on the cockatoo problem by the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. It is rare to find such detailed and wide ranging studies and the Department is to be congratulated on their work.

However, a careful reading of this by your officers will surely lead to a re-consideration of the poisoning methods being recommended.

First our Society accepts that certain species of wildlife can cause problems to farmers in general and other humans in particular.

This means that the first step must be to assess the economics of the problem before governments are justified in spending large sums of money. The report - page 52 - sought such economic data but found 'it does not exist'.

On page XV it sets out what action should be taken and with these our Society agrees. We agree in particular that 'does not support the capture and export of wild cockatoos.' We have given evidence to a number of enquiries detailing why this will not lessen the problem.

Next the committee 'does not support the use of poison to kill wildlife.' We agree wholeheartedly. Regarding crop damage the committee found this varies and in the case of small scale farmers can be much more severe than for larger farms. Perhaps the solution might be in such cases that an inspection of damage might lead to monetary compensation, as is done for example, in the United States where damage from wildlife in adjoining national parks is examined and assessed. Similarly, in regional parks in England, damage by hikers on farms is also examined and assessed and compensation paid.

Our society recommends that all activities be put on hold until a well organised public meeting be held in the Wimmera where all points of view can be brought forward. With adequate media coverage so that not only will justice be done but also be seen to be done.

We are not familiar with the region so leave the choice of venue to your office though we have local members who could give advice on both location and the organisations which should be contacted to ensure the widest possible coverage both of farmers, scientists and conservation organisations.

Woodlands

Birds Australia has initiated a new woodlands appeal. This habitat of temperate woodlands has suffered most through white settlement with eighty percent having been cleared for farming. It is among the most attractive of our bushland and contains many attractive species of our wildlife.

Sadly, half woodland birds are in decline. Birds Australia is to make a study of Queensland woodlands which will enable similar work to be carried out in that state similar to what is being done in New South Wales with the cooperation of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

When we complain our local national park staff are not doing enough, remember they have wide demands on their skills.



Dryandra woodland, today a nature reserve, once under threat from bauxite mining and saved when media magnate Rupert Murdoch agreed with our view that its destruction would be sacrilege.

Koalas

ECOS is an excellent journal published by the Australian government. However, the last issue has two strange articles. One is on koalas, the other on what to do with sewage.

First the koalas. In spite of the immense interest in this charming marsupial and its huge range which once covered the whole of Australia since fossils have been found in south-western Australia. Also zoo animals flourish on local eucalypts and there is no doubt that if released in the bush they would flourish. Possibly the lyrebird also did well in the wet forests and if released, would succeed just as well as in Tasmania.



Translocation in Victoria. How shocking to suggest shooting our most loved animals.

The Australian Koala Foundation estimates there are between 45,000 - 80,000 nationally. Yet they want the species listed as endangered by the World Conservation Union. Fortunately they have refused. Acceptance would make all their listings absurd.

Also the old myth about the dangers of lack of genetic variation. Most of the translocated animals came from French Island in Victoria and have done very well, too well in some places. Yet is the worry important? Think of that handful of wild rabbits brought to Australia more than a hundred years ago. Today they show no signs of facing extinction with that limited genetic inheritance.

What of brushtail possums? Taken to New Zealand they became as great a pest as rabbits in Australia. Take one district in the South Island. Twenty four released in 1894 and twelve in 1895. In 1912 sixty thousand skins were taken for the market.

There are many other examples around the world ranging through mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish without even mentioning invertebrates. No, lack of genetic variation does not seem essential to survival.

We still hold to our original position. The safest solution is translocation of surplus animals to as many locations as possible. Let the animals decide which trees they need.



The brushtail possum, as big a pest in New Zealand as the rabbit is in Australia.

Sewage

The ECOS articles does agree that re-use seems the best option for the long term. What we cannot understand is why the 'experts' do not travel overseas to study what other nations are doing or have done for hundreds of years.

To give only one example. In one house in Sydney a housholder has its own treatment plant in the backyard. The waste water with its load phosphates and nitrogen is used to nourish her garden.

The cost? One fifth of the charge levied on those connected to the sewerage system with its huge expenditures on pipes and final wasteful solution of ocean outfalls.

This in the driest inhabited continent.

What a waste of good water to use it as a transporting agent for our effluents!

Crows

These birds have a bad reputation. There are a number of reasons. First they are black, the symbol of death. Secondly, they are blamed for what is the fault of humans, the disappearance of small birds from our gardens. The real causes of their going are first domestic cats.

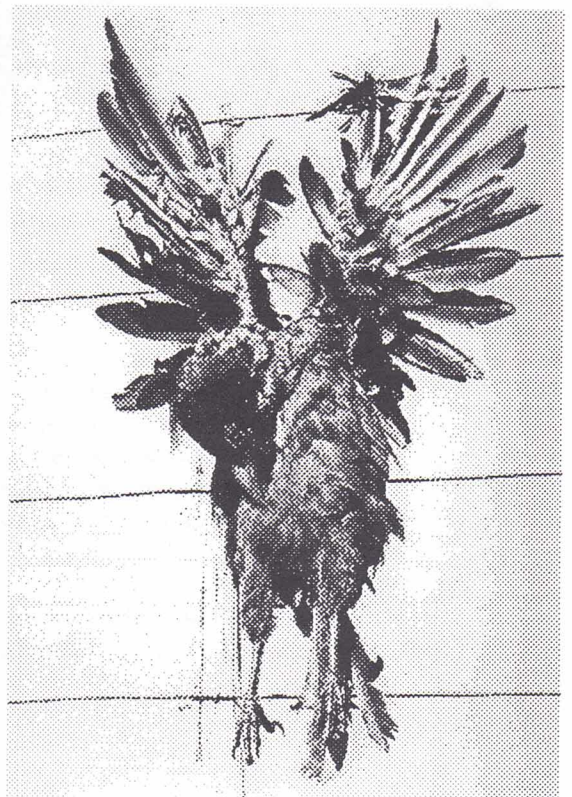
Secondly, pesticides, thirdly, European garden plants which offer little food or shelter for most of our native species and a few dozen more reasons though that is enough to go on with.

They have raucous voices but for the bird student those calls conceal a variety of messages for other crows.

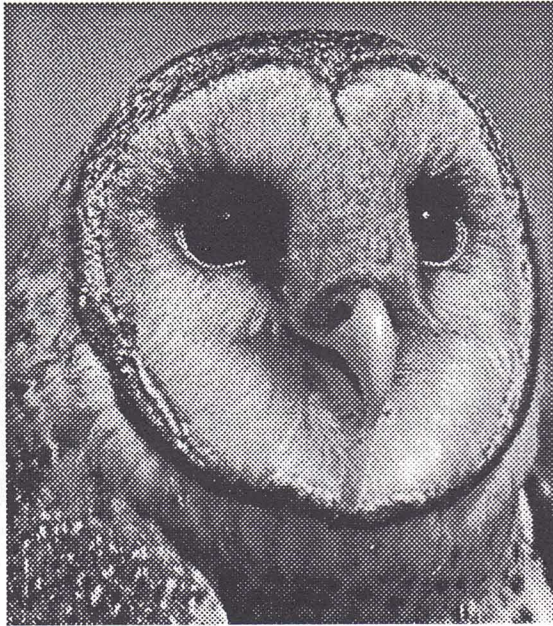


All members of the crow family will be at risk.

Certainly they are among the more intelligent of birds. The father of Australia, Joseph Banks on his wanderings along the east coast with Captain Cook found shooting local crows very difficult and wrote that while English crows were renowned for their intelligence they were fools compared to the Australian species.



The bad old days when farmers thought the only good bird was a dead bird.



All kinds of owls will suffer including this masked owl.



A sick bird is a welcome item for brown hawks.

Also crows are useful scavengers as well as eaters of insects. Their habit of pecking the eyes out of dying lambs while earning them farmer's dislike, only happens when the animal is near death. Certainly black kites also do the same with dead and dying fish so it appears eyeballs must be nutritious.

There are 43 world species and Australia has five, six sometimes when Asiatic crows reach our shores.

Cockatoo Poisoning

Birds Australia has a media release on this topic after Victoria took a long leap backwards into the bad old days. A long list of poisons including organophosphates can be used to kill the offending cockatoos.

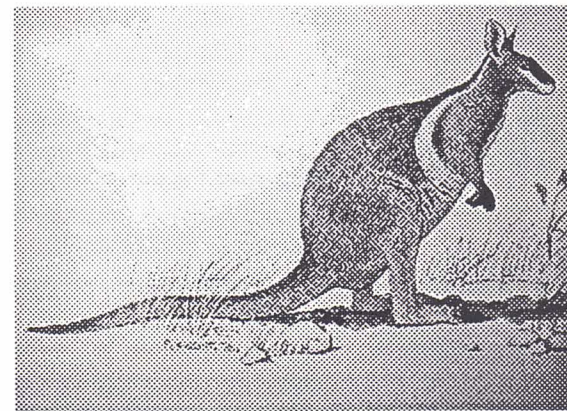
Greedy and non-caring farmers can use these to target any species they regard as a pest. To prosecute farmers the wildlife officers will have to prove deliberate intent and resources are slender in this area of economic rationalism.

So animals such as kangaroos, wallabies, parrots, crows, broilgas and waterfowl which eat grain.

Most birds of prey will be at risk since they will eat sick or any prey weakened by such poisons. Even broilgas and larger herons will suffer. This is not wild speculation as Birds Australia has cases of this happening in several States.

So the next time you visit Victoria remember that the government while keeping humans reasonably safe has declared warfare against any wildlife which irritates any farmer, even for the most flimsy of reasons.

Nailtail Wallabies



Bridled Nail-tailed Wallaby.

Once the most common of our marsupials but agricultural clearing destroyed much of the shrub shelter needed to protect them from predators. Rabbits ate the shrubs not eaten by sheep and cattle, while foxes and feral cats added to the native predators. For a time it was considered they were extinct until a small colony was found in southern Queensland.

(cont. page 19)

Towra Point Nature Reserve

Official Launch of the Draft Plans of Management

Monday 16th August 1999

An Address by Minister Bob Debus.

I welcome you all to Towra Point and to the launch of these two documents, the draft Plan of Management for Towra Point Nature Reserve and the Strategic Plan for the Towra International Wetlands.

The wetlands behind us today contain half of Sydney's remaining mangrove forests, more than 90% of our city's saltmarshes, and extensive seagrass beds. These habitats provide the driving force for the rich aquatic environments of Botany Bay.

The large intertidal zone is the feeding ground for the annual international visitors, the migratory waders. These birds travel halfway around the globe each year in pursuit of the perpetual summer - much like the tourists who share the same ambition, but travel by jumbo jet to arrive on the opposite side of the Bay.

Probably the best known of the reserve's international feathered travellers is the Little Tern. A productive breeding colony for these animals is located on the western side of Towra Point, where more than a hundred congregate each summer.



Bruce Baird, Federal Member for Cook, receiving a Towra Coffee Mug after launching the Draft Plan of Management.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service, under a National Wetland Program grant, is currently conducting research on the distribution and behaviour of several of these migratory wader species once they arrive at Botany Bay.

The terrestrial area of the reserve is also of considerable interest. It contains a relic littoral rainforest community, which is listed as an endangered ecological community. Other flora includes the stand of Magenta Brush Cherry where the species was first recorded by European science. In addition to the waders, a number of rare terrestrial bird populations are found on Towra, notably the White Fronted Chat.

These values underpin this area's gazettal as a nature reserve and its listing as an internationally significant RAMSAR wetland. This protection and recognition also owes much to those who have lobbied for so long on behalf of this place, including Mr Bernie Clarke, who is with us here today.

All around us are the signs of major developments. The building of the port, the extension of the runway and, most significantly, the dredging of the entrance to Botany Bay all have changed the dynamics of the Bay - especially the powerful forces of waves and tide that shape its environment. Day to day this change may go unnoticed, yet major storms, like that of a few weeks ago which saw a 7 metre swell on a 2 metre tide, now send waves crashing onto Towra Point in a way rarely seen only two decades ago.

The result is the erosion that we see on Towra Beach and the destruction of trees along its shoreline. The results of such dramatic episodes are evident to any observer. Added to these are longer-term changes, such as the gradual movement of sand westward along Towra Beach and around on to the area known as the "elephants trunk" and Spit Island.



President Vincent Serventy and Councillor John Clarke about to board the ferry for the launch on Botany Bay.

A myriad of decision makers are involved in these changes to the Bay. While this reserve itself falls under the responsibility of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, threats to Towra Point mostly derive from outside the reserve. The idea that the Towra wetlands can be managed in isolation from their neighbours and the broader Botany bay context is simply untenable.

Accordingly, National Parks recognises that it cannot possibly "go it alone" in managing Towra Point. These wetlands need to be managed in a co-operative, holistic fashion.

Impacts on the Towra wetlands - whether through erosion, weed invasion or inappropriate recreational use - must become issues over which the entire community, from local conservationists through to corporate neighbours, assumes a degree of responsibility and ownership. The public exhibition of these plans is an important first step in that process.

Today we are releasing the *Draft Plan of Management for the Towra Point Nature Reserve*. It is an important document, one which will guide National Park's management of the nature reserve.

However, the critical point is that this document goes hand in hand with another, the *Strategic Plan for the Towra International Wetlands*. This wider strategy looks at management of the wetland system as a whole and the contributions to be made by all players with a stake in this area's future.

This approach of producing "dual and complementary plans" is a truly important shift in the way that we address the issues of Towra. These plans make a commitment to a regime of co-operation and integration, not to the shifting of blame.

It is with pleasure that I acknowledge the contribution of Federal Environment Minister Robert Hill in progressing these plans. A grant under the National Wetlands Program funded much of the work on the plans and investigation into the issue of erosion impacts and their control.

The plans we are launching today confirm that erosion control is the highest priority for the protection of Towra Point.

The remainder of these Federal funds, together with an additional and very welcome \$25,000 grant from Senator Hill - which I am pleased to say will be matched by an equal contribution from the NSW Government - will enable the preparation of an Environment Impact Statement for erosion control works to protect Towra Beach and its adjoining aquatic habitats.

This EIS, the next step in the process of ensuring the long-term survival of Towra Point and its values, will ensure that whatever erosion control strategy is chosen is credible and free of unexpected or unacceptable environmental impacts.



Secretary, Patrick Medway chaired the Official Ceremony for the launch.



The Official Party on deck for the Official Launch of the Draft Plan of Management

The proposals to be assessed in the EIS also bear significant costs - costs that need to be tested against community expectations for the site and consideration of how these costs of site protection and remediation should be met.

I can assure you that the NSW Government is committed to the protection of Towra Point and I will be making pursuit of lasting solutions for Towra a personal priority. However, these solutions must be pursued in concert with our Federal environmental colleagues, corporate neighbours, and the wider Botany Bay community as represented by the Towra Point Steering Committee.

I would also like especially acknowledge the role of this Steering Committee in the preparation of the plans and organisation of today's launch. From the outset, it was agreed that decisions about the future of Towra should be made by all of the key stakeholders, not just the management agencies.

Accordingly, this Steering Committee includes local and peak conservation groups, the state agencies with direct responsibilities at Towra, namely the NPWS, NSW Fisheries, NSW Waterways, the Maritime Assets Division of the Department of Transport, local government, and Environment Australia.

The commitment of this group in addressing what has previously been viewed as an intractable problem and their energy in developing feasible strategies for the protection of the site, is highly commendable.

Deserving of special mention are the community representatives - Mr Bernie Clarke of the Botany Bay Planning and protection Council, Mr Patrick Medway of the Friends of Towra Point Nature Reserve, Dr Paul Adam of the Wetlands Society, and Mr Milton Way of the National Parks Association.

I invite you all to participate in, and encourage an active and fruitful public discussion of, the draft Plan of Management and associated Towra Point Strategic Plan.

Thank you.

Bob Debus
NSW Minister for the Environment



The Wildlife Preservation Society's display for the launch.

Replanting Towra Point Nature Reserve

The Friends of Towra Point recently successfully replanted the first of 500 new trees on the Reserve after removing tonnes of weeds.

Over several weekends the Friends had removed tonnes of bitou bush and feral grass from the Reserve.

The seedlings were propagated in the NPWS Nursery at Kurnell from seeds collected on the reserve last year. They included acacia and banksia plants indigenous to this historic area.



Bernie Clarke and Ranger Jamie Erskine replant the first of many shrubs on the historic reserve.

Bernie Clarke OAM Receives an Award

One of our very active members, Bernie Clarke recently received the highest honour from the National Parks Foundation.

Bernie received the Foundation's Conservationist of the Year Award for 1999 for his outstanding contribution to the conservation of Botany Bay and Towra Point.

Bernie has worked tirelessly for more than 50 years to protect the historic Botany Bay and its surrounds. He has written extensively on conservation issues and appeared on press, radio and television appealing for better protection of Botany Bay and Towra Point Nature Reserve.

Congratulations Bernie from all your Friends in the Society.



Bernie Clarke with the special plaque for "Conservationist of the Year for 1999 Award" with members of the Steering Committee for Towra Point. (Milton Way; NPA, Gary Dunnart; Area Manager PNWS, Georgina Eldershaw; Ranger NPWS, Patrick Medway; Chairman - Steering Committee and Peter Stevens; District Manager NPWS.

Seed Collection on Towra Point

Recently, members of the Friends of Towra Point joined forces with NPWS to collect native seeds for propagation in the plant nursery.

Each year the seed is harvested to help re-establish the mature shrubs throughout the Reserve. Typically, we collect banksia seeds, acacia seeds and some eucalyptus seeds for propagation.

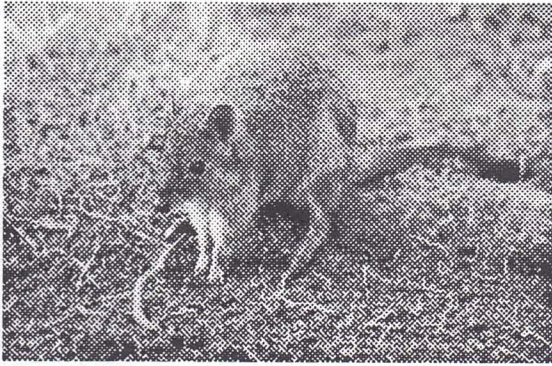


Milton Way, Georgina Eldershaw and Jim Tourett collect seeds.



Milton Way, Keith Egan, Jim Tourett and Georgina Elderhsaw at the Weedy Pond rehabilitation site on the Reserve.

(cont. from page 14)



Woylies are now being produced in some numbers.

This was conserved as a national park but it was decided a breeding colony was needed so new regions could be colonised. The Western Plains Zoo at Dubbo was selected as it has a good record of breeding rare animals.

Recently, a 3336 hectare sheep farm near Peak Hill was selected for a release region. The owners Michael and Kylie Sutherland with the local Landcare group had predator-proofed a fence around the property and recently six wallabies from the forty at the zoo were released into this new sanctuary.

An excellent project guarded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

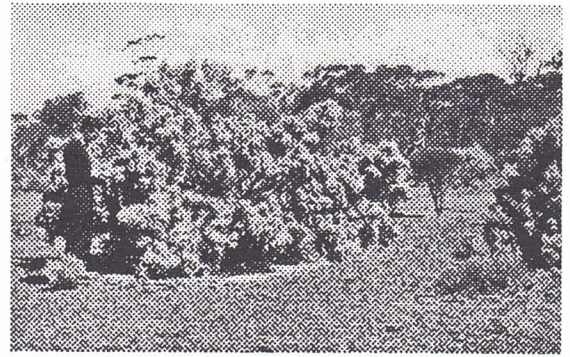
The Wamsley Method

This is the way Dr Wamsley has organised many similar sanctuaries. Where no money is available it seems economic and sensible to use his money and expertise to carry out similar work with various species. Jealousy by wildlife authorities should not be allowed to hamper his pioneering work.

Old Man Saltbush

Another weapon in the fight against our salted soils is this species, one of fifty kinds abundant in our arid country.

Even though devoured by sheep they are still thriving. An article in the Sydney Morning Herald details how a Mr Sippell and a company CO2 Emission trading are raising thousands of seedlings of Old Man Saltbush for replanting our arid areas with this wonder plant. At Naromine the secret of mass propagation of seedlings has been mastered ready for replanting our salt devastated soils.



This species grows as a very tall shrub and was often used as a windbreak to protect homes in the arid inland.

Protecting Sharks

The Daily Telegraph offers good news about sharks. Every year hundreds of thousands are netted, their fins cut off and sold to Asiatic countries to make shark tail soup. The reason for creating this tasteless culinary item is the belief it increases male potency.

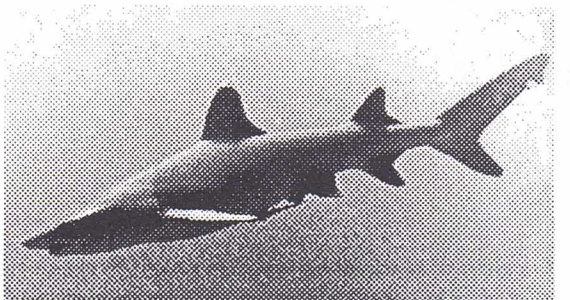
It is interesting in these countries there is no eagerness to increase female potency since women are regarded as inferior beings only suited for child bearing.

Such home medicines are being encouraged by stupid folk in the western world bemused by a belief in ancient folk medicines, forgetting how much medical science has achieved for our own wellbeing.

New South Wales has brought in new laws to ban this revolting and wasteful practice.

Of course if the federal government banned the importation of shark fins and also the harvesting practice in our own oceans it would be more useful than changing our environmental laws.

What we need is action on all fronts, not political point scoring.



Sharks are the beautiful marine hunters essential to the good health of ocean life.

WWF Report on Japanese Whaling

WWF led the drive to establish a Southern Ocean whale sanctuary. Japanese whaling ships defy the sanctuary rules and continue to hunt in these waters. They also are trying to have the sanctuary abolished.

Our Society at the Earth 2000 conference will put forward a new plan for Antarctica, both lands and more important the seas, which will give the whole region UN protection.

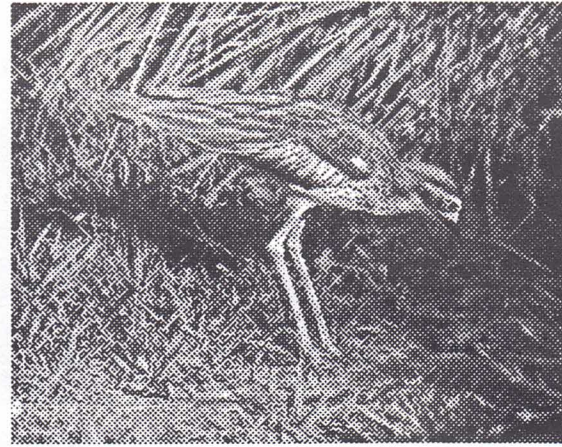


Whaler and gun. This photo was taken 50 years ago when the Australian government took part in this brutal killing of the world's largest mammals.

Factories in the Fields

We are rapidly getting to that stage. Paddocks looking like the Nullarbor, drenched with pesticides, full of genetically modified crops. No room for the wild.

Birds Australia gives some figures for a coming Silent Spring, a world where no birds sing. In Europe and North America birds once common are declining. In Europe up to fifty percent. Australia too is suffering. The following species; greycrowned babblers, plains wanderer, regent and painted honeyeaters, swift parrots, bush curlews.



Bush Curlew.

World Conservation Union

This organisation which we helped begin fifty years ago now represents 74 nations, 110 government agencies and 706 non-government organisations of which we are still a member.

In their annual report they mention how using calculations for the economic benefits provided by a variety of ecosystem goods and services, they found that the goods and services provided by nature are worth on average about US\$33 trillion per annum. The world's GNP, flawed though that is, only provides US\$18 trillion a year.

Which means nature provides almost double what humans provide. Even more important what nature provides is often irreplaceable. And costs us so little, only good care.

News from the West

Gilbert's potoroo came back from the dead in mammal terms since most naturalists thought it had become extinct due to the arrival of the fox. However, CALM's great work in getting rid of ferals meant it was abundant enough to make a comeback. Once discovered work began to breed the animal, assisted by CALM and WWF. They had success with the chuditch and have been releasing some captive bred animals though the potoroo has proved a harder nut to crack.

University of WA research students are working on it.

Environmental Defenders Organisation

Most States have this group to help non-government folk with their legal problems. Our members should bear this in mind when faced with environmental difficulties in the west.

Do We Have the Vision?

There are three media cliches regularly dragged out at the beginning of summer. The first is that the bush is a tinderbox and the second that packs of sharks are moving south along our coastlines. The third is that salination is ruining our soils and we face disaster.

Bushfires are a constant threat and we have adequate steps to fight them. Similarly with sharks, attacks are rare. The threat of salination is brought out, dusted by politicians, then put away to be dealt with some time in the future.

The future is with us!

Our Society has tried to get something done. In 1988 I published a book, 'Saving Australia' which our Society launched. It led to my being asked to appear on midday television. Ray Martin asked me what was in greatest danger. I disappointed him by saying something that was not really newsworthy.

I did not say forests, or cats, or dogs, or woodhens, but said soil degradation. It has steadily become worse while most politicians have done nothing.

Western Australia is the great exception. They have planned a billion dollar scheme to counter the salting of their soils. We all know that the clearing of our plant life was responsible for the rising of the water table, bringing salt to the surface. Planting trees is the major answer.



Trees can grow in our most arid land.

Bob Hawke tried with his derided suggestion we should plant a billion trees. Queensland farmers, terrified that something might happen to prevent their clearing, began destroying millions. Other States have brought in legislation to prevent further clearing.

WA began planting Tasmanian blue gums in the wetter rainfall areas, maritime pines in the middle regions and poorer soils with arid zone plants in our drier areas.

As a sop for the Olympics the national government nominated one farm in each State to become an Olympic Site which was better than nothing. Our Society is suggesting a committee should be set up, headed by CALM in WA. Some individuals from the Olympic Sites, since they and the experts in the west have 'hands on' experience, WA has just begun the maritime pine planting project. This also can offer farmers returns from the timber.

Once the plan has been agreed then it is a matter for Cabinet to accept that any costs should be picked up from the second sale of Telstra. What finer use than to save our land. Then a conference to sell the idea to conservation councils, shire councils, farmers' groups and all the rest.

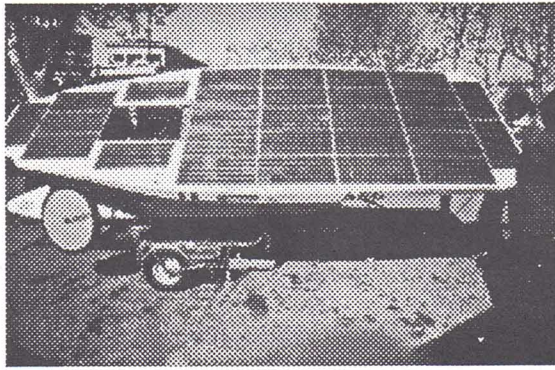
We had 100,000 workers on the Snowy. With this scheme we should have more. Landcare groups and Cleanup Australia under the banner of 'saving the land' would enlist millions.

We hope all our members are volunteers to sell this cause.

Renewable Energy

Great interest is now being shown in solar powered cars since emissions from today's cars is one of the major reasons for the greenhouse effect. An Australian solar car won the Darwin to Adelaide race. Perhaps it's an omen.

Also study is to be made on hot rocks in South Australia and New South Wales. These are granites deep in the earth which are 200C and two kilometres below the surface. The idea is to send water down an old well in the region and let it come up an adjacent shaft as superheated steam and use this power to drive a steam turbine to produce power. Incredible! Funds to work on a commercial application of the scheme have been allocated.



Solar powered car.

Mangroves

For the average person a dreary line of green, waiting for a developer to clear them away for something more profitable.

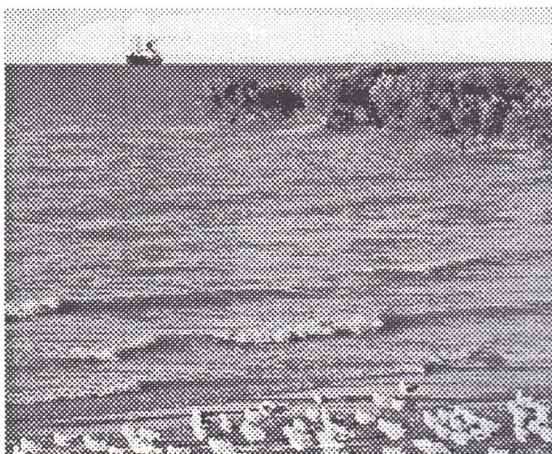
For the conservationist a region more valuable than any other place as the nursery where all the animals of the sea are nourished.

For the marine engineer a most important buffer to protect the land from wave surges.

For the prawn farmers, places to be cleared so they can develop good returns.

Orissa in India, a cyclone called in the debt to be paid. The New Scientist of 6 November told the story of how all the mangroves had been cleared for prawn farms. In the past 'mangroves would have dissipated the wave energy'... 'Three years ago India's Supreme Court ordered the closure of large shrimp farms within 500 metres of the high tide mark...'

The dead cry out. Will the world everywhere hear?



Mangroves.

National Parks Pest Management Programme for 1999

Weeds and pest animals are a major threat to the conservation of biodiversity and the productive capacity of agriculture. Hence, the management of pest populations is a major priority of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The appointment of staff in each NPWS District with specific responsibility for pest management has allowed the Service to develop a more strategic approach to pest management. Most Districts have now developed a District-wide pest management strategy in which priority programs are identified for action. Considerable resources have also been allocated to the development of pest management plans for individual reserves and for key pests.

Wherever possible integrated control programs are adopted using a range of options. Biological control is incorporated into programs where effective agents are available, but in most cases biocontrol must be supplemented with conventional control techniques. The pest management approach adopted by the Service reflects a balance between the desire to use the most effective control technique (such as 1080 baiting for many animal pests) with a desire to minimise non-target effects and animal suffering.

As the lead conservation agency in NSW the Service has a duty to ensure its own activities comply with the law and are environmentally sound. All pest control activities proposed on NPWS land require an appropriate level of assessment of their environmental impacts. If an initial analysis indicates environmental impacts are possible an assessment report in the form of a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) is required. If the impacts are considered to be significant the preparation of a more extensive assessment report, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required.

The EP&A Act also addresses the conservation of threatened species; Section 5A of the Act sets out the eight factors to be considered in deciding if there is likely to be a significant effect on a threatened species, population or ecological community or their habitat, and hence if a Species Impact Statement (SIS) is required under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995.



Cooperative Regional Pest Programs

The Service is committed to a regional/catchment approach to pest management where the programs are developed and often undertaken in collaboration with NSW Agriculture, rural lands protection boards, local government councils, regional pest committees, catchment management committees, CSIRO, universities, community groups such as Landcare, Dunecare and Bushcare volunteers, park neighbours or cross border programs with other states.

Details of the cooperative programs are summarised under each pest species. However, a good example of cooperative control occurs on the South Coast where the Service is working jointly with the South Coast and Bombala RLPBs, State Forests, and the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment to develop a regional approach to vertebrate pest control. A working group has been established and the South Coast and Braidwood RLPBs have been contracted by Eden, Narooma and Nowra NPWS Districts and State Forests of NSW to undertake a regional vertebrate pest control program. Similarly, Queanbeyan NPWS District undertakes a cross-border cooperative pest program with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service.

Jindabyne and Tumut NPWS Districts, Tumut and Snowy River Shire Councils, the Road and Traffic Authority and the Snowy Mountains Authority have worked together closely to control weeds along roads such as the Snowy Mountains Highway and Happy Jack's Road. Weed distribution maps have been prepared and funding of operations is undertaken jointly. In the Sydney area the Service has worked closely with local government councils and other stakeholders to form the Sydney North Noxious Weeds Committee. The Committee has prepared a regional weed strategy and management plans for priority weed species.

Central West District is working closely with NSW Agriculture and private landholders in a large-scale cooperative fox control program. The program involves Forbes RLPB, State Forests of NSW and landholders around the Weddin Mountains National Park and it is planned to use this as a model for a community driven fox management program. Further west, Coonabarabran District is working jointly with Coonabarabran, Coonamble, Walgett, Narrabri and Tamworth RLPBs, State Forests of NSW and NSW Agriculture in a fox baiting program over a large area surrounding Pilliga Nature Reserve and Pilliga State Forest. The program aims to protect native species such as the threatened Pilliga mouse and to increase lambing percentages on farms.

Control of pest animals in urban areas is more difficult than in rural areas and North Metropolitan District is working closely with six local councils and the community to address this issue. Fox control to protect wildlife including the threatened southern brown bandicoot in and around Marramarra and Ku-ring-gai Chase national parks is undertaken by the District and local councils. The program has wide community support and its effectiveness is being monitored by undertaking regular fauna surveys. Similarly, Hunter District in conjunction with the Port Stephens Feral Animal Management Committee has undertaken an extensive fox/wild dog control program in and around the Tomaree National Park and Moffats Swamp Nature Reserve. Because of the proximity to urban areas this program was undertaken in conjunction with an extensive community education program and a vertebrate management plan has been prepared to ensure the protection of koala populations in the Port Stephens area.

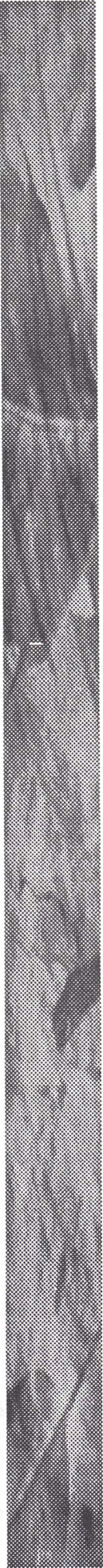
Pest Management Officers from the Upper Hunter, Armidale and Port Macquarie Districts are key participants in the Northern Feral Animal Advisory Council which aims to develop a more coordinated approach to pest animal control in the region. This group has been very active in running vertebrate pest management field days.

Threatened Species

The importance NPWS gives to pest management is emphasised by vertebrate pests and weeds being identified as broad threatening processes under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995. Pest threats listed so far include predation of native animals by foxes and invasion of plant communities by bitou bush. Submissions for other pest threats are likely to follow.

The Service is in the process of preparing a threat abatement plan for foxes. The objective of the plan is to coordinate the management of foxes to promote recovery of threatened species in cooperation with other government departments and the community. In the long-term, voluntary cooperation between all land managers will be critical in reducing both the environmental and economic impact of foxes.

The initial step in developing the plan has been to identify priority species for which foxes are known to have a major impact. The priority species include the mountain pygmy possum, yellow-footed rock wallaby brush-tailed rock wallaby, malleefowl, little tern, pied oyster-catcher, southern brown bandicoot, broad-toothed rat, long-footed potoroo and the small lizard, *Tympanocryptis lineata*. Fox control programs are being undertaken for all of these species with monitoring of the threatened species



populations where possible. In many cases fox control is being undertaken with the collaboration of other land managers, the local RLPB, local councils and private landholders. There have been some early successes in these programs and these are described in more detail in the section on foxes.

Key weed control programs underway to protect threatened species include those associated with the habitat of: the endangered dwarf mountain pine (*Microstrobos fitzgeraldii*) in Blue Mountains National Park; *Rutidosia leptorhynchoides* in Queanbeyan Nature Reserve; *Cyananthus elegans* in Booti Booti National Park and Glenrock State Recreation Area; the magnolia lilly pilli (*Syzygium paniculatum*) in Wyrabalong National Park; *Zieria prostrata* in Moonee Beach Nature Reserve; and blackberry removal to protect the Bathurst Copperwing Butterfly at various sites in central-western NSW. The Service is also working closely with Sydney Water and Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council to protect Blue Gum High Forest in the Dalrymple-Hay Nature Reserve. The Forest has been listed as an endangered ecological community.

Pest Priorities Identified in the Biodiversity Strategy

The NSW Biodiversity Strategy was released in March 1998. The Strategy provides a framework for the conservation of biodiversity in NSW and identifies a number of priority actions to be implemented. Funding of \$800,000 has been allocated to the Service over three years for the following pest management programs:

- to combat the threat of bitou bush in coastal ecosystems;
- to expand rainforest restoration programs on the North Coast;
- to protect threatened species in the Barrington Tops from invasion by Scotch broom;
- to enhance bush regeneration programs in priority conservation areas in the Blue Mountains and Sydney Metropolitan area;
- to protect priority conservation areas in western NSW from grazing and land degradation by rabbits; and
- for a program which aims to improve the effectiveness of the Service's pest management programs.

Pest Animal Management Programs

Vertebrate pests are widespread on Service estate with a recent survey finding that 80% of the reserves have one or more species present. Foxes are the most commonly occurring pest being present on 73% of the reserves. Cats (56%), rabbits (53%), wild dogs (39%), goats and pigs (28%) were also present on many reserves.

Key control programs for pest animals are summarised below.

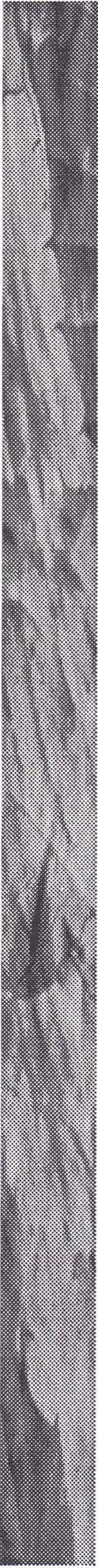
Foxes



Foxes have been listed as a threatening process under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 and the Service is in the process of preparing a threat abatement plan for foxes. One of the most successful of these programs is the fox control program to protect yellow-footed rock wallabies in Mutawintji National Park and Mutawintji Nature Reserve. An intensive fox control program has been a major factor in a 400% increase in the rock-wallaby population since the program began in 1995.

A fox control program to protect brush-tailed rock wallabies has been operating in the Kangaroo Valley for several years. Since 1995 more than 650 foxes have been removed using the bait station technique and preliminary surveys indicate that the population of rock wallabies may be starting to recover. The success of this program has resulted in the formation of a local community group "Friends of the brush-tailed rock wallaby" which aims to increase public awareness of rock wallabies and the threat posed by foxes, cats and dogs, and to raise money to support the program. The Friends recently won the Readers Digest National Community Award for Environmental Endeavours.

Two complementary research projects on fox control to protect brush-tailed rock wallabies have been funded by the Natural Heritage Trust. The projects, located in the Hunter Valley and the Kangaroo Valley, aim to evaluate current practices for reducing fox abundance and their impact on rock wallaby populations. These projects will also examine how the community can best contribute to such control programs. Other fox programs aimed at protecting brush-tailed rock wallabies were undertaken in Blue Mountains National Park and on farmland near Attunga north of Tamworth.



In this latter program the NPWS Upper Hunter District and the Tamworth RLPB undertook coordinated fox control on over 80 private properties.

In western NSW the Service has obtained a special permit to undertake aerial baiting programs to protect endangered malleefowl populations from predation by foxes in the Yathong, Nombinnie and Round Hill nature reserves. A special dried-meat bait has been prepared and a computerised navigation system based on GPS technology is being trialled to accurately monitor bait placement. Aerial baiting of these reserves is complemented by an extensive ground baiting program on surrounding properties coordinated by the Hillston RLPB and the program has increased survival rates of translocated malleefowl.

In Kosciuszko National Park foxes are attracted in large numbers during winter to the artificial 'food source around ski resorts. At the end of the ski season when this food source declines, foxes switch to native animals including the threatened mountain pygmy-possum (*Burramys parvis*). A very successful control program has been implemented at Charlotte Pass Village and this program is being expanded to all ski resorts on the Perisher Range.

Another successful program is that undertaken at South Ballina Beach to protect the threatened pied oyster-catcher. The survival of nedglings has significantly increased following a cooperative control program involving the Service, Tweed-Lismore RLPB, the Department of Land and Water Conservation and Southern Cross University. Similarly, an intensive fox control program at Lake Wollumboola near Jervis Bay has resulted in a 100% increase in the number of little tern chicks leaving their nests in 1999.

In the central western NSW there are several excellent examples of cooperative fox control programs over large areas. Coonabarabran District is undertaking an extensive fox control program in the Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve. This Ramsar listed wetland is a very important habitat for a number of endangered ground-nesting birds at risk from fox predation. The Service is combining with the Coonamble, Nyngan and Walgett RLPBs to implement a fox baiting program over 200,000 ha in and around the Macquarie Marshes. Central West District is working closely with NSW Agriculture and landholders in a large-scale fox control program in and around Weddin Mountains National Park. The program involves Forbes RLPB, State Forests of NSW and private landholders, and NSW Agriculture intends to use this as a model for a community driven fox management program. Upper Hunter District has contracted the Mudgee RLPB to

undertake an extensive baiting program in the Coolah Tops National Park. A part of this program targets more wide ranging fox control on neighbouring properties.


On the Illawarra Escarpment the Service is working cooperatively with other major land managers in a coordinated education and fox control program. The program is being undertaken in collaboration with Moss Vale RLPB, Wollongong City Council, Sydney Water, Bulli Pass Scenic Reserve Trust, Integral Energy, BHP and various mining companies and private landholders. Preliminary reports suggest that this program has already been successful in reducing fox numbers in the area.

The group (Illawarra Escarpment Managers Forum) is now looking at the possibility of expanding the scale of the program to eventually cover an area from Botany Bay to Nowra.

Many other cooperative fox control programs have been undertaken. The Hunter District received wide community support in a very successful baiting program coordinated by the Port Stephens Feral Animal Advisory Committee. This resulted in more than 180 foxes being removed from Tomaree National Park to protect koalas. Central West District combined with the Palmers Caley Feral Dog and Fox Association, the Central Tablelands RLPB and State Forests of NSW in a cooperative program over 25,000 ha in and around the VVindurndale Nature Reserve. Estimates of bait: take before and after the program suggest that the fox population in the area has been reduced by about 70%. Further north, NPWS Armidale District is working closely with the Armidale RLPB and the Southern New England Landcare Committee in a large scale fox control program involving 500 landholders in an area stretching from Nowendoc (southeast of Tamworth) to Guyra.

Rabbits

To gain a better understanding of the epidemiology of the rabbit calicivirus the Service has continued to contribute towards the national program on rabbit calicivirus disease (RCD). To capitalise on the spread of the disease, the Service is working closely with NSV Agriculture and rural lands protection boards to ensure effective follow-up programs using conventional control techniques are implemented (i.e. 1080 baiting, fumigation and warren destruction). A recently developed propane gas fumigation unit (Rid-a-Rabbit®) has been used by the Service to control rabbits in sensitive areas such as Aboriginal heritage sites and in and around threatened plant communities.



In western NSVV very extensive fumigation and/or warren destruction programs have been undertaken in most reserves to maximise the effectiveness of RCD. For example, in Mungo and Wiallee Cliffs national parks, the combination of these techniques has reduced the rabbit population by over 95%. Similarly, in Kinchega National Park, RCD has been very effective and rabbit numbers have been reduced by over 90%. The disease and the ripping of over 17,000 warrens has allowed a significant recovery of a range of important native species such as wattles (including the endangered *Acacia carnei*, butterbush, belah and rosewood. A similar program has been undertaken on Nombinnie Nature Reserve where approximately 6,000 warrens have been destroyed in an area of approximately 110,000 ha.

As part of the Recovery Program for the Could's Petrel undertaken on John Could Nature Reserve by NPWS scientists, rabbits have been eradicated from Cabbage Tree Island. The program illustrates how conventional methods (in this case poison baiting and trapping) can be combined with biological controls (RCD and myxomatosis) to effect control of rabbits. There has already been a dramatic increase in the regeneration of plants on the Island which augurs well for the recovery of the petrel and for the recovery of the only offshore rainforest in southern Australia.

A major pest control program at Little Llangothlin Nature Reserve (rabbit proof fencing, poison baiting, fox and blackberry control) has reduced rabbit numbers to low levels and native plants are already responding. In Scabby Range Nature Reserve the Service has worked closely with Cooma-Monaro RLPB and surrounding landholders to undertake a cooperative control program (baiting, fumigation and warren destruction) to maintain rabbit numbers at very low levels on the reserve and on private land in the Yaouk Valley. Other significant control programs were undertaken in the tablelands (Kosciuszko, Goobang, Goulburn River and Wollemi national parks and Scabby Range, Burrinjuck and Hattons Corner nature reserves) and along the coast (Vvyrabalong, Cattai and Lane Cove national parks and Munmorah State Recreation Area).

Cats

Cats are a major threat to wildlife in many national parks and the Service undertakes small programs on most reserves. However, the success of these programs is limited because cats are extremely difficult to control. There are no poison baits registered for control of cats, although limited use of 1080 may be possible under strict permit conditions. In addition, trapping has only limited success as cats are innately wary of traps.

Major advances in the management of cats will depend on innovative research breakthroughs such as the use of a cat-specific toxin which is currently under development in Victoria.

Another major problem faced by the Service is the continual dumping of unwanted cats in protected areas. Hence, most cat control programs incorporate a community consultation component. Extensive education programs by local councils following the introduction of the Companion Animals Act 1998 is beginning to have a positive impact on the number of domestic cats entering protected areas. The Service is working closely with councils to identify the owners of domestic cats captured in any trapping program.

Good examples of cat control programs incorporating education and awareness aspects are those undertaken in and around Royal, Georges River and Tomaree national parks, Towra Point Nature Reserve, Glenrock and Illawarra Escarpment state recreation areas and in the Macquarie Valley in western NSW and the Kangaroo Valley west of Nowra.

Apart from reducing the number of feral cats the Royal NP program will also capture valuable data on the number and type of cats within its reserves and on the urban interface. A brochure on the impact of cats on wildlife has been produced and this and other material on the need for community participation (responsible pet ownership) have been distributed to the local community.

In the Macquarie Valley program, representatives from rural lands protection boards, NPWS, Department of Land and Water Conservation, Landcare and Nyngan, Coonamble and Warren Shire Councils have formed a Pest Management Committee which is specifically targeting cats. Cat traps have been purchased to allow landholders to undertake their own trapping programs. In addition, a number of public meetings have been held in each of the towns to raise public awareness.

In the Kangaroo Valley the Service in conjunction with the Moss Vale RLPB obtained a permit for the use of 1080 baits to protect the threatened brush-tailed rock wallaby from predation by cats (and foxes). In conjunction with the baiting program an intensive community relations program is being undertaken. This involves property inspections and surveys, public notification through local media, information packages, newsletters and field days.

In the South East Forest National Park, a cat baiting and trapping program has been undertaken by the South Coast RLPB to protect threatened populations of the smoker mouse.

Wild dogs

The management of wild dogs at the interface of NPWS lands and grazing properties is a contentious issue which is not easily reconcilable. This is because the Service has to balance the conflicting objectives of protecting dingoes on NPWS estate and meeting its responsibilities under the Rural Lands Protection Act 1998, which requires wild dogs, including dingoes, to be controlled. The Service is working with rural lands protection boards and wild dog associations to identify problem areas and to implement effective control programs.

Because of potential non-target impacts, aerial baiting of wild dogs has been phased out in most parks. To compensate for this reduction the Service has greatly increased its use of bait-stations which are much more target specific. However, in very inaccessible terrain ground-based operations are often not possible. In these situations, where stock losses are occurring and provided all necessary environmental impact assessment procedures are completed, aerial baiting may still be possible on Service estate.

Because of severe drought conditions last year, there has been an abnormally high number of wild dog attacks on sheep properties bordering the eastern part of the Kosciuszko National Park. In response, the Service developed a multi-pronged program to counter these stock losses, including contracting trappers employed by the Cooma RLPB, and expanding the baiting and shooting program. This intensive effort has managed to control the incidence of wild dog attacks in most areas, although some stock losses still occurred. The Service has consulted closely with landowners and the RLPB, and is continuing to investigate ways of improving the program.

WWF

This is the world's largest non-governmental group and has used the money it raises to do tasks selected by its scientific staff.

Its director Dr David Butcher is a well known New South Wales conservationist and also a member of the NCC.

This is a letter highlighting their achievements over the past year.



Female red-capped robin; one of our endangered species.

1. The federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act and WWF considers this Act to be the most significant legislative 'win' for Australian conservation in 25 years.

We have discussed this in previous newsletters and can agree it is a small step forward.

2. Work is continuing on the Murray-Darling Basin with the protection of 50,000 hectares of wetlands and the removal of unnecessary dams and weirs.

We think our plan for the Snowy River and the New Snowy would be a giant step forward but we are still waiting to hear what the national government is planning.

3. There has been a 400% increase in the threatened species network. At our EARTH 2000 conference we will hear how the west is doing far more to save our ground dwelling wildlife by getting rid of foxes and cats.

4. The arrival of the first Forest Stewardship Council certified timber has arrived in Australia. An excellent step.

Congratulations WWF but we wish they would return to their original name of the World Wildlife Fund.



Saving Gould's Petrel

Written by Murray Hunt, after spending a week participating in recovery activities.

Produced by taxpayer money

Directed by NPWS

Main Cast - David Priddel and Nick Carlile

Supporting cast - volunteers

Photography by Nick Carlile

An inspiring story about the efforts to save from extinction a rock crevice breeding seabird through the intensive management of the bird population including the elimination of threatening processes and translocation.

Showing (hopefully) for a long time to come!

The Subject

Gould's Petrel *Pterodroma leucoptera* is a small (30 cms, 70cms wingspan) black and white seabird. It is reputedly Australia's rarest endemic seabird and is listed as endangered in both NSW (Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995) and Commonwealth legislation (Endangered Species Protection Act 1992). The population is estimated to be approximately 500 breeding pairs. It breeds to near exclusion on only one island - Cabbage Tree Island.

The Setting

Cabbage Tree Island, situated just off Port Stephens, measures only 1 km long and 450 metres wide (30 ha), but rises to a height of 123 metres. There are near vertical cliff faces on the east side of the island with an almost continual decrease in altitude to the sea on the west. The island plays host to no native or introduced mammal species and hence the petrels can nest in relative safety protected by a sea of water from predation by cats and foxes. The absence of these introduced predators is critical because the petrels nest on the ground in natural rock crevices, in hollow palm trunks, under palm fronds, or in cavities among the buttresses of fig trees. The nesting of the petrels occurs to a high degree only in two prominent scree-slope gullies which are largely covered by Cabbage Tree Palm *Livistona australis*.

Lifecycle of the Subject

The petrels are present on Cabbage Tree Island between October and May of each year. October witnesses courtship, with eggs laid in November. A single egg is laid and, if lost, is not replaced. Hatching commences from late December with young departing in late March.

Birds may remain at sea for a number of years, sleeping on wing and not landing on ground before returning to near where they fledged to mate. It is not known where the birds travel or feed in the intervening years. Whilst the birds are raising chicks they will return to the island every couple of days under the cover of nightfall to regurgitate feed for their nestlings. Although excellent fliers above the open seas, the petrels regularly crash roughly through the closed palm and fig canopy but somehow still land close to their nesting site. After feeding their chicks the majority of adults depart once again under the cover of nightfall to avoid predation by other birds. Some adults however remain resting and hidden in their nesting chambers for the day.

The Good Guys

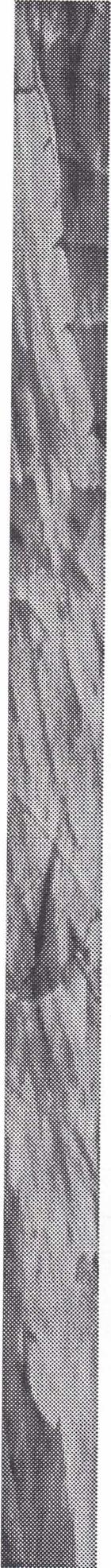
The National Parks and Wildlife Service have been working intensively on the Gould's Petrel recovery program since 1992. Nicholas Carlile under the direction of David Priddel and the Threatened Fauna Ecology Unit, has participated in most of the field research, sometimes staying on the uninhabited island for weeks on end. The work over the years has been assisted by a large number of volunteers willing to participate in the recovery fieldwork. Management of the bird population has included the banding of birds to gather data on feeding range, age of birds at return to the island, life duration and nesting site fidelity amongst other questions. More importantly however, priority management activities have been initiated to control threatening processes.

The Baddies

In the decades before the commencement of the current NPWS programme, the population of Gould's Petrel declined substantially. The major processes that caused the reduction and continue to threaten the Petrel are entanglement in the sticky fruits of the Birdlime Tree *Pisoniaumbellifera* and predation by Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina* and Australian Ravens *Corvuscoronoides*. The presence of rabbits on the island since 1906 may also have increased bird mortality due to the degradation of the vegetation under story and a higher proportion of fruits of the Birdlime Tree falling completely to ground level.

The Fight Scene

In a one-sided fight, which indeed was easier than expected, the threatening processes were combated and controlled. The threat of the sticky entangling pods of the Birdlime Tree has been reduced by simply removing the trees from the



nesting gullies of the petrel. Trees from other areas have not been removed to avoid adversely affecting the botanical diversity and climate of the island. Predation by other birds has been controlled by the culling of ravens and currawongs on the island. A low density of the sea via predators are allowed to remain. These birds protect the island from recolonisation, effectively fighting off birds from the main land due to their strong territoriality. Rabbits have also been removed from the island through the combined use of myxomatosis, rabbit calicivirus disease and grain-based poison pellets.

Everyone Rides Off Into the Sunset

The control of the threatening processes has reduced the mortality of Gould's Petrel ashore on Cabbage Tree Island. Similarly a suite of reproductive success measurements such as the number of pairs nesting and number of birds fledgling each year (almost 300 this year!) have significantly increased following the initiation of management procedures. Furthermore monitoring of vegetation plots since the removal of rabbits from the island has revealed the emergence of the first seedlings which herald a recovery of the island's vegetation.

The Twist at the End

A second island, in addition to Cabbage Tree Island, has been identified as a breeding locality for the Gould's Petrel. This was determined when a small colony of about a dozen pairs were found nesting on nearby Boondelbah Island. In recent (March 99) conservation management activities (which will necessitate a sequel; stay tuned!) the NPWS have translocated 100 chicks from Cabbage Tree Island to Boondelbah Island to bolster the second colony. The chicks are moved at an age when they have yet to imprint, the location of their hatching nest cavity so that at a later date they will imprint, their new nest site as their home. Hence in a couple of years (3 or 4) when the birds have reached maturity they will return to Boondelbah Island rather than Cabbage Tree Island to breed and raise chicks of their own.

The translocation activity has been performed to spread the risk (of the petrels, extinction) over two locations in the same way that a wise financial manager might diversify his stock portfolio to avoid having all his eggs in one basket. Through the actions of the NPWS the creation of a second viable population of the petrel will reduce the danger of extinction should a catastrophe occur on Cabbage Tree Island. Catastrophes, or things that eliminate a large percent of the remaining birds and render them closer to extinction may (in this case) be rock slides, or the introduction of

an avian disease, or introduced predator. It is great to witness the NPWS proactively lowering the stakes via the translocation. Furthermore it is good to see that good science, in the form of a pilot study translocation between the gullies of Cabbage Tree Island, has pre-tested the management activity and hence increases the chances of the translocations, success and the continued survival of the Gould's Petrel.

The complete story of the recent translocation and previous trials is currently just a glint in the director's eye whilst this story is in the can!

Further Readings

Priddel, D and N. Carlile (1997).
Conservation of the Endangered Gould's Petrel
Pterodroma leucophaea.
Pacific Conservation
Biology 3:322-9

Priddel, D and N. Carlile (1997).
Boondelbah Island Confirmed as a Second
Breeding Locality for Gould's Petrel *Pterodroma*
leucophaea.
Emu 97: 245-8

Priddel, D and N. Carlile (1999).
Reclaiming a Petrel's Paradise. *Nature Australia*,
Autumn 60-63

Letters to the Editor

29 October 1999
The Minister for the Environment
The Hon. Bob Debus

Dear Bob Debus,

Congratulations for your work on curbing pesticides. Could you now add to your laurels by helping save the snowy. By adding that twenty eight percent it could be restored as a wildlife corridor.

Many years ago the Nature Conservation Council were told that everywhere in the world irrigation schemes ran at a loss and had to be subsidised. It was only when they worked to produce luxury foods and out of season items they ran at a profit.

Also when I drive through the irrigation paddocks and see the water sprays at work, wasting most of the water by evaporation I wonder when they will learn what grapegrowers learned many years ago in using drip irrigation.

In that way they wasted no water, could control its supply when needed for best results. Perhaps farmers could accept a moratorium on in air sprinklers within a few years.

So the Snowy could gain its needed water without loss of production.

Yours sincerely,

Vincent Serventy
President

10 November 1999

The Editor

Dear Sir,

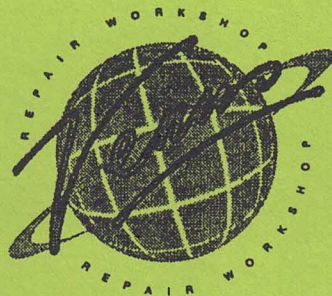
Four Corners (ABC) had an excellent programme on climate change. Some viewers may have been cheered by the view of some American scientists who claimed global warming would mean increased growth in plants, including world crops. An Australian botanist, Dr David Murray recently published a book 'Carbon Dioxide and Plant responses'.

He wrote, 'The expectation that the extra CO₂ accumulating in the atmosphere is going to act as an 'excellent fertiliser for all the world's vegetation is simplistic, illogical and dangerous.'

The programme also mentioned the sad news that Australia joined with the United States in thwarting attempts to cut carbon emissions at the Kyoto conference. In fairness it also pointed out industrial concerns like BP Australia were concerned enough to encourage tree planting as one way of cutting carbon emissions.

This telecast deserves repeat programming to alert Australians to one of the greatest dangers facing, not only Australians but the whole world.

David is a member of our scientific committee.



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VINCENT SERVENTY

President