

Summer 1996



# AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE

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



*"Wildlife preservation in action with Society members working with National Parks and Wildlife Service Officers to prepare the nesting habitat on Towra Point Spit Island in readiness for the breeding season for the endangered Little Tern (Sturna albifrons)."*

**NB - REMINDER** - The annual NEW YEARS DAY GARDEN BIRD COUNT will be conducted across Australia on Wednesday, January 1, 1997 and your personal invitation to participate is inside.



## '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

Price \$2.50 (for non members)

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### PRESIDENT

Vincent Serventy, AM, B Sc B Ed  
Tel/Fax: (043) 43 4708

### EDITOR

Patrick W. Medway, B A, M Ed Admin,  
FPRIA, MACE  
Tel/Fax: (02) 556 1537

### ADDRESS

National Office  
Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc.  
GPO Box 3428, Sydney NSW 2001  
Tel/Fax: (02) 556 1537

Production: New Media Communications  
Printing: Major Print Marketing

Articles may be copied or quoted with  
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### COUNCILLORS 1996

**Patron:** Judith Wright

**President:** Vincent Serventy AM B Sc B Ed  
Order of the Golden Ark  
36 Diamond Road, Pearl Beach NSW 2256  
Phone & Fax: (043) 44 4708

**Vice Presidents:**

Ross Bernie Ph: (02) 9607 8825 (H)

John Robertson Ph: 9363 9629

**Hon. Secretary/Executive Officer:**  
Patrick W. Medway

**Min Secretary:** Marjorie Woodman

**Hon. Treasurer:** Frans Brandt  
2 Iluka Road Mosman NSW 2088  
Phone: (02) 9969 5642

**Editor:** Patrick W. Medway

PO Box 277 Brighton Le Sands NSW 2216  
Phone & Fax: (02) 9556 1537

**Councillors:** Dr Clive Williams,  
Dr Richard Mason, Denis Bowden,  
Mabel Brown, Sandy Johnson, Murray Hunt

**Regional Councillors:**

Glen Ingram 5'46 Ferndale Street,  
Annerley QLD 4103

Max Blanch 41 Smith Street,  
Merewether NSW 2291

Jack Pearce 98 Alexander Street,  
Greensborough VIC 3088

**Scientific Advisory Committee:**  
Dr Michael Augee, Mammals

Dr Walter Boles, Birds  
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Dr David Murray, Plants

Dr James Puckridge, River Ecology

**Correspondence To:** Executive Officer, Wildlife  
Preservation Society of Australia, Inc.  
GPO Box 3428, Sydney NSW 2001

### REGIONAL COUNCILLORS

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

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

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

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

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# From the Presidents Desk...

## National

The Scientific Director of the World Conservation Union, Dr Jeffrey McNeely, in an Editorial in a recent publication 'World Conservation' explained the need for social as well as biological knowledge in conservation. However most of the articles dealt with the need to work with local folk to produce a good social as well as sustainable living. The examples were in the Developing rather than the Developed World.

## Regional Parks

Yet our Society more than twenty years ago put forward the concept of the Regional Park where conservation methods covered not only wild nature but also the world where people lived and worked. At the time we also dreamed of a world where regional parks could cover the whole of a nation.

We quoted an article by Louis Bromfield published in the American Audubon magazine for 1963 which epitomises the ideals of regional parks, ideals which have resulted in these being developed in many nations around the world.

"... instead of a wasted and ruined countryside, crossed by polluted streams, devoid of wildlife and beauty, it is possible to make the whole nation a vast and wonderful park in the midst of which works humanity, surrounded by a kind of natural paradise. All this is far less a dream than it might appear, it is merely commonsense. More than that, it is profitable not only in terms of dollars and cents but in a thousand other ways..."

Australia has the world's largest marine regional park, as well as one of the most diverse in the Shark Bay Regional Park. Perhaps all our States will bring in their own Regional Park Acts to complement their National Park Acts. For this is a concept to keep and increase the interest of the national where people live and work. It will increase the quality of our lives by enhancing the creations with the creations of nature.

*English 'national parks' are actually Regional Parks. This is a scene from the Lakes District in England where a neolithic stone circle is surrounded by farms and heather clad hills.*



## Our Society in the next decade

We have survived for nearly a hundred years by keeping to some fundamental principles.

*We are an Australia-wide society and must always keep this image strong.*

This can be done in several ways:-

- \* By producing a strong image of wildlife conservation by publications in the media through letters and articles;
- \* By producing a better and more frequent Newsletter for members which is the only outlet most members receive;
- \* Keeping strong working contact with other conservation groups, particularly the State Conservation Councils by judicious funding of seminars, etc;
- \* Keeping the idea of Bequests constantly before the public to aid the Society;
- \* Producing more leaflets, posters, position papers on conservation projects for our members and the general public;
- \* Increase our Australian wide membership, with branches in all State.

### *Spending our funds:-*

\* Some conservation projects have very little return for us. For example funding the Little Tern research has little impact. It is a world-wide species and nesting on many islands, since most of these are reserves, its Australian future is secure.

\* Towra Point Nature Reserve and the Rockdale Wetlands Environmental Education Centre are excellent local ventures. While a central office-display centre will be valuable to our future, it must not become financially crippling but hopefully income producing.

\* Talks to conservation and other groups are always valuable and we must increase facilities for these by producing coloured slide sets on particular wildlife preservation themes.

**Vincent Serventy AM**  
President

# Alarming news about KOALAS

Our Society has a deep interest in the fate of these marsupials. It was our efforts that saved it from savage hunting in the southern States, finally in Queensland about seventy years ago.

Many times in the last twenty years we have been warned it was in danger of extinction. That was the main reason why exports to overseas zoos were made difficult. We did not think koalas would become extinct since offshore islands held populations and the wildlife authorities, having learned their lesson, would translocate animals if they ever became too abundant and threatened their food trees.

We should have known better. On Kangaroo Island the wildlife folk let their numbers rise too high. Their suggestion was to shoot the excess, cull them in official terms to make the decision more palatable. We and others managed to convince the government they should translocate the excess animals to places where koalas were once common but were wiped out by overhunting.

All seemed well until on 28 September the New Scientist published a new articles which alarmed us. Koalas are becoming so abundant in Victoria the wildlife officials are planning a scientific blitz using contraceptives rather than guns.

The claim is that there are no wild places to translocate the extra animals. We have wandered in many such bush havens without seeing those supposedly abundant animals. The river red gums of the Murray-Darling were favoured feeding grounds in the last century.

Have the authorities encouraged the planting of food trees? Landcare groups are creating wildlife corridors by replanting with trees and shrubs. Why not put some grey gums, nanna gums and the many other eucalypts koalas relish?

Even worse has been the suggestion that a disease of koalas should be introduced since this causes sterility. Could stupidity go further? Koalas in the past have lived with the disease which is endemic. Such infections in the past, with Aboriginal hunting kept numbers in balance. We are not suggesting we should make koalas a food item but the planting of millions of trees with natural inroads by disease and drought should be nature's way of checking too high numbers.



*Koalas, our national conservation emblem.*

## *Plea for better Koala management*

### *Late motion*

That the NCC organise a seminar as early as possible on the future of *koala management* since recent publicity in the New Scientist for 28 September 1996 indicates alarming suggestions for future action. In preparation for this seminar the Australian Nature Conservation Agency and the eastern mainland States National Park and Wildlife Services supply what facts they have on koala numbers and their own suggestions for future management.

### *Explanation*

The New Scientist article indicates alarming suggestions for control of koalas including the spreading of disease, and other contraceptive methods while on Kangaroo Island shooting is recommended by some experts to reduce numbers. A decade ago it was suggested, often by the same experts that the species was in danger of extinction and stringent restrictions were placed on export to overseas zoos for this reason. Since the koala is often portrayed as a symbol of Australian concern for conservation it is important that we understand the facts as far as they are known and can develop management plans for their future.

# Trouble in paradise

## **Two thousand Koalas to be shot on Kangaroo Island!**

That was the chilling recommendation of a State government committee as their solution to overcrowding of the island with koalas.

How has our most loved marsupial, our symbol of conservation, admired by famous visitors, the latest the president of the United States, as well as a tourist asset worth millions come to this sorry state? First, a quick look at the history of the strange creature.

It took nearly thirty years after the European invasion of Australia for the koala to first come under settler's notice. The reason is obvious. Hunting by the first invaders, the Aborigines, kept numbers low. Slowmoving and easy to find by skilled hunters, the koalas were easy prey, so even though a healthy colony can double its numbers every three years this culling check kept them from destroying their food trees.

Yet these animals have been in Australia for millions of years, so what natural check kept Australia from becoming a land ruled by Koalas?

### **Other Disasters**

The answer may lie in a southwestern Queensland study of a population crash in 1979-1980 when a combination of heatwave and drought wiped out just over sixty percent of the population. This was an unusual event yet predators like eagles, owls, tree climbing goannas, ticks, bushfires, disease and other trials winnowed populations over those millions of years gradually the animal so superbly fitted to survive on a diet of gumleaves has evolved.

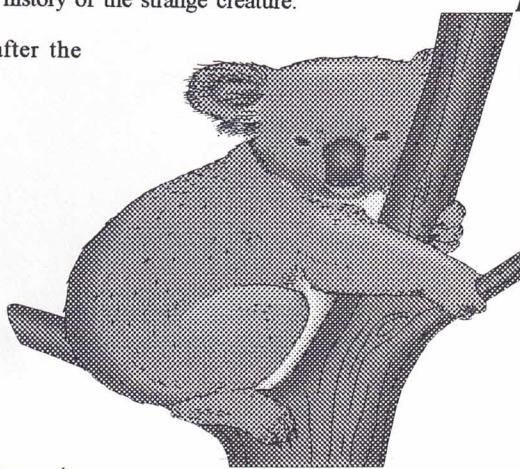
The Queensland disaster wiped out koalas which had expanded to forests away from the permanent creeks and such pioneers suffered when the bad times came.

Once koalas roamed more widely than they do today. They lived in southwestern Australia until climatic changes aided by human hunting wiped out that colony. Although koalas in zoos do very well, feeding on the local eucalypts.

### **Export of skins**

For more than a hundred years after white settlement, the koalas thrived so well that an industry developed, exporting skins to America. So greedy were these new hunters for profit, that conservationists began to lobby for the species' protection. The **Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia** using a method with a modern touch appealed to a previous American president, Herbert Hoover, asking for action to save the koala.

Hoover placed a ban on skins, and deprived of the US market, the trade collapsed. Often conservation commonsense prevails when there is no longer any profit to be made.



So the koalas, given legal protection, survived but only in reduced numbers. Colonies were placed on a number of Victorian islands where they flourished, then ate themselves out of house and home with a subsequent population crash. The Victorian government solved the problem by translocating surplus stock to fill the gaps on the mainland. A study by WWF found these newly located animals were doing well despite the fears of some conservation groups.

### **Phillip Island**

Phillip Island in Victoria solved the surplus population using a more modern method, killing by cars. Despite road signs appealing for care about a quarter of each year's crop is still removed. Similar controls are kept in place in other States with cars, domestic dogs and cats harrying the urban populations while intense wildfires cause even greater carnage.

In 1983, a scientific expert on the animals was to write gloomily "... the long term future of the species is in some doubt. It seems clear that the survival of many populations will depend upon appropriate management."

### **Kangaroo Island Problem**

Then came the Kangaroo Island problem. The *New Scientist* of 26 September 1996 had an article with advice from many experts the most humane solution. More experts created a Tower of Babel of opinions, often conflicting. An expert committee had advised the State government to shoot two thousand animals as the most humane solution.

The gun lobby solution is nothing new. Some twenty years ago I was on a state government advisory committee whose task was to advise the minister in charge of wildlife. A small plantation of koala trees had been planted by a local school. Time passed and with larger trees, koalas were introduced and flourished too well. What was the solution? The head of the CSIRO Wildlife Division was one of our committee. His advice 'shoot the excess'.

I convinced the rest of the group to relocate them on nearby reserves and this was done. Now the *New Scientist* of 26 September 1996 had a article with advice from many experts.

**First a word of advice.** Scientists are not all experts on conservation. What would be the result if their advice is taken on the Kangaroo Island problem? It would be no solution as other island populations have shown had the wildlife managers did some reading, in time to prevent the danger.

What would be the result if the State government took this unsound advice? It would make the South Australian government seem as uncaring and environmentally brutal as was the Queensland government of many years ago.

It would deal a savage blow to all conservation groups trying to raise money to save endangered species. Why increase the numbers of bilbies and wombats if they may be culled later?

There are enough haters of the conservation movement to leap eagerly onto the new bandwagon.

The New Scientist article quotes one scientist as suggesting dominant male koalas should be given a vasectomy. The problem will be to find and catch the dominant individuals. Steve Phillips of the Australian Koala Foundation suggests spreading chlamydia, a native koala disease which helps keep populations stable.

Perhaps research will in time come up with more satisfactory solutions.

#### **Translocation**

Until then our Society suggests we keep on with the old method of translocation. There are huge areas of Australia where koalas once lived but which have been empty of them for more than a hundred years. They are still empty despite misinformation on this aspect.

#### **Long Term Solution**

A longer term solution is to plant more koala food trees. Years ago we suggested planting **koala corridors** linking all reserves with groves of suitable trees. An ambitious koala one day might then begin at Gladstone in Queensland and travel along these wild lifelines to Adelaide. The **wildlife corridor** idea has caught on, both in Australia and the United States where such webs of green are spreading.

This will not only help koalas. It will help all wildlife. It will also help humans, by modifying climate change, checking erosion as well as other aspects of creating a better quality of life.

*The sooner we learn to live in harmony within nature the better for the world.*

#### **Stop Press:**

The good news has arrived. The State and Federal Governments are taking sound conservation advice and translocating the animals. **Congratulations!**

## **Bridled Nailtailed Wallabies**

Some time ago a sad result of trapping these rare wallabies for captive breeding purposes went partly wrong. Our old friend, the one time Senator and always a fighter for conservation, Tony Mulvihill, sent me the following letter. He also explained he is still working hard for the cause.

Vincent Serventy

TO: The Hon Dr Meredith Bergmann  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Meredith,

I refer to enquiries by Ms Yvette Andrews from your office about the deaths of eight Bridle Nailtail Wallabies at Western Plains in June 1996.

The Western Plains Zoo has advised that a group of fourteen Bridle Nailtail Wallabies were transferred from Townsville to Dubbo to be part of a captive breeding program at the Zoo. *Eight of the animals died within twenty four*

hours of arrival at Western Plains Zoo. Pathology results indicated that the *cause of death was stress* related to the transportation and handling of the animals.

The Western Plains Zoo has also advised that the protocol followed for the transport of the animals has been successfully followed previously within Queensland, however as a result of the deaths of the wallabies, the protocol for future movements of the species will be reviewed by the Recovery Team for the Bridled Nailtail Wallaby program.

The Western Plains Zoo has advised that the remaining wallabies are in good health and are likely to increase to twenty-four within two years due to the relative ease of breeding them in captivity.

I trust that the above information is helpful. Should you have any further inquiries regarding this matter please contact Mr Greg Sheehy on 233 4044 from my office.

Yours sincerely,

Pam Allan  
Minister for the Environment.

# Cleaning Our Beaches

Australians love their beaches though usually they do not take much care with their upkeep. Some time ago there was a huge protest meeting at Bondi on beach pollution. Next day the council workers removed tons of rubbish from those public haters of pollution.

Ian Keiran's concept of a one day of the year cleanup of water pollution caught the public imagination not only in Australia but worldwide. Our Society welcomed the idea but felt it should not be only a one day affair, as each year there seemed to be the same tonnage of litter to be collected.

Ian also has the same idea and has turned his talents to more permanent solutions. The first was to handle sewage pollution at the Taronga Zoo and our Society has written to all the other Australian zoos suggesting they might do the same. The same principle can be developed for every large complex like industrial parks, factories, shopping complexes and the like.

The same groups could extend sewage treatment to using industrial litter and other waste to burn in special incinerators to create energy for use in the complex. That is already done in Europe and also in one hospital complex in Australia.

A group known as the Surfrider's Foundation formed to look after the beaches on which their recreation depends have organised a two year survey of all Australian beaches. There is a Coastcare Group, an offshoot of Landcare, for one in every three beaches in Australia. This is encouraging and gradually when that spreads to every beach we will really make progress.

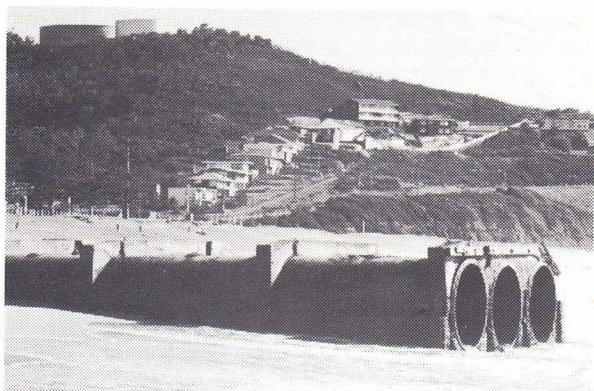
A major problem is that most have sewage outfalls within five kilometres. Many years ago Prince Phillip got a great laugh from a Sydney audience at Bondi when he said swimming in Port Phillip Bay in Victoria he felt he was swimming in sewage. What he did not know was that when swimming on Sydney beaches he actually was swimming in sewage.

The situation has improved because now we have the outlets further out which may smell better but is still a waste of two important assets, freshwater and fertiliser. Our policy is that all sewage and storm water should be given tertiary treatment as is done everywhere in Europe and in most countries inland from the sea. It is often said that the waters of the Rhine pass through six human guts before reaching the Channel.

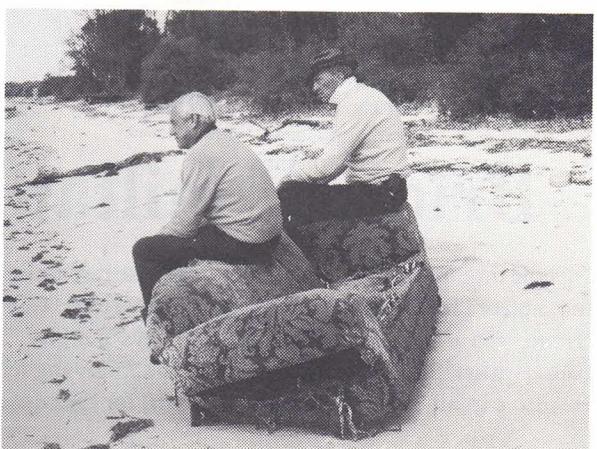
The survey found that seventy percent of all Australian beaches have buildings of some sort within 250 metres. The Gold Coast is the most shocking of these but they are common over much of Australia.

Our own solution for beach litter put forward many years ago was that our members should encourage Carer Groups. We take a plastic bag on walks along beaches, parks or roadsides to collect litter.

A law which Newton never devised but we discovered was that rubbish attracts rubbish. Where we clean the beach the amount of litter diminishes making our work easier. Also in one case it has saved the local Council from sending expensive beach cleaning machines along every few weeks so saving ratepayer's money.



*Stormwater drains wash fertiliser, pesticides, oil and other toxic wastes into rivers, lakes and the sea.*



*Towra Point, Botany Bay. A beach spoiled by solid waste pollution. PHOTO: K A Hindwood*



*Plastic Death*

*Seabirds are not only killed by oil spills. This fairy penguin was trapped by one of the plastic rings used to carry beer packs. Plastic bait bags litter beaches while discarded fishing lines and other debris kill many marine creatures.*

# *A success story*

## The Crommelin Arboretum

In our first 'new' issue we told the story of the Shortlands Reserve and its guidelines for other conservation groups. In October another success story was the twenty-year anniversary of the Commelin Arboretum at Pearl Beach. Speakers at this celebration were our President and his wife Carol, who are the joint patrons of this community project.

Arborets are found around the world. Usually these grow a selection of plants, not only of the region but often the best for home plantings anywhere in the nation. For example at Pearl Beach, with Brisbane Waters National Park on its doorstep, it would be wasteful only to show regional shrubs and trees when the park nearby has an even better display. So the collection has rainforest silky oaks, waratahs and acacias from around Australia.

It all began in 1976 when the Gosford Shire Council agreed to give four and a half hectares of degraded bushland to the local Progress Association for development as a native Arboretum. Until that time it was a wasteland of weeds such as lantana, the best trees had been logged, parts had been grazed, regular fires had burned much of the bush while the area had become the favoured dumping ground for old cars, iron tanks, refrigerators beyond their useful life and building waste. In other words a typical piece of urban bushland with an uncaring council.

This time Gosford City Council did care and thought a very active Progress Association might do wonders. For those groups wanting to develop green guidelines and which do not have any active association we recommend either taking over an existing Progress Groups or forming a new one.

After all most are in favour of progress so the first battle is won. Many are against progress in the wrong direction, the way favoured by developers looking for a quick dollar return. Such folk, once they have achieved their aims, leave to settle in a 'nicer' neighbourhood with lots of trees and other greenery with a caring local group to guard against inroads by new developers!

Back to the Beach. A sub-committee was formed and with the help of the Council got rid of the main eyesores. Once that was done the name *Crommelin Native Arboretum* was chosen to honour a keen conservationist who had lived on the edge of the region

while serving as the postmistress at Woy Woy. *Minard Crommelin* was a living legend, born in 1881 and leaving school at fourteen to begin work as a postwoman. Always she travelled, studying her beloved bush until on her retirement she went first to Europe, and then to the Central Coast. She tried to lease the land around Pearl Beach but it had been earmarked for a proposed national park so she bought seven acres on its fringe. There she created a 'naturalist's cabin' where fellow enthusiasts could study the bush nearby.

The years passed and the grounds were improved with plantings. Then she gave the whole project with an accumulation of valuable natural history books to Sydney University who used it until the



*Bush Regeneration volunteer Alan Fergerson (right) and Robert Payne in the lantana patch removing exotic weeds.*

last few years as a students' research station. Now there are plans to give rebirth to Minard's old dream and provide accommodation for lay folk to learn about nature. Minard died in 1972 at the age of ninety, honoured by all. Her ashes were spread from the Warrah Lookout over the bush she had fought so long and hard to protect and preserve.

The Arboretum Committee worked hard not only on restoring the bush but raising money for its needs. The first newsletter for 1977 told of the planting of over 170 trees on the western side of the land to form a windbreak and a wall of green. Today these are giants. Also as the years passed bequests from older members allowed for more ambitious plans which included bridges, many plaques to name feature trees as a guide for visitors, a watering system using ground water for a number of purposes including the creation of an artificial rainforest in a swampy section.

Today the Arboretum is a Pearl Beach showplace. Not only do tourist buses come to visit but many events attract large crowds for special occasions including music festivals and more often, occasions such as the present celebrations where people come to be educated on the natural history delights of our local bush.

Her is an example which could be copied all over Australia.

# Calicivirus

## *Effects on the European Rabbit*



*The Wedgetail Eagle was once regarded as a serious pest. Research has shown the birds are valuable as rabbit destroyers.*

There have been many queries to our office about the question of rabbit control and in particular the release of the calicivirus, a virulent disease of rabbits.

Our Society applauds any control measures to destroy this **public enemy number one** of Australian wildlife.

A rabbit appears so harmless and cuddly. It is not. A grazing competitor to all our grasseating marsupials, a destroyer of the cover which offered small mammals protection against hunters, a spreader of erosion and an economic pest which caused at least a billion dollars damage to our farmers, it certainly deserves the title.

Myxomatosis and calicivirus are the least painful ways of killing such pests. The alternatives such as traps, poisoning by gas or smothering by ripping warrens are far worse. The disease appeared first in China and is now used in more than twenty countries around the world, either spreading naturally or being introduced. Nowhere has it harmed native animals and unlike many diseases, only kills one species.

Just to make sure, in Australia it has been tested on 28 different kinds of birds and mammals with doses a thousand times stronger than that needed for a rabbit and no problems emerged.

The belief that once the rabbit is removed native predators such as hawks, eagles, quolls and snakes will attack rare species and drive them to extinction is absurd. Rare animals are hard to catch and there are usually plenty of common species such as small wallabies, reptiles and birds as substitute food. Within a few months many of these predator numbers will die out from starvation and hopefully the greatest drops will be in foxes and feral cats.

We know that when myxomatosis destroyed most of our rabbits. What is important is that farmers should not rely only on this disease. Warrens should be destroyed so surviving rabbits will die of exposure. We must make this scientific triumph a success by giving a helping hand, or should we say, deep ripping tractors.

# Absolute Lunacy

## *Importation of Raw Salmon*

This was the headline in a recent *New Scientist*. It told of the battle against federal departments planning to allow the *import of raw salmon into Australia*.

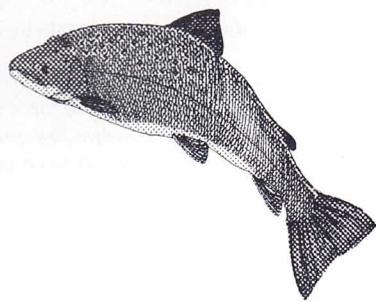
This local industry earns us \$70 million dollars a year and will earn us more when consumers realise we never use antibiotics to control the 23 diseases the fish in the northern hemisphere have naturally and which can only be countered by antibiotics.

Restraints on international trade, the economic rationalists tell us, so we must endanger a valuable industry to let other countries export raw salmon to compete with the local product.

It was the same kind of economic rationalism which brought clearfelling to Australia and stopped the United States trying to force Mexicans to use dolphin exclusion fishing methods if they wanted to export their cheaper fish into the States.

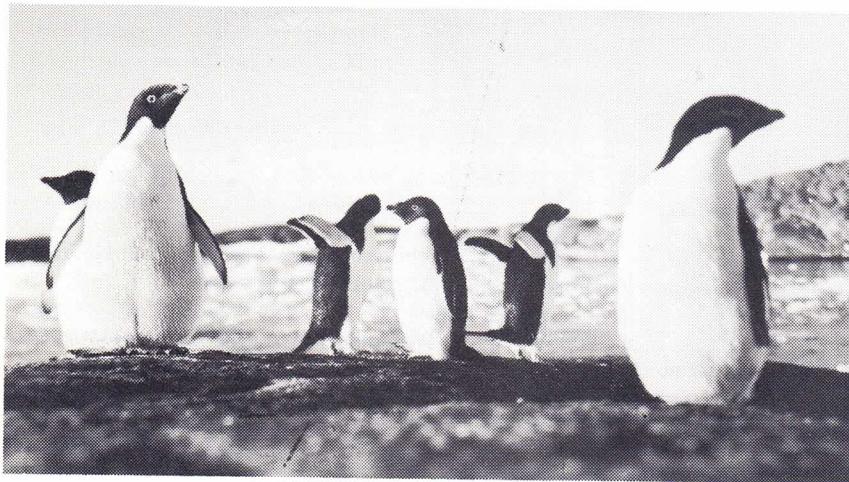
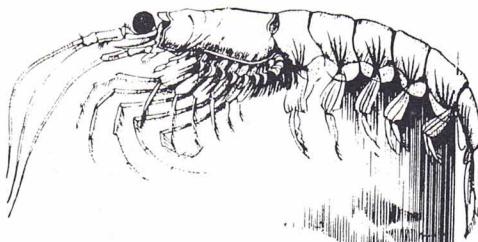
The Mexican fish were cheaper because saving dolphins is expensive though most nations think it is worthwhile. Though not Mexico apparently.

European salmon farms have been disastrous in Norway due to the bringing-in of English salmon to meet the large demand according to the *New Scientist* article.

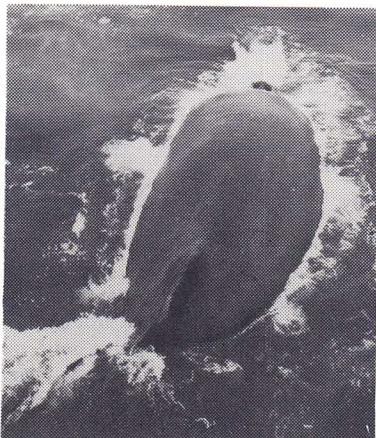


# Atlantic Ocean Krill

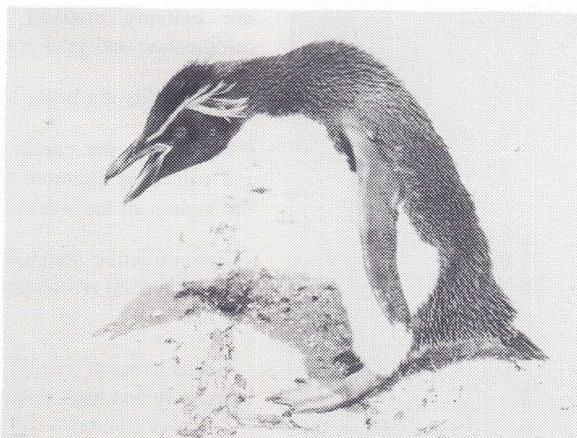
**Krill** (kril), *n.*, *pl. Krill.* any of the small, pelagic, shrimp-like crustaceans of the family *Euphausiidae*, used as food by certain whales. [*<Norw Kril* young fry (of fish)]



*Adelie Penguins feed on Krill.*



*Humpback Whales, when the giants went, other animals took their place, eating Krill.*



*Crested Penguin on the land where they nest, at sea they feed on Krill.*

You will not find this word in most dictionaries. Yet this shrimp, only a few centimetres long, is the base on which most Antarctic wildlife rests. Not that krill of many kinds is not found in other oceans but one species reaches its triumphal success in the summer waters of the Ocean.

Their total mass is estimated variously between 750 and 1350 million tonnes with an estimated safe catch of one hundred and fifty million tonnes.

Sadly though there are conservation laws over both land and sea of the Antarctic Ocean and Australia lays claim to a quarter of the land and the sea adjoining our legal powers are slim. Very few nations recognise the various claims by the few nations involved. Since there is no real human occupation it is 'terra nullius' and the same applies to the sea.

Anyone who has enough money could equip krill trawlers and take as much of this creature as they can and freeze it for later use as human or stock food. However there are problems - the major one being the high costs and the low returns. Still greed conquers most problems.

Since Blue Whales eat about four tonnes of krill in the southern oceans, with the near extinction of the great whales, there was left a huge surplus which other animals like seals and birds were quick to take advantage of. Crab-eating seal numbers jumped from half a million to an estimated thirty million while all the other profited, particularly those directly feeding on krill though hunters such as killer whales also increased.

Now it has been suggested we could start a \$250 million dollar industry. Before the slaughter begins our Society hopes the United Nations will step in and take control of all the Antarctic land and ocean to the 60 degree of southern latitude. Then any fishery could be for the benefit of all humankind, particularly the developing nations, rather than the greedy developed ones which take the lion's share of all the rest of the world's resources.

# State of the environment

ECOS published a summary of the recent government report. Here it is.

## *The good news*

Australia has no problem with sulphur dioxide and acid rain. Levels of some urban air pollutants, including lead, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and large particulates have declined in recent years.

The quality of our food and urban drinking water is generally good.

Oceans and estuaries away from major settlements are in good shape.

Urban housing is generally of good quality and a system exists for protecting significant places.

All this is good news, though we remember a Danish millionaire looking for places in which to build tourist hotels decided against Sydney. 'Because it smells' he told me.

## *Good moves*

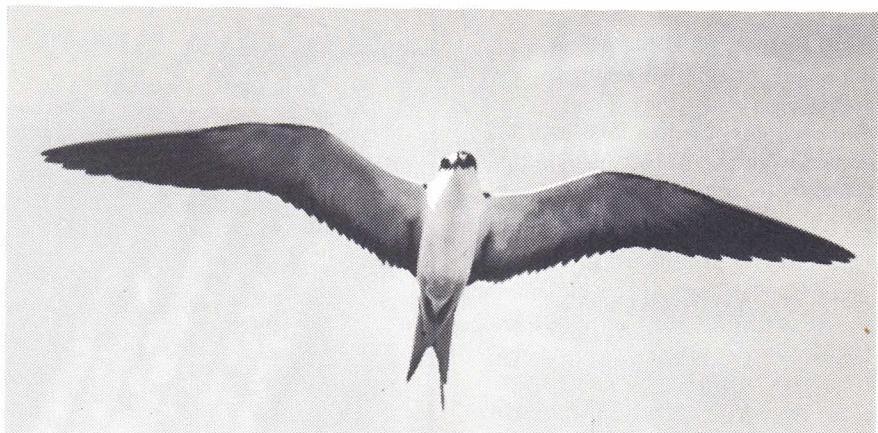
Establishment of multiple-use bioregional management regimes, such as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

Management by traditional owners of significant elements of cultural and natural heritage such as Uluru, KataTjuta and Jervis Bay National Park.

The limiting of further water diversion from Murray-Darling Rivers.

New Fisheries Acts to sustainably manage resources in the face of increasing fishing pressure.

### *Fishing must be better managed*



*A Sooty Tern, one of the many seabirds of the Great Barrier Reef.*

Landcare has mobilised landowners and communities to improve land-use and conservation practices.

Prompt action to phase out ozone depleting substances such as CFC's.

Queensland, WA and SA are promoting renewable energy such as solar power.

Kerb-side recycling scheme.

## *The bad news*

Some landscape systems are not represented in national parks and other reserves.

Not enough is known about Australia's biological diversity.

Changes to fisheries management may not be enough to reverse the decline of some fish stocks.

Inland waters in southern Australia are in poor shape. Too much water is being taken from some systems. Nutrients, salt levels and algal blooms are of concern.

Waste water and sewage are polluting coastal environments.

Land clearing, cropping on marginal land, irrigation and introduced species are causing erosion, salination, acidification and poor soil structure.

Old forests are being logged.

Australia's per capita greenhouse gas emissions continue to be among the highest in the world.

Few effective attempts have been made to contain urban sprawl or reduce car use.

Social stress is emerging in pockets of poverty and high unemployment.

Indigenous Australian have not shared the health improvements

enjoyed by other Australians in the past 50 years.

## **Bad moves**

National environmental management is hamstrung by varying government standards and structures.

Some government agencies promote economic development with little regard to environmental costs.

The short term objective of reducing the power prices may increase energy use, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

## **Our comments**

We can take pride that we began the move to develop Regional Parks such as the Great Barrier Reef, Shark Bay and Coongie Lakes N.P.

We also pushed for groups such as the Youth Corps in the United States and Landcare is an even better development. This happy combination of farmers and other folk is also pushing for wildlife corridors, again a movement began by our Society.

No mention of the fact that one of our most precious resources, freshwater is being flushed into rivers and the sea taking with it fertilisers and other wastes. All sewage should be recycled as is done in most developed countries.

## **Logged**

1. They still use the term 'logged'. Does this mean clearfelled or selective logging? Such logging has been practised since the first settlement to the end of the World War.

2. The old growth forests so highly praised today have often been logged in this way.

However our Society, while accepting praise with some modesty, will examine the bad moves and take what steps we can to reduce them. That will be our task for the next decade.



*Acid rain from metal smelters and overcutting of timber for mines has produced this wasteland at Queenstown, Tasmania*



*Phillip Island off Norfolk Island*



*Estuaries are important breeding grounds for sea life.*

# Wildlife preservation in *ACTION*



Wildlife Society members assisting National Parks and Wildlife Services officers prepare the nesting site.

## *In preparation for their 'Tern' to breed*

The month of October brings with it the expectation of the arrival of the Little Tern. Migrating from as far as Japan they come to Botany Bay, more specifically they come to Towra Spit Island and they come with one goal in mind, to breed.

One of several colonies in NSW, these endangered birds group together on the one hectare sand island to nest and rear their young. Unfortunately they are not the easiest birds to accommodate. They are very particular in the position of their nest and for them, real estate is all location, location, location. Preferring clean sand areas sheltered from prevailing winds with little if any green vegetation nearby yet close enough to feeding grounds and security from predators. Towra Spit Island fits this description well, the only fall back being the inevitable re-growth of some grasses and weed in the 'sand bunkers' used by the birds. In preparation then for their arrival it was necessary to clear this re-growth and make the area look all that more attractive to the birds in an effort to steer them away from less desirable areas such as Dolls

Point. Volunteers were called for and under the direction of NPWS officers Geoff Ross, Pat Murray, Keith Egan, Sally Austin, Patrick Medway and myself set out to do just that.

Meeting at the Fisheries Wharf, Sans Souci we were given a quick lecture and rundown on the Little Tern and the Island from NPWS officer Geoff Ross. Struggling for a berth on the driest and most stable boat we were all eventually transported to the Island. Clearing of

the vegetation began with the help of some shovels and pitch forks, avoiding the marked nest sites from last year's colony. Progress was fast and soon a majority of the Island was clear. Stopping for a lunch of cut sandwiches and salad which didn't quite make the boat trip unscathed, we were given a well-earned rest. Many hands make for quick work and shortly after lunch the rest of the Island was cleared. In the boats, on the way back to Sans Souci, we looked back and were satisfied we had made a difference and probably enhanced the Little Terns' chance for survival.

**Post Script** - Reports after the first birds nesting have come through. Two chicks, 45 nests and more than 90 eggs were present on the beach while at the same time last year there were no chicks, only 3 nests and 4 eggs. I'm sure that's enough satisfaction for us all!

*Eric Plumer, BSc(msci)*



Members Patrick Medway and Sally Austin removing the weeds from the nesting sites for the Little Tern.

# *A 'tern' for the better?*

The creation of a Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) and wading bird habitat on Towra Spit Island was proposed in an effort to replace that lost due to the construction of the third runway at Kingsford Smith Airport. The action plan was to increase the size of the island via sand nourishment and stabilise it through the construction of a number of groynes. Proposed works for this action involved the dredging of the adjacent aquatic reserve to provide the sand required, and it was this activity which met with wide spread criticism.

The Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) is listed as endangered species and Schedule 1, Part 1 of the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 (The TSC Act).

## ***Environmental Impact Statement***

The EIS on the proposed works outlined the relocation of 37,600 cubic meters of sand and the subsequent loss of 3.5 hectares of seagrasses, mainly *Zostera capricorni*. The fact that this was to occur in a proclaimed Aquatic Reserve which prohibits any form of habitat disturbance and recognises sand extraction as a major threat to species brings about easy opposition to the project.

Seagrasses communities are invaluable, providing aquatic habitats for many fish and crustacea and assist in sediment stabilisation, supply and fixation of biogenic calcium carbonate, detrital food chains, and nutrient cycling. They are an important nursery for many species of fish, particularly Mullet, Tailor, Bream, and Flathead. As such they are vital to coastal ecosystems and commercial and recreational fisheries alike.

Previous studies show the damage to such ecosystems once seagrasses were removed, and the subsequent failure of any re-planting or rejuvenation efforts. Between 1942 and 1986 Botany Bay lost 58% of its seagrass communities. Any further destruction is sure to bring drastic consequences to the entire marine environment in the Bay.

The main predator on the Little Terns and wading birds are rats, feral foxes and cats, silver gulls and ravens.

The question then remains is the preservation of one species worth the sacrifice of an entire marine ecosystem?

*Eric Plumer, BSc(msci)*  
*Some of the members marking a presentation to the public forum into the proposal to create a Little Tern and Wading Bird Habitat on Towra Point Spit Island*



*Councillor Bernie Clark led a presentation to the Public Forum on the E.I.S. on the proposal.*



# Endangered Species

Professor Mark Tyler at the ANZAAS conference in Canberra claims we should not waste time saving endangered species, not using desperate and expensive attempts to save them. Professor Tyler is a respected academic who has done good work on frogs which are his speciality. Yet like so many academics who are good scientists, he does not know a great deal about conservation.

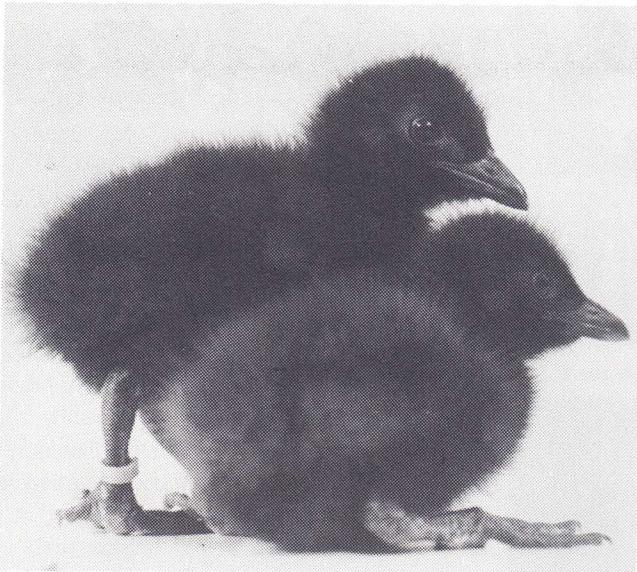
Of the endangered species most in the news, the reason for their going is not habitat destruction as usually claimed, but *changes caused by introduced animals or plants*. With rabbits, foxes, goats and feral cats their removal may be expensive but is worthwhile. Project Western Shield in WA will see the return of many endangered animals. Rabbit calicivirus will also see the return of many endangered plants to the National Parks.

When this technique is spread around Australia, we will see many of our problems solved, not without cost but well worthwhile in wildlife terms.

Let us look at a few more examples. Our Society played a large part in saving the Koala. Yet a decade ago scientists and others feared it would become extinct. Today there is talk about reducing their numbers due to overpopulation.

We played a large part in saving the Lord Howe Island Woodhen. It cost a great deal of money, though mainly because the authorities would not take our advice. Today the Woodhen is prevalent again.

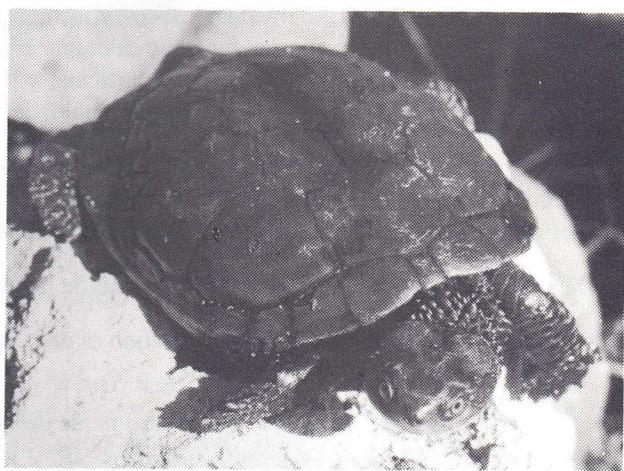
The Noisy Scrub-Bird was saved with our help and by translocating should have a secure future.



*Two week old Lord Howe Island chicks, from a quarter million dollar breeding programme paid for by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Foundation. It was largely due to our efforts that the breeding programme was begun and today woodhens are once more common on this world heritage island.*



*Noisy Scrub-Bird calling. This photo by its modern discoverer Harley Webster is a triumph for conservation. The last section of bush where it survived has been made a nature reserve and translocation has allowed it to thrive in some of its old localities.*



*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.*

The list is quite long. Numbats, rock wallabies, quolls, Goulds Petrel are a few saved by removing feral animals.

Professor Tyler's claim we should explore places where species remain to be discovered hardly seems as urgent as setting up reserves in all our varied ecosystems. Then all the wildlife will be safe even if we don't know all their names.

Saving our freshwater and marine animals will not be easy since the introduced competitors will not be easy to eradicate.

Even the Cane Toad could be controlled if we spent enough money on research into its natural controls in its home country of South America.

No. Our Society will keep battling to save the endangered wildlife of Australia.

# Dinosaur Footprints

The stealing of the Stegosaur Dinosaur footprints near Broome has created excitement, dismay and anger at the loss of part of our heritage. Perhaps there is some consolation that we still have a set of dinosaur footprints at Dinosaur Point just north of Broome.

Or did have, though it is thirty years since I photographed them for our television series *Nature Walkabout*. Even then the sea was eroding the prints.

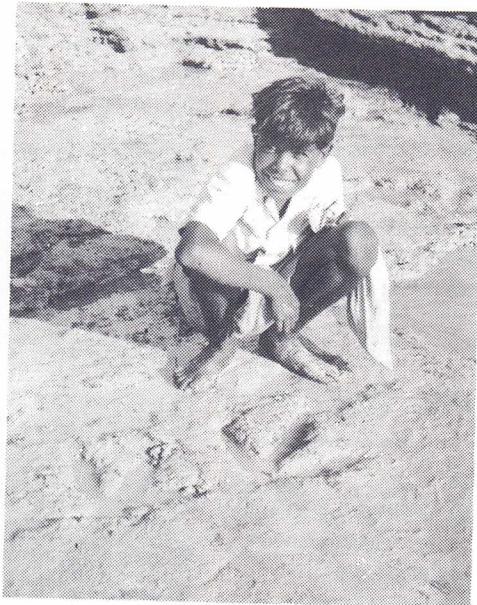
The set of tracks created great excitement when they were first reported by Walter Jones in 1945. He made a cast which he gave to the Perth Museum. However they had been found thousands of years before by the local

tonned according to a 1982 Western Australian Museum newsletter.

## Plaster Casts

At that time casts of the prints had been made in concrete slabs to become a feature of the Museum. Many years before we had also made casts using them to create a series of white imprints in Hay Street leading to the old Town Hall. It was an advertising idea to attract patron inside where the WA Naturalists Club and the Gould League had organised a Wild Life Show.

I can't remember if any of our visitors complained we had no live animal on display.



Dinosaur footprints at Dinosaur Point, Broome.

Aborigines. The late Ludwig Glauert, then director of the WA Museum wrote an article for the WA Naturalist of the legend associated with the prints describing how they were made.

"... the Aborigines had given them the name of Warragunna and who have a legend to account for their origin. The story is that a native walking along the beach noticed the tracks and at once began to follow them. Suddenly a very large bird was seen trying to get across the bay. When the bird turned and came towards him the native fled, not stopping until he reached Willy's Creek where his footprints can be seen..."

## Identification

No wonder he moved fast since the footprints were identified by Dr E H Colbert of the American Museum of Natural History as those of a carnivorous dinosaur of 135 millions years ago. Dr Colbert and Dr Duncan Merrilees of the WA Museum studied the prints and theorised it was a creature known as a Theropod dinosaur about six metres in length and nearly four metres tall. When living some 135 million years before, it would have weighed about two

## Dinosaur Point

However on my last visit to *Dinosaur Point* in 1965 when we timed our arrival for the few days each month when a very low tide uncovered them. Then it appeared a few more years would destroy the fossil prints. However since the tracks continued, to go under the sandstone of the Point these could, some day in the future, be uncovered to reveal pristine tracks.

Perhaps that time has now arrived!

It would be a skilled operation but the Perth museum could supervise the task. With the number of local companies funding the operation Western Shield, the world's largest project dealing with feral animals, the scourge of native wildlife, it would seem possible to find companies willing to fund the task.

The local Aborigines could also be asked to assist and it would be simple to protect the revealed prints by strong metal screens so there would be no opportunity to steal this set of tracks. They could well repay the cost as a tourist attraction for future visitors.

# Invaders

Our Society for decades has warned of the danger to our wildlife from plants and animals evading our quarantine. The Australian Quarantine service has usually fobbed off our complaints. However now the axe has been taken to public service jobs they may listen more closely, now their own jobs are at risk.

Public servants do not just push pens around large offices. They are also the folk who provide anti-venoms for snake bite victims, watch ships and aircraft to stop new invading plants and animals and a host of other vital duties.

## *Japanese Seastar*

Now for a report on a recent newcomer, the *Japanese Seastar* which the media persist in calling a starfish. Anything less like a fish it would be hard to imagine.

It arrived here in ballast water in the early 1980's and now in the Derwent Estuary alone there are an estimated twenty eight million. The New Scientist of 19 October 1996 has a full page on this new menace.

Just like locusts and grasshoppers on land, seastars of many kinds are a menace at sea, devouring bivalve molluscs, such as mussels.

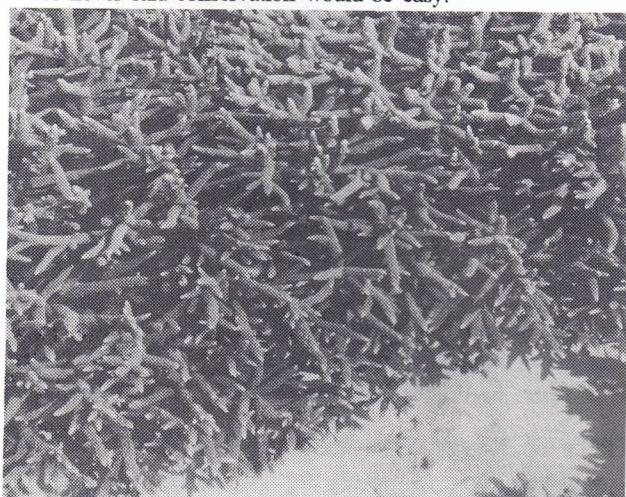
Now back in its original home, a disease has appeared which is causing a collapse in their seastar populations. Our scientists are studying this new parasite for its potential use in Australia though sadly unlike other biological controls such as myxomatosis, calicivirus and cactoblastis which are single species attackers, it attacks many kinds of seastar.

Which produces a dilemma. If the new parasite can kill Japanese seastars and possible crown-of-thorns seastars should we sacrifice some of our native species as well?

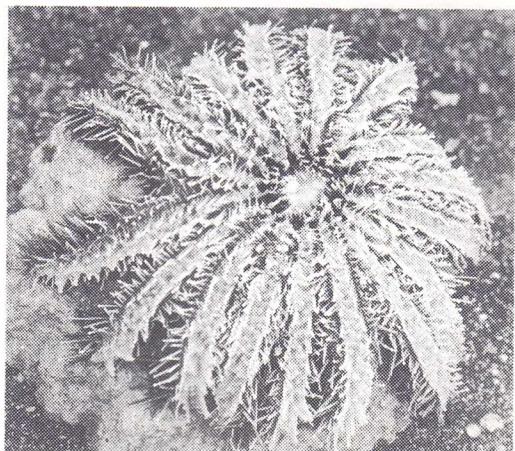
We are confident the CSIRO will take all these aspects into account as they study the potential of the new disease, another example of possible biological control of introduced pests.

The article suggests a precaution would be to carry out the research in Japan but it may come down in the future to a decision on how much of our biodiversity will be lost if we do not take action.

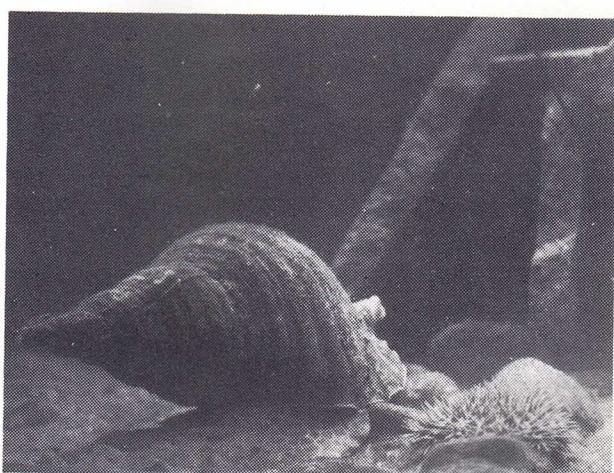
We never said conservation would be easy!



*Staghorn coral, a favoured victim of the seastar.*  
Photo Keith Gillett.



*Crown-of-thorns seastar, viewed from underside, a deadly enemy of many kinds of corals.* Photo Keith Gillett.



*Giant triton mollusc approaching a crown-of-thorns seastar which it will devour. This is one of our natural enemies of the invading seastar.*



*Tasmanian mussels a possible victim of the Japanese seastar.*

# Carp in Australia

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), a fish introduced from Asia, is responsible for a multitude of detrimental effects to our waterways.

Carp are farmed in other countries but are considered pests in Canada, North America, and Australia. Recent reports in 'The Land' newspaper, suggest that the carp is the 'Scourge of our Rivers' and the 'River Rabbit'. The carp is well established in New South Wales with carp accounting for approximately 90% of all fish present in the Murrumbidgee, Murray and Lachlan Rivers.

It is thought that carp displace native fish species by more efficiently competing for food and space. It is also thought that carp may be predators of some native species. They may cause the death of some fishes by acting as a disease vector for the anchor worm, *Lernaea cyprinacea*.

Carp are blamed for the degradation of waterways through their feeding habit, since they are bottom feeders and suck up mouthfuls of sediment and proceed to spit out all inedible materials. It is suggested that this feeding method increases the nutrient load in the water. Increases in nutrient load may then aid in the outbreak of algal blooms, such as the well publicised blue-green algae. Carp are also accused of undermining river banks, causing collapses, which results in

the waterways becoming wider and shallower. This reduces water flow rate.

All of these suspected effects are well supported by anecdotal evidence but not much scientific research has been performed. Moreover, research that has taken place, has largely been conducted overseas and in unnatural conditions like experimental ponds and drains. In Australia, the Victorian Carp Program which ran from 1978 to 1982 found that there was no correlation between carp density and turbidity and that even at high densities they did not increase turbidity. This contradicts general public opinion. Current research being performed by NSW Fisheries is nearing completion, and is reported to have evidence that demands a major campaign to control the carp.

Possible control methods include immunocontraception, and the introduction of a disease specific to the carp. One such disease may be 'spring viraemia' produced by the virus, *Rhabdovirus carpio*. Limited tests in England in the 1970's showed that the disease was not transmissible to seven species of freshwater fish from Australia but more tests need to be performed.

(The Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia call on the government to reinitiate research into the suitability of this virus as a control method for the carp.)

*Murray Hunt*

# The Truth About Paper

How often do we hear how greedy woodchippers are turning beautiful rainforests into paper. Less than one percent of this ecosystem is used for papermaking. The same amount of temperate hardwood forests is used for the same purpose.

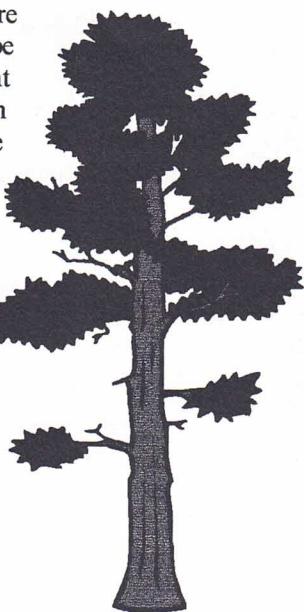
Thirty percent of paper comes from plantations and if we had enough sense we could make even more from hemp. This plant is not the variety used for making marihuana but one used for hundreds of years to make rope. A perfect plant for growing on our degraded soils since it will help stabilise them.

Just under forty percent of managed temperate forests are used for papermaking but 'manage' is a loose term since it usually means clearfelling the forest and gradually this becomes a plantation, with loss of biological diversity.

Just under twenty percent of paper comes from forests.

We should be planting more of our eucalypts. These can be harvested in seven to eight years, or at least they can in Brazil where they also use hybrids developed in Australia but probably not planted here.

Above all the paper industry is one of the few which is sustainable if we plan well according to the New Scientist for 28 September which has an article on the world paper story.



# Rica Erickson Nature Reserve

Usually naturalists and conservationists are honoured when they are dead. It is good to know one important person has had this recognition while she is still alive.

I first met Rica in Western Australia when she came to me at the Museum classes of which I was in charge. She showed me a portfolio of botanical drawings and asked if she should continue.

I was enthusiastic but even more important told Dom Serventy about this talented amateur and he was able to organise publication of her work. Her book on Orchids was a worthy successor to the 1930 one by Emily Pelloe. She also was assisted by a good friend of the WA Naturalists Club which had been formed in 1924 before by my brother and Emily was a member of the club and her assistant was Colonel Goadby, a delightful man who became my own good friend.

Rica now has had a Nature Reserve which she helped save on the Victorian Plains. Along the same track the famous botanist James Drummond also collected and no doubt here Rica drew the orchids, sundews and trigger plants, all of which became subjects for her books.

So the *Rica Erickson Nature Reserve* proudly carries her name.



Above: Enamel orchids in the Nature Reserve



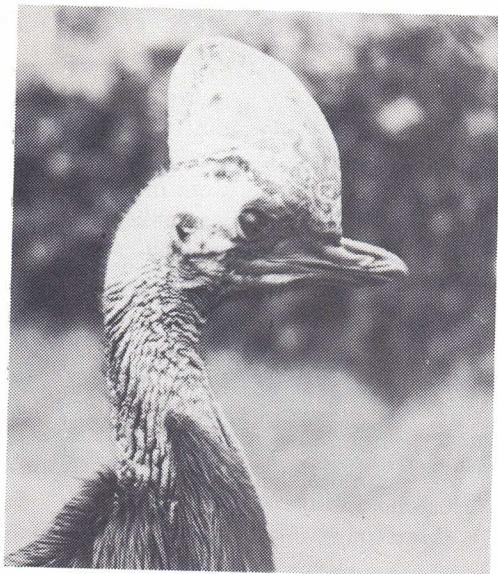
Left: Sundews which have trapped a butterfly.

# Cat and Dog Control

Too often conservationists worry about domestic cats and the need for controls on their wanderings and killings. Dogs seems to get a better press yet in many cases dogs on the loose are far more dangerous to many species, particularly the larger animals such as koalas.

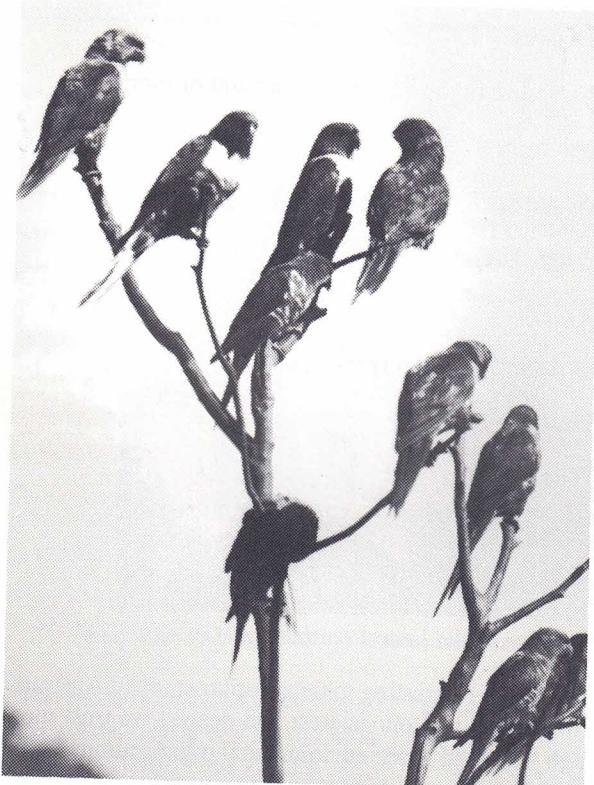
Now comes a sad story from North Queensland. Mount Whitfield near Cairns had eight cassowaries by 1992 and these dropped to two by 1995. The last bird was a female known to be at least 35 years old until savaged by two bull terriers.

These dogs are the companions of sad humans who need the comfort of savage and dangerous dogs, possibly because of their own inadequate natures. It is obvious that the only way to save these wonderful birds is by adequate national parks patrolled by rangers with rifles ready to shoot any dogs found in the park.



*Southern Cassowary are now rare and in need of greater protection in our northern State.*

## Damage to Fruit Crops by Birds



*Rainbow Lorikeets are beautiful Australian birds along the East Coast of Australia. In some cases they can be very destructive to local fruit crops especially in the Northern Territory.*

*Rainbow Lorikeets* are so beautiful most folk in New South Wales enjoy their splendour without any thought of the damage they do to orchards. Yet the latest edition of *Landscape* tell the sad story of how in the Territory the birds destroy up to 90 percent of rambutan and on some properties up to sixty percent of cultivated mangoes.

In Western Australia the first birds escaped from aviaries and rapidly colonised the southwest. As a matter of fact in the late fifties our President had one bird in his garden. Next year there were two and now they are in thousands. In Queensland, annual crop losses are \$one million and it is estimated they may rise to \$20 million. Victoria and South Australia are also suffering heavy losses.

Before reaching for their shotguns the authorities should test the methods used in New South Wales to protect their fruit against fruit bats. The orchards are covered with nylon netting which can be rolled up when not in use, then unrolled when the fruit has formed. Apparently these nets last about seven years at least and also protect fruit against damage by hail.

Hopefully this will provide a solution in every State. The damage was recorded many years ago by early naturalists earlier in this century so this is nothing new.

# New National Parks

## *New South Wales take a giant step forward.*

National parks and wilderness areas gained many new regions by the decisions of the Carr government. It was a move reminiscent of the good work of the Neville Wran years and make this State a remarkable contrast to most others governed by conservative political parties, more concerned with economic rather than ecological rationalism.

To mention some of the gains. 37 new national parks have been declared as well as twelve wilderness areas. These are mainly in State forests wilderness, a *Dunphy Wilderness Fund* of 5 million dollars will be set up, used to purchase leasehold wilderness land.

More importantly in terms of the State's future will be half a million dollars to be used in a base study of the western region to prepare a firm base on which new national parks and other reserves can be declared, rather than the present ad hoc methods.

WWF many years ago made a similar study of western Queensland but little was done with the information. It is essential that no government will be elected to power unless it promises a programme to make these findings viable.

Politician's promises are only platitudes. We must demand firm programmes in these for future election.

## Whom Can You Trust?

Our President in his book 'Easy Guide to Green Living' gave the following list of organisations which can be trusted to give decisions on environmental matters. In this section he quoted an opinion poll in Victoria on those organisations which could be believed.

The CSIRO headed the list, with in order, the Health Commission, conservation groups, local government, State government, the lead industry, car manufacturers and at the bottom petrol companies.

The poll was dealing with lead in petrol and how dangerous it was to human health.

Now the New Scientist for 28 September 1996 published an English poll and our President suggests we might modify his section. It was carried out with 210 people in Norwich. These were given a list of 13 common risks and asked which groups were most trusted to give judgements.

The risks were - sunbathing, food colouring, genetic engineering, nuclear power, mugging, home accidents, ozone depletion, car driving, microwave ovens, AIDS, war, terrorism and alcholic drinks.

The groups were surprising but should not have been.

Here is the list beginning with the most trusted:-

- \* Family
- \* Friends

### *\*Environmental organisations*

\* Doctors

These were in the top seventy percent or more.

Then came:-

\* Scientists

\* Trade Unions

\* Religious organisations

All these in the low twenty percent.

Finally:-

\* The Media

\* Companies

\* Government

All these in the lowest ten percent.

It would be interesting to do a similar study in Australia but in general it is our nearest and dearest we trust most though it is good to see environmental organisations in the top list. Folk have learned we have no axes to grind except of course the conservation axe!

# Brave New World

"An Australian robot is pushing this nation to world leadership in forestry genetics and automated tissue culture."

*Vitorn 501* is doing for forestry what Henry Ford did for the car industry - automating it. It works 365 days a year cloning three million trees for domestic and global markets. The technology will produce a billion seedlings for Indonesia by 2000.

This is the heading of an article in the Sydney Morning Herald of 5 November 1996.

Why not the same for Australia? The best way to save our native forests with their biological diversity, is to grow more plantations for timber and paper, just as we grow wheat for food. Abandoned farms and other cleared land can be turned to good use. Also farmers can spread their crops using agroforestry.



*A private plantation at Tooborock, south of Heathcote in Victoria.*

Already in Western Australia there is a farmer who is able to mass plant trees for shelter belts and also for agroforests using an automated technique for planting eucalypt seedlings. So this could produce a 'brave new world' for our plants ranging from gum trees to tea tree

oil, acacias for tannin, mulgas to improve our arid lands and a host of other purposes.

All we need is radical thinking by governments with bright farmers to show them the way.

## Big Cities



*Smog over Sydney. Sadly folk living in cities become used to bad air.*

For those Sydney folk who boast their's is the largest city in Australia, this story published in the New Scientist should be salutary.

India has 36 big cities and a World Bank study "... shows that air

pollution kills 40,000 people a year in 36 Indian cities. With an annual toll of 7,500. New Delhi has the largest number of pollution-related deaths followed by Calcutta with 5,700 and Mumbai with 4,500. In the same 36 cities, air pollution

also leads to nearly 20 million hospital admissions..."

Perhaps some Australians watched Australia's defeat in the first Test in Delhi. The air was filled with pollutants which make it hard at times to see the players. This is because the small pollution particles in Delhi is five times higher than the World Health Organisation standards.

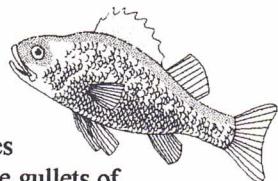
Perhaps that explains why we lost, though Sydney is not far behind at times. However, our air quality is slowly improving, though with the planned expansion of the size of Sydney, it is unlikely this will continue.

# Barramundi Cousin

The Nile Perch is a close relative of our Barramundi. Lake Victoria in Africa is the world's second largest freshwater lake. It was home of a huge number of species of small fish which helped nourish a sizable human population.

Then someone, though it is not clear who was responsible, decided it would be worth bringing in a new species, the Nile Perch, a much larger fish. This may have happened accidentally through an escape from a fish farm nearby during a flood. The first record was in 1957, then in 1959 the Ugandan fisheries department released fingerlings in 1959.

At the time it made good sense as a much larger fish could thrive and would be easier to catch. In 1972 this new species was still only one percent of the catch but by 1982 it had become 85 percent of the Lake Victoria fish take. The species was helped by the fact there are no crocodiles in the lake and this reptile is the main predator of the perch in its native haunts.



Of course the native species gradually disappeared into the gullets of this new giant. The New Scientist of October 1996 writes of this scientific disaster as follows.

"... But if you are one of the millions of Tanzanians living near the lake, why care? Unlike the indigenous species, Nile Perch grows to a huge size, often, as the Africans say, as big as a goat... It is not particularly good to eat, rather oily. But never mind, it can be caught in large trawl nets, it feeds the masses, it can be exported. It has done the economy good creating niches for fishermen, boat builders, smokers, salt grinders, restaurant owners, shopkeepers and bicycle repairers..."

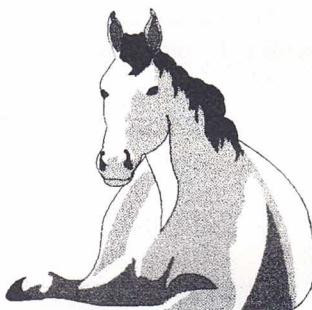
We are not sure the connection with fish of some of the industries but it does show the dilemma of keeping biological diversity when contrasted against biological abundance. The value of rainforests against wood plantations is another example.

## Fruit Bats and Horses

Some time ago a news item told the sad story of a disease which affected horses. Fourteen died in all and more sadly, a racehorse trainer. It was a scientific mystery but recently research by the Department of Primary Industry in Queensland announced the disease came from fruit bats.

The virus did not apparently affect the health of the bats.

How the virus jumps from bats to horses is still a mystery.



## Greenhouse Cooling

New Scientist, that brilliant environmental magazine bringing us news of discoveries, disasters and the like together with the latest discoveries in scientific research, published the following item.

A Californian group tried the experiment of seeding 60 square kilometres of ocean west of the Galapagos Islands. They used iron minerals since the scientists thought that this missing mineral was responsible for the well known fact that tropical oceans are biological 'deserts'.

Here is the conclusion.

*"... Fertilising the ocean with iron could lower carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere by ten percent or more taking some of the heat out of global warming... roughly fifty of the world's oceans are rich in nutrients yet*

are lacking in plankton. It is now clear that these marine 'deserts' found mostly in the tropical Pacific and the Southern Ocean are starved of iron..."

Plankton are the floating animals and plants of the ocean which are the base of the food pyramid on which all marine life depends. The theory of one researcher is that by putting iron continually in the Southern Ocean for a hundred years could reduce the amount of carbon dioxide by about 60 parts per million being a *reduction of 17 percent*.

We all hope this is right as it would be a part solution to the problem of global warming which threatens the whole of the earth with lowlying lands being flooded as well as changes to climatic patterns.

# Long Lines

Seabird deaths have been in the news lately. This time from a new killer, longline fishing. A recent edition of the New Scientist describes how about eighty thousand seabirds are killed annually in the North Pacific Ocean.

These incredible killing devices are often eight kilometres long with baited hooks spread along this immense length. It is a technology used in most of the world's oceans so Australian seabirds also suffer.

One method of protection is to set the lines at night so the baited hooks, with weights attached, sink out of sight of the seabirds.

This suits the fishermen since a dead bird is not only a nuisance but also means a bait wasted which might have caught a fish. There are other methods which can be used and we have described these in earlier issues of this newsletter.



*Wandering Albatross are often victims of longline fishing.*

## And now for a brickbat!

We never thought it could happen. A government selling off the right for private rich folk to buy the right to build apartments in a National Park. We have fought for some years to get rid of squatter's butts in National Parks along our coastline.

Now those with the money will have the legal right to build in the Thredbo area. This is in Kosciusko National Park in the Snowy Mountains.

If the government gets away with this land sale, why not also sell the right to build on Sydney Harbour National Park. Such a site on North or Middle Head would be worth millions of dollars.

If the Australian Labour Party allows it, how can any other government be stopped.

Conservationists have always held firmly to the principle that ideally all private developments should be outside National Parks. In some circumstances this may not be practicable. It is essential that private folk will only have the right to buy accommodation for short periods, not for their own life and that of their offspring.

It is a shameful blot on a proud record to this moment.

## Shellharbour Wetland Disaster

Now it seems that this wetland, which was designated in 1985 by a Labour Government, in 1996 another Labour Government plans to destroy it. An amendment to the original declaration will allow the local Council to do what it likes with this piece of nature, now in short supply in Australia, the dryest inhabited continent in the world.

What the Council wants is a marina and later perhaps other tourism buildings, according to SPACE, 'Shellharbour People's Association for the Conservation of the Environment'.

However a two million dollar Commission of Enquiry found that the wetland had suffered serious and irreversible damage and almost impossible to recreate in its natural state.

That would seem tautology. If it is irreversible it cannot be recreated.

# Annual New Years Day Garden Bird Count

The President, Vincent Serventy has issued a special appeal to all members of the Society to participate in the 1997 annual New Years Day Garden Bird Count.

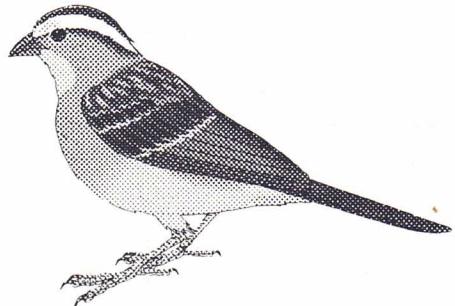
The Garden Bird Count will take place across Australia on New Years Day, January 1 and interested people are asked to walk around their garden between 7am and 8am recording all the birds they see or hear including the actual numbers which are present or fly over during this time.

We are interested in counts from people living in urban areas, no matter how large or small their town.

Please forward your Garden Bird Count direct to the Society, GPO Box 3428, SYDNEY, NSW, 2001 and include your name and address with POSTCODE for our records.

Full details of the annual Garden Bird Count will be processed and compared with the recorded data collected over the past 15 years searching for trends and developments effecting bird life in our urban gardens. After compilation, a report will be published in the next edition of Australian Wildlife for members information.

**Members** are encouraged to advise local media representatives of the annual Garden Bird Count and where possible to encourage a wider public participation. Copies of our Media Release are available on request by calling Sydney 02 9556 1537.



## **Garden Bird Count Compiler Wanted**

Following the unfortunate death of our Councillor, Allan Read who was our very active Bird Count Compiler for so many years, members are invited to call the Secretary or President to volunteer their services to act as the Compiler for the 1997 Bird Count.

Full details of the position are available from the Secretary on Tel/Fax 02 9556 1537 and will usually involve some knowledge of computer data collection and compilation.

## **Update on Towra Point Nature Reserve**

We have now participated in four weekend 'working bees' on Bush Regeneration on Towra Point Nature Reserve. On the first day more than 40 volunteers helped remove exotic weeds from the historic site wetlands. On the other days, the numbers were less, but the spirit of cooperation is still strong.

Working on clearing up the Towra Point Nature Reserve to preserve our wildlife is 'conservation in action'. We meet again in early December to plan for more conservation action in 1997. Plans include more working bees on bush regeneration, better signage, better supervision of the Reserve, possible fencing to prevent foxes entering the Reserve.

## **Keeping a Lid on Recycling at Taronga Zoo**

A five year sponsorship agreement designed to reduce waste and increase recycling at Sydney's Taronga Zoo was officially launched 24 July 1996 by the NSW Minister for the Environment, Ms Pan Allan.

Ms Allan said the agreement between Taronga Zoo and Collex Waste Management Pty Ltd will play a significant role in the Zoo meeting Government targets for all its agencies and departments to achieve a 60 per cent reduction in land fill contributions.

"I congratulate the management and staff of Taronga Zoo for their involvement in the Government's environmental initiatives and the achievements they have already made.

"With more than one million people visiting Taronga Zoo each year this project will prove to be another important step in the Zoo's role as a community leader and educator on environmental issues," Ms Allan said.

# President speaks at Port Stephens Eco-Network Meeting

The President of the society, Vincent Serventy, AM, was the guest of honour at a special Luncheon Meeting of the Port Stephens Environmental Eco-Network groups meeting at Soldiers Point, Nelsons Bay recently.

Some sixty members of the various conservation groups of the Port Stephens and Nelson Bay region gathers as a ECO-NETWORK GROUP to support and encourage each other in preserving and protecting their local natural environment under the very active Presidency of Councillor Helen Brown and Secretaryship of Councilor Darrel Dawson. (Full details from Secretary, PO Box 97, Nelson Bay, NSW, 2315.)

Eco-Network's objectives are to unify members, affiliates communities and their organisations in co-operation around shared values, common interests and objectives;

To conduct educative and awareness programs within local communities on ecological values and systems;

To conduct workshops, seminars, forums, on complex and contentious issues impacting upon ecosystems and related concerns;

To develop a capacity to become the eco-forum/network of the Port Stephens, Great Lakes, Gloucester and Dungog local government areas.

Policy areas focus for 1996-97 include vegetation, habitat conservation in dedicated nature reserves and national parks in the region, koala and other wildlife protection from sandmining and developments, linking wildlife corridors, eg: Tillierry Peninsula, Salamander Bay, Corlette; opposing development zoning's in wildlife habitat, feral animal controls, bitou bush removal and native replanting, land, coast and dune care projects and eco-tourism policy and projects.

The Eco-Network draws on the principles of Agenda 21 from the World Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

## Friends of Towra Point Nature Reserve Formed

Following a series of successful meetings organised by the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre and the Society on the future support for Towra Point Nature Reserve, a number of recommendations were adopted at the December 6 meeting by the representatives of the conservation groups in the Sutherland Shire area.

Recommendations adopted included regular working bees by local volunteers to clear the bitou bush lantana from the Reserve and nearby Botany Bay National Park; applications for Environment grants to assist in major projects on the Reserve; the formation of an organised group of 'Friends of Towra Point Nature Reserve' to provide regular and on-going assistance to the National Parks and Wildlife Service officers responsible for the Reserve and to endeavour to preserve and protect the Towra Lagoon and its associated wildlife with an emphasis on the migratory bird population protected under the international RAMSAR agreement.

Members interested in assisting the 'Friends' are asked to contact the Secretary.



*Environmental Volunteers work hard on Bush Regeneration programs in Nature Reserves and National Parks.*

# Around the States

## Western Australia

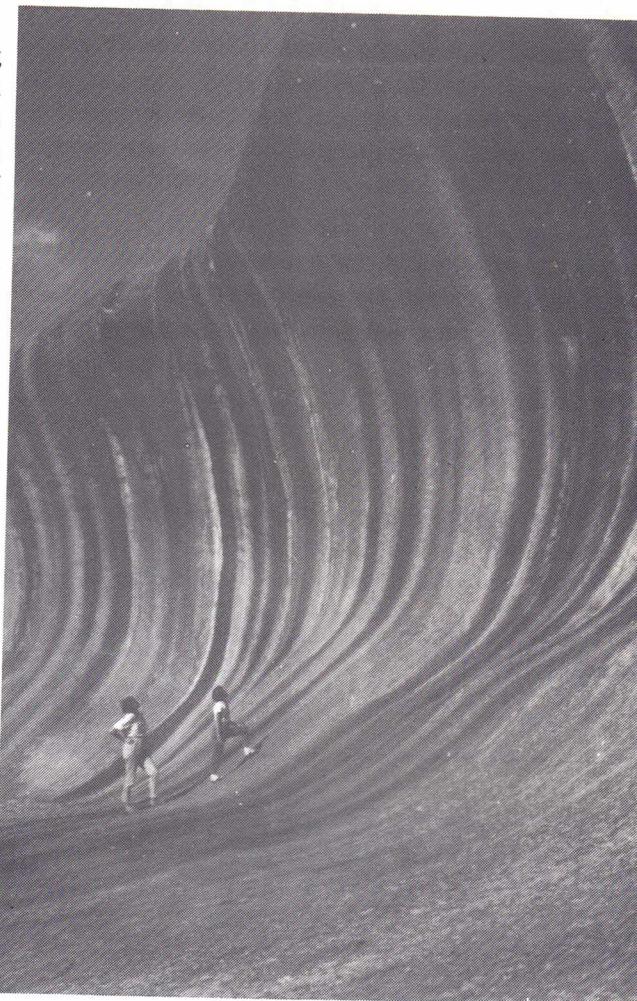
That marvellous magazine *Landscape* had an interesting article on Wolfe Creek meteorite crater. Until then we had always called it Wolf Creek. It was made by a meteorite which crashed to the ground some 300,000 years ago. The article stated it weighed 50,000 tonnes and hit at a speed of 15 kilometres a second, creating a wonderful landform.

The Aborigines no doubt had a name for it and their Dreamtime legends explained it as being where one huge snake came out of the ground. There were two snakes, one forming Sturt and the other Wolfe Creek crossed the desert and left behind those two landforms.

Of course Aboriginal Dreaming stories are fascinating just like the legend of Noah's Ark is fascinating. No reasonable person accepts these were historical truths since with thirty million species of animals and plants estimated to be living today any ship would have been grossly overcrowded!

Only from the air can this crater be truly appreciated but viewed from on high it is just as awesome as *Wave Rock at Hyden* is from the ground.

The wildlife authorities have had the crater protected as a National Park. Hopefully it will remain as it is today without any additions like climbing assistance as at Uluru where a series of spikes and chains spoils the symmetry of Uluru. Similarly local authorities have created an ugly cement wall so this natural wonder is used to trap rain. Hopefully the State authorities one day will remove it.



Wolfe Creek Crater National Park.

## New South Wales

The Labour government has made giant strides on environmental protection in the last few weeks. Most important is a detailed forestry package which should take much of the heat out of this troubled area. We did not get everything we wanted but often we must make compromises to ensure progress towards our major aims.

The Carr Government has kept its election promises, declaring 20 new national parks in the first 12 months in office. In the forest regions 240,000 hectares of new wilderness were declared and an additional 30,000 hectares of new forest parks with an additional 30,000 hectares still to come.

Until then there will be a logging ban over 670,000 hectares of forest, much of which may become new parks when the research has been done.

The timber industry has been given a ten year guarantee of wood supply which, though it is much less than in previous years seems to have left them reasonably satisfied.

A great achievement and it has produced satisfaction from all sides of this long argument.

## The World of the Small

Few of us other than naturalists realise the most abundant of all living things are the minute forms of life which occupy every environment where life can survive.

They include bacteria, fungi, single-celled animals, and single-celled plants. These are the base of the pyramid of life which drives every living thing on land and in the sea.

If you were to mass all the larger plants and animals together in the world, the world of the small is estimated to be between 5 to 25 times more massive than the world of the large.

These micro-organisms are the partners in plant nutrition. Also they supplement what the farmer puts into the soil to grow crops. For example, each year they add two million tonnes of nitrogen. They also help bind the soil particles together preventing too great erosion. Many of our industries depend on their assistance.

Even though they are so vital to human survival, we know very little about most of them, so it is good to see some research being done.

Their numbers of species are immense with less than one percent having been identified. It has been estimated that one gram of forest soil may contain 4000 distinct species as well as millions of individuals.

## Lord Howe Island

Society members will always have a soft spot for this beautiful island. Our vice president Jim Brown ably aided by our council member Mabel Brown, his wife and helper made many of us aware of the charm of this place.

Indeed when visiting Lord Howe on the cruise ship Lindblad Explorer I was told by the tourists that this was the most beautiful of all islands they had visited. Since these folk had been almost to every corner of the globe this was praise indeed.

Now there are complaints from the islands that very little federal money has been given to the State government to help manage this World Heritage Region.

Also in the worries of the media report was a request to ban cruise ships though no reasons have been given. Tourists do not love the island to death. They take away only memories.

It is the islanders who want more and more vehicles though the area is so small that walking is an easy way to visit the most popular spots. Stiff climbing is needed for Mounts Lidgbird and Gower. Bicycles are for hire and in many ways Lord Howe in the east mimics Rottnest in the west where there are no private cars, only government trucks which take tourists on day trips to selected part of the island which is larger than Lord Howe.

Also why pet goats are allowed to roam free seems strange. If in fenced enclosures they will do no harm and any which escape should be shot by the rangers on the island. Also building approvals for holiday homes should certainly be banned. There are a number of good guest houses with satisfactory restaurants.

It would seem an easy matter for the State Minister Pam Allan to get whatever research funding is needed though it would seem to us this is a place where immense research has already been carried out. There are far more urgent needs elsewhere.



*Sooty Terns are now nesting for the first time on Mount Eliya. Large colonies have always nested on offshore islands.*

# Letters to the Editor

13 November 1996

Dear Editor

While our Society has admired the environmental work of Peter Garrett his suggestion of a 'clean beach tax' to be imposed on packaging and other companies (SMH 13 October 1996) is not the best way to go.

Our Society some years ago suggested people should become 'carers' rather than 'complainers' about litter on beaches, parks or roadsides.

Carers on their walks in such places take a plastic bag supplied by most stores for purchases. We use this while enjoying the walk, yet also pick up litter of all kinds and at the end, dump this in a convenient bin.

For example, at Pearl Beach half a dozen carers keep the beach clean of all litter. Interestingly the amount becomes less and less as we have found that 'rubbish invites rubbish'. Also the local Council have found there is no need to send in their mechanical rubbish cleaning beach equipment so saving ratepayer's money.

The 'one day in the year' cleanup is no permanent solution.

Our way is!

VINCENT SERVENTY

President

13 November 1996

The Honourable Minister for Urban Affairs

Dear Craig Knowles,

Congratulations on your decision on banning all future canal developments. This will stop the deterioration of many estuaries and other wetlands of the State. It is a courageous and worthwhile step forward by a government which has done so much for the environment.

VINCENT SERVENTY

President

13 November 1996

Director, Taronga Zoo

Sydney

My apologies for non-attending at the opening of the water recycling scheme at the zoo. It is a big step forward and hopefully the team led by Ian Kieran will be spread to many other large industrial units in Australia.

The many industrial centres being created around Sydney could follow suit, not only with water recycling but also

energy conservation as is done in Europe where many factories and other large business firms use their litter to be burned to create electrical energy fed into the grids. Our Hospital in Sydney already does this to burn their waste and use this for heating as well as other uses.

Again congratulations.

VINCENT SERVENTY

President

13 November 1996

Governor General of Australia  
Canberra

Dear Sir William,

Our Society congratulates your speaking on behalf of the disadvantaged during recent interviews and speeches. It is a refreshing change.

We also feel that while the Human Bill of Rights promulgated in 1948 was a big step forward for the world, what is lacking is a complementary *Environmental Bill of Rights*. All the safeguards of human rights would mean very little to say the Minimata villagers dying of mercury poisoning to give only one of many examples around the world.

Yet we are grateful for your courage in being so outspoken on worthwhile causes.

VINCENT SERVENTY

President

17 September 1996

Dear Mr Serenty,

The Hon Craig Knowles MP, Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, Minister for Housing, has asked me to reply to your recent letter about conservation of Wingebarrie Swamp.

In September 1995 the Heritage Council advised the Minister that the site was so significant it warranted protection under the Heritage Act. It made no formal recommendation for such action at that time, instead seeking to arrange discussions between the various parties about how the peat mining could be halted.

A number of government agencies have a stake in the matter and discussions have been lengthy. The Heritage Council has continued to monitor the progress of these talks and to work toward determining the best possible means of achieving long term conservation of this place.

The Heritage Council most recently met on 5 September 1996, when it reviewed progress and reiterated its previous position that the Swamp did warrant protection under the Heritage Act.

The Minister has arranged for your letter and the information it conveys to be referred to the Heritage Council to assist in its work.

ROSALIND STRONG

Acting Director

14 October 1996

Dear Mr Serventy,

The Minister for the Environment, the Hon Pam Allan, MP has asked me the thank you for your letter of 6 September 1996 to the Premier of New South Wales about the recruitment of Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney.

The Minister has also asked me to assure you that her office and the Government of New South Wales are keenly aware of the scientific and botanical significance of the Gardens and the National Herbarium and will be taking these aspects into full consideration in filling the position.

The vacancy has been widely advertised within Australia and overseas, including relevant internationally recognised scientific journals such as *Nature* and *New Scientist*. The advertisement for the vacancy identifies "qualifications, experience and professional standing in botany, horticultural studies or relevant sciences" as an essential selection criterion and stresses the Gardens' role as a distinguished centre for botanic and horticultural research and education.

The Minister considered the position description and advertising schedule demonstrates recognition of the need to maintain the traditional scientific excellence of the organisation.

I hope this response has reassured you about the Government's commitment to securing a Director with the skills to maintain the Garden's local and international reputation in botanical science.

MADI MACLEAN

Chief of Staff

Australian National Museum

Dear Sir,

Having been interested in the National Museum idea since it was first put forward by the Piggott enquiry and followed the rest of the planning which involved a detailed study of the best site for the museum, I am puzzled by the almost continuous suggestions for examining the 'best site'.

The previous government planned to break up the original plans so the museum would be dismembered and placed on three sites. The suspicion at the time was that the government had other plans for Yarramundi, it being regarded as a perfect place for commercial developments.

The Museum must not be broken into sections since this would destroy the original theme of a total look at Australia, as it was before humans arrived, the impact of the Aboriginal coming, then the changes made by the arrival of the first Europeans with Australia as it is today.

A visitor would be able to see the whole story, the failures and the successes as well as our hopes for the future.

In addition with the ample grounds there would be open air displays to expand the more static interior exhibits. It would become a centre for all Australians to visit as well as an attraction for tourists.

If Yarramundi is not chosen by your government, it will be for reasons best known to yourselves, since there are no valid reasons for a change. Your government will have broken faith with the thousands of folk who have dreamed of an Australian National Museum, filling a gap in our present institutions.

The National Museum will be the first major event in our museum history. We cannot be satisfied with any second best solution.

VINCENT SERVENTY

President

19 October 1996

The Hon the Premier

Dear Bob Carr,

It is a truism that a national park is sacrosanct and no part of it can be sold to private interests.

The present plans for the Perisher Resort, where the sale of private apartments is envisaged, will be a blot on a State which has a proud record of national park declarations and management.

Our Society urges you to urgently reconsider.

VINCENT SERVENTY

President



## WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA, INC.

G.P.O. Box 3428, Sydney NSW 2001

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

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

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

"The challenge to the present adult generation is to reduce the increasing pressures on the earth and its resources - and to provide youth with an education that will prepare them emotionally and intellectually for the task ahead."

VINCENT SERVENTY

President