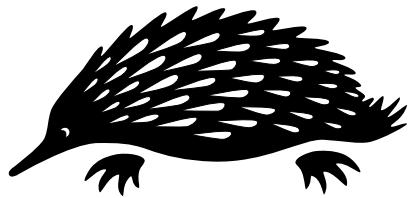


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# AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE

*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.*

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## NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Patrick W Medway AM, B A, M Ed Admin,  
FPRIA, MACE  
Tel: (02) 9556 1537  
Fax: (02) 9599 0000

## PRESIDENT OF HONOUR

Dr Vincent Serventy, AM, B Sc B Ed D Sc  
Tel: (02) 4344 4708  
Fax: (02) 4342 6291

## ADDRESS

National Office  
Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc.  
PO Box 42, Brighton Le Sands NSW 2216  
Tel: (02) 9556 1537  
Fax: (02) 9599 0000  
email: [wildlifepreservation@optusnet.com.au](mailto:wildlifepreservation@optusnet.com.au)  
website: [wpsa.org.au](http://wpsa.org.au)

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## COUNCILLORS 2003

**Patron:** Governor General of the  
Commonwealth of Australia

**National President:** Patrick W Medway AM  
PO Box 42, Brighton Le Sands NSW 2216  
Phone: (02) 9556 1537

**President of Honour:** Dr Vincent Serventy  
AM B Sc B Ed  
D Sc Order of the Golden Ark  
36 Diamond Road, Pearl Beach NSW 2256  
Phone: (02) 4344 4708  
Fax: (02) 4342 6291

**Senior Vice President:** Dr Clive Williams  
**Vice President:** Dr Richard Mason

**Hon. Secretary/ Executive Director/ Editor:**  
Suzanne Medway

**Hon. Treasurer:** Ralph Campbell

**Councillors:** Dr Mike Augee, John Clarke,  
Don Goodsir, Judith May, Colleen Murphy,  
John Robertson, Louise Ruhl,  
Natasha Serventy, Peter Stevens, Peter Stock

### Regional Councillors:

Dr Glen Ingram 20 Harrogate Tce,  
Birkdale QLD 4159

Max Blanch 41 Smith Street,  
Merewether NSW 2291

Ken Metcalfe PO Box 8901  
Alice Springs NT 0870

John and Cecily Fenton PO Box 114  
Hamilton VIC 3302

Desley Gyetvay "Gyetvay Park" PO Box 27  
Tamborine Village QLD 4270

### Scientific Advisory Committee:

Dr Walter Boles, Birds

Bernie Clarke, Botany Bay

Dr Harold Cogger, Reptiles and Amphibians  
Professor Alan Keast, Ornithology

Dr David Murray, Plants

Dr James Puckridge, River Ecology

**Correspondence to: Executive Office: Wildlife  
Preservation Society of Australia Inc.**  
PO Box 42, Brighton Le Sands NSW 2216

## REGIONAL COUNCILLORS

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

Such Regional Councillors would be sent the minutes of our  
Council meetings so they would know more about 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, Patrick Medway and  
Suzanne Medway unless stated otherwise.*

# *From the President's Desk...*

## *Vice Regal patronage*

Members will be pleased to learn that the new Governor General of Australia, His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffrey AO, is now our Patron. His is a distinguished Australian with a strong leadership background and has indicated a keen interest in all things Australian. We have forwarded a full list of our wildlife preservation activities to his Office and hope to have an opportunity to meet with him personally in 2004.

## *Christchurch Wildlife Management Congress*

I have just returned from one of the most exciting and rewarding wildlife management conferences I have ever attended. Our Society is a member of the Australian Wildlife Management Society (AWMS) which organised the Congress in conjunction with The Wildlife Society of the USA (TWS). During the Congress I gave a presentation on the role of our Society, and handed out many copies of our magazine and brochure. Nearly 1,000 delegates from 51 different nations attended the 3rd Wildlife Management Congress in Christchurch, New Zealand in early December 2003. Over 500 spoken presentations were made on a wide range of wildlife management issues with many coming from Australia. Of special note was the attendance of some 81 indigenous delegates from all around the world including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South America, Central America, North America and Africa. I believe the most valuable aspect of the Congress for our Society was making contact with scientific experts from all around the world who are contributing to research projects on wildlife preservation. I have written a series of detailed articles on the Congress for publication in the next issue of our magazine.

## *Death of our oldest life member - Lucy Serventy*

It is with great sadness that I report the death in October 2003 of our oldest Life Member, Lucy Serventy. You will recall I visited Lucy in her nursing home in Perth last Christmas and she was then in fine spirits. Lucy was a very keen natural history and wildlife supporter and, along with her brothers Vincent and Dominic, made a significant contribution to wildlife preservation in Australia. We will miss her greatly and extend our sincere sympathy to her family and friends on her passing.

## *Reduction of Roadkill Seminar*

I was delighted at the success of our recent Reduction of Roadkill Seminar, which was held in the Maiden Theatre, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney in November 2003. Some 68 people interested in reducing this terrible waste of our precious native fauna attended, some even travelling all the way from Brisbane, Queensland for the Seminar. Many other people concerned with the loss of our native fauna rang the office prior to the Seminar saying they couldn't attend but wished us well and asked for a report on the proceedings. Four expert speakers addressed the gathering and gave us a strong overview of current research and what really needs to be done to reduce this national tragedy. We are now arranging to publish the results of this important Seminar for our members and will forward the recommendations to the Minister for his consideration.

## *Quoll Research Advisory Committee*

Following our active involvement in recent quoll research grants to encourage scientific research on how to better protect our native fauna during feral eradication programmes, I was invited to attend the inaugural Research Advisory Committee meeting in Armidale, NSW last month. (See full article inside). Some 20 experts from around the State gathered to oversight the current quoll and wild dog baiting research programme being conducted in the North District of the NPWS of the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). I was delighted with the spirit of cooperation which prevailed among all delegates and look forward to a successful resolution to the problem of wild dog predation on livestock and our native fauna.

P W Medway AM  
NATIONAL PRESIDENT



## **Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc - Notice of Annual General Meeting**

Notice is hereby given that the 95th Annual General Meeting of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Incorporated will be held in a special room of Parliament House, Sydney on Wednesday 18th February 2004 commencing at 11:00am.

### **BUSINESS**

1. Welcome and recording of those present.
2. To receive apologies.
3. Minutes of the 94th Annual General Meeting.
4. President's Report, Executive Director's Report and Treasurer's Report for 2003.
5. To receive and adopt the Balance Sheet and Income and Expenditure of the Society for the year ending 31st December 2003 in accordance with our Constitution.
6. To elect and confirm:  
A) the Officers of the Society:  
President/Chairman, Senior Vice President, Junior Vice President, Honorary Treasurer, Honorary Secretary (Executive Director) and;  
B) 10 Councillors of the Society for the next twelve months in accordance with the Constitution. Nominations must be received by 28th January 2004.
7. To appoint an Auditor for 2004.
8. General Business as submitted by 28th January 2004.
  - To recommend an increase in fees for 2004.
  - Any other general business.
9. Closure.

### **Annual Luncheon**

**Wednesday 18 February 2004**

The Council extends a cordial invitation to all our members to attend our Annual Luncheon in the Parliamentary Dining Rooms on Wednesday 18 February 2004 commencing at 12 noon. Please call the office for bookings. The cost of the luncheon will be \$50 for members and \$80 for non-members, which includes one year's introductory membership.

Booking and prepayment essential.

## **Vale Lucy Serventy**

Our Society's oldest member, Lucy Serventy, has died in Perth at the age of ninety-eight. She joined our Society many years ago, then encouraged her young brother, Vincent, to join.

Well known in Western Australia as a civil servant, she was famous as the saviour of the WA Naturalists Club, the major conservation group in that State. This Club, begun by Dominic Serventy, had become moribund during the war years and was almost destroyed by a dishonest treasurer, followed by an incompetent one. Lucy, a top accountant and new club treasurer, was part of a group of young bloods led by Vincent Serventy and Stan White.

Lucy was also in charge of the juniors in the Naturalists Club. Many a scientist today, high in the conservation world, remembers her guidance with affection.

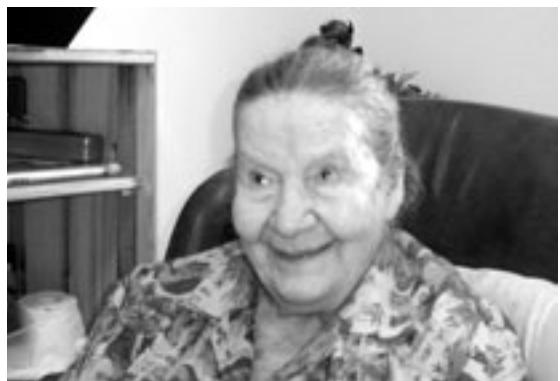
The Wildlife Shows started by the Club, held first in the Perth Town Hall, and in later years spreading across the State and even to Sydney, had two basic missions. The first was to make wildlife important and exciting for a wider public, the second was to raise money.

As well as founding the Western Walking Club, Lucy was involved with and knew well the Abrolhos Islands. There is now a State Government named Serventy Island in that Group, honouring her, Dominic and Vincent.

The WA Naturalists Club has a Serventy Memorial Fund to honour all the members of the family who assisted the cause of the Club and conservation.

Our own Society awards the Serventy Conservation Medal each year to an outstanding wildlife conservationist, in memory of the members of the Serventy family, including Lucy.

To use Thoreau's words "Lucy you have lived".



*Lucy Serventy*

## *The arid Australian environment*

Australia is famous for its beautiful and mysterious desert landscapes. More than 70% of Australia is arid, or semi-arid, where rainfall tends to be unreliable and erratic, which means that the amount and composition of vegetation can change substantially following good rains. These deserts host a fascinating array of plants and animals and are popularly known as the Red Heart from the incredible colour range of the soil, hills, valleys, mountains and vegetation.

Many arid zone species survive because they are able to make the most of the wet times and survive through the dry. Some species that cannot move very far, like frogs, may lie dormant underground in dry river beds until rain comes to stimulate them. Some species that can move long distances, like certain birds such as pigeons and parrots, can fly to where there is water.

Water often only lasts a short time in arid zones, so species have to react quickly to take advantage of their brief opportunity for reproduction.

### *Natural environmental forces*

The environment is dominated by three forces: low, unpredictable rainfall, patchy infertile soils and fire. More recently, since European settlement, the environment, particularly vegetation, has been badly affected by a fourth factor - grazing by introduced animals such as cattle and camels.

Put simply, the arid and semi-arid lands are those remote, sparsely populated areas of inland Australia, defined by the presence of desert vegetation and land forms as well as by low rainfall. They are bound by average annual rainfalls of about 250 mm in the south but up to 800 mm in the north and about 500 mm in the east. Together with sub-tropical regions and the mountain high plains, they form the rangelands, where rainfall is too low or unpredictable or where terrain is too inhospitable for sustainable cropping or timber harvesting.

### *Unusual vegetation*

The vegetation of the arid lands has been especially adapted and has a strong influence on land use and productivity. The saltbush, mulga and grassy plains provide pasture for sheep and cattle as well as habitat for a range of unique mammals and birds. In the dry infertile interior, the spinifex-covered sand plains and stony deserts are too tough for livestock. Instead they are home to a

multiplicity of termite species and the world's richest lizard fauna.

It is an uncompromising environment at times but never monotonous. The climate of arid Australia is more variable than in arid lands anywhere else in the world, with highly erratic rainfall, extremes of long dry periods and flooding deluges. As well, soils are characteristically very infertile over vast areas compared to other deserts of comparable aridity.

The range of flora and fauna occupying the various ecosystems also contrasts with that from other arid regions of the world. Major differences in the Australian arid landscape include the lack of many succulents, the small number of large mammals and the high numbers and diversity of lizards as well as social insects such as ants and termites. These factors combined determine the arid zone's uniqueness. Whoever uses this land must come to terms with its variability or risk destroying its rich potential.

### *The outback*

Many Australian children have learned to recite Dorothea MacKellar's words: "I love a sunburnt country, a land of sweeping plains, of ragged mountain ranges, of droughts and flooding rains." The outback is regarded by most Australians as part of the nation's heritage and, although Australians are largely urban people, many retain a romantic image of the outback pioneers forged in the tradition of mateship and love of the land they wrested from the wilderness.



*The spinifex pigeon (Geophaps plumifera), a bird of the arid northern interior. Their habitat is spinifex grassland with rocky outcrops and hills. Diet of the spinifex pigeon mainly consists of seeds of native grasses, especially Triodia*



*The red kangaroo (Macropus rufus) is the largest marsupial in the world. Males are larger than females, standing a massive two metres tall and weighing approximately 85kg. The female is often called the "blue flyer" because of her blue-grey fur. Their main food is grasses and green herbage. The red kangaroo's habitat is mulga and mallee scrub and deserts of mainland Australia. A single young is born at anytime of the year. The joey remains in the pouch for eight months and continues to suckle until twelve months of age. Weaning occurs at eighteen months*

Realities are different today: rather than fighting nature, we must learn how to live with it. Australia and indeed the world are concerned about land care and the preservation of land use options for future generations. The obligation to maintain the arid lands and its unique wildlife is shared by many groups of people. We must look at the long sustainability of our land and its unique flora and fauna.

The need for a heightened awareness of the arid zone is the more significant because there is no Federal Government ministry with responsibility for arid land affairs. Not one of the Australian states and territories supports a government portfolio for arid land issues. There is no single purpose institute for either pure or applied research into arid zone systems.

Our Society believes there should be a more coordinated approach to arid land management to take into account the holistic management and long term sustainability of our unique flora and fauna. Federal and state/territory governments should review and coordinate their various agencies' work to more fully protect our precious wildlife in all its forms.

## Watering arid Australia

What happens when you introduce water to arid Australia? Do you turn it into a Garden of Eden? Not really. Rather than adding life, the latest research from CSIRO's Division of Wildlife and Ecology indicates that the widespread introduction of water supplies to the arid outback is actually reducing the variety of life.

Before European settlement the outback was practically waterless. But now, artificial sources of water for livestock (such as bores and dams) have been provided across nearly all the potentially productive rangelands. There are few pastoral areas further than 10 km from the nearest water (the greatest distance most large grazing animals will usually range from water). This has dramatically increased grazing pressure across vast areas that were previously waterless, and lightly and intermittently grazed.



*Red-tailed black cockatoo (Calyptorhynchus magnificus) is mostly arboreal but is frequently encountered feeding on the ground on seeds of eucalypts, casuarinas, banksias and also large white grubs. This magnificent bird is noisy, wary and conspicuous. They nest high in a hole in a tree*



*Thorny devil (Moloch horridus). This bizarre-looking dragon lizard is found only in the drier parts of central and western Australia. It feeds exclusively on ants, and may eat up to 5,000 in a single meal! Despite its fearsome appearance, it is completely harmless*

How has this affected native biodiversity? Environment Australia asked CSIRO's Division of Wildlife and Ecology to find out, and their study has revealed some disturbing trends. The Division examined 48 carefully selected sites in eight locations across Australia's rangelands to assess the effects of artificial water sources, and the heavy local grazing they encourage, on biodiversity. The investigation showed that between 15% and 38% of the plant and animal species in each location declined dramatically the closer you got to the water source. Further, many of these species in decline are the less common animals and plants that are quite vulnerable to loss of habitat.

### ***Arid zone degradation***

Arid areas are among the worst affected by the impacts of domestic feral cats, other feral animals and damages caused by European settlement. However, few conservation projects have targeted arid areas in the past.

Over the past 100 years, many drastic changes have occurred in the arid environment area. Over 60% of the mammal species have become locally or completely extinct, while many remaining species are threatened. Ground dwelling birds become extinct or endangered. Long-lived arid zone trees and shrubs have been prevented from regenerating.

Long-lived plant species are being replaced by short-lived annual and weed species.

Why have so many plants and animals disappeared?

The main reasons for the decline of local native fauna and flora are overgrazing by rabbits and domestic stock; predation from introduced animals like the feral cat and fox. It is estimated that Australia has some 12 million feral cats doing untold damage to our native fauna!

Feral cats are abundant in arid regions and can each kill up to 30 native animals a day. Medium sized mammals are the most susceptible to predation by both cats and foxes due to their easy prey size and inability to roam out of areas containing feral animals. This loss is calculated to be approximately 3.6 billion native animals lost per year.



*Bilby (Macrotis lagotis). Once called the common rabbit bandicoot, the bilby is now restricted to a few small locations in remote Central and Northern Australia. Bilbys obtain water from a diet of insects, tubers, fruits and seeds, found in soil with their acute sense of smell. Two young are reared in a backward opening pouch. They avoid the extreme daytime heat in an extensive warren system about three metres long and up to two metres deep*

One feral cat shot at Roxby Downs, South Australia had the following in its stomach:

24 painted dragons, 3 bearded dragons, 2 earless dragons, 3 striped skinks, 1 zebra finch, 1 house mouse ..... the result of a single meal!

In some arid areas, introduced rabbit numbers have been measured at densities of more than 600 per km. Rabbits, along with domestic stock, considerably reduce native grass cover which reduces food and shelter for native species. This reduction in vegetation cover increases susceptibility to predation by cats and foxes.

Since the inception of grazing in arid rangelands of Australia, there have been extensive vegetation changes. These include the decline in long-lived perennial shrub cover and their replacement with shorter lived colonizing species. Many parts of arid Australia were severely over-grazed by sheep and cattle during the advent of pastoralism in the 19th Century. Whilst current pastoral practices are much more conservative there are still areas heavily degraded by pastoralism.

### ***Need for more research***

Research by various bodies is still proceeding, but the challenge is clear. We need to manage our artificial water supplies in arid Australia to protect biodiversity. In the first instance scientists are calling for water points to be shut down in national parks. Following this, selected water points on pastoral lands might also be considered where agreement can be reached with local pastoralists and the industry. The aim is to strike a balance between the needs of the pastoral industry with the needs of threatened native plants and animals.

There is still much to learn about our arid interior.



*The black honeyeater (*Certhionyx niger*) is a rarely seen desert nomad that follows the flowering of *Eremophila* (emu bush) in the semi-arid and arid regions of WA. It is an unmistakable bird, boldly marked with black and white, and has a distinctly curved bill*

## ***Protecting the environment***

In order to ensure that future generations have the opportunity to enjoy Australia's pristine oceans and natural landscape, it is vital that we clean up our act, and take responsibility for the disposal of waste and our use of precious resources. Some of the steps we can take to preserve the beauty of the world we live in are:

### ***Cleaning the home***

By cutting down on the use of chemical cleaners in our home we can reduce landfill by saving on wasteful products and packaging and reduce water consumption and the pollution of our waterways.

### ***Recycle***

One of the easiest ways for the average household to help the environment is to make an effort to recycle plastic; milk and juice cartons; aluminium and steel cans, newspapers and magazines; glass bottles; mobile phones and accessories; and office paper, cardboard and paper packaging. When recycling plastic bottles, remember to take the lids off. Avoid placing household recyclables into plastic shopping bags this contaminates recycling collections.

### ***Conserve Energy***

Each time we switch on a light or use the washing machine, we emit greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. As this is considered to be one of the greatest threats to our continued existence, it is time we reduced energy consumption.

We can conserve energy by using a water-efficient showerhead; using compact fluorescent lights; insulating our home; buying energy efficient household appliances; installing a solar or gas hot water system; using a clothesline instead of a clothes dryer; filling the washing machine before running it and switching lights off when not in use.

### ***Reduce water consumption***

As our most precious resource, it is vital that we prevent overusing water by looking for the Triple A water efficient rating on household appliances; installing tap flow regulators; checking for leaks; and by watering gardens at cooler times of the day, ie early morning or late afternoon.

## **Protect our waterways**

Home to numerous aquatic species, the health of our waterways determines the health of our planet, so it is vital that we drastically reduce water pollution by washing our car without detergents; not littering any rubbish on the streets that will end up in gutters and flow into stormwater systems, seriously polluting our waterways; not disposing of rubbish in the toilet and using a kitchen sink strainer.

By working together and changing our habits, we help to improve the world we live in.

## ***Disturbing facts***

Plastic bags make take 20 to 1,000 years to break down in the environment.

On average, every Australian sends almost 690kg of waste to landfill each year, making us the second highest producers of waste per person in the world.

More than 18 million tonnes of waste ends up in landfill each year in Australia, with the household sector contributing almost 40%.

It is estimated that 4.5 trillion cigarette butts are littered each year worldwide, with each butt taking between 1 to 5 years to break down.

## ***NSW Government***

### ***NSW Government announces \$400 million land clearing package***

It is a promising time for environmental management in New South Wales, with the State Government recently undertaking to end broad scale land clearing.

Under the plan broad scale clearing will cease and native vegetation laws will be simplified; environmental standards will be established and responsibilities clarified; and farmers will be given financial support to encourage private conservation and environmentally friendly farm practices. A number of key reform actions have been identified underpinning the reform process:

- Allocation of \$406.3 million to fund locally-driven organisations and land managers responsible for managing the State's natural resources.

- An end to broadscale land clearing of remnant vegetation and protected regrowth.

- Creation of locally-driven organisations, Catchment Management Authorities, responsible for making decisions about natural resources management.

- Direct funding to land managers to assist with conservation and management of important areas of natural vegetation.

- Creation of the Natural Resources Commission to set standards and targets for natural resource management, and to audit the performance of locally-driven organisations.

Our Society urges the Government to ensure any exemptions facilitating land clearing under the new plan are tightly defined so there is no ambiguity, and so that the laws can be properly enforced. Under the old regime, a number of exemptions have provided loopholes and allowed extensive clearing.

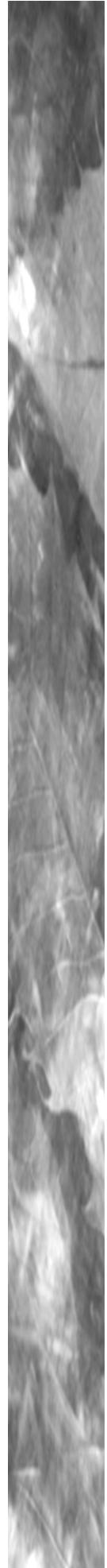
The plan builds on the model proposed by the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists. This Group last year investigated landscape conservation issues in response to concerns about the environmental and social consequences of natural resource exploitation.

## ***Report on the National Koala Conference***

*by Clive Williams, Senior Vice President*



The Australian Koala Foundation held their annual national conference in Brisbane on 28-30 September and 1 October. The theme this year was the Status of the Koala in 2003. I represented the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia at the conference and found it to be most informative.



To me the most important point to be learned from the papers presented is the necessity to have scientific data, not only to assist in negotiations with governments, but also to assist in the proper use of energy and funds by voluntary organisations. A paper presented by John Callaghan and colleagues from the Australian Koala Foundation illustrated how population modelling was used to provide data used in negotiations with the Queensland Government. Their data showed that koala populations in the study area had fallen by over 30% over the past 18 years and, depending on which of their four models was used, the population could be expected to become extinct within 14-30 years. As a result the Koala has been declared vulnerable in four contiguous local government areas: Brisbane City Council and Redlands, Pine Rivers and Logan shires. This decision is important in that it represents a new focus on a region rather than on a state as a whole.

Everyone concerned with conservation knows that preservation of habitat is crucial to the survival of native species. The paper by Professor Clive McAlpine from the University of Queensland and colleagues, Koala Conservation and Landscape Ecology, focused on management strategies and habitat conservation. The research study found that a radius of at least two kilometres was important for koala survival and Professor McAlpine's view is that so-called green corridors are frequently too narrow to be effective. He recommended that a corridor should be at least one-fifth the length of the preserved habitat.

Another scientific paper which set out to gather accurate data on koalas was presented by Dr Greg Baxter of the University of Queensland (Gatton Campus). The work reported was carried out by a Ph.D. student under Dr Baxter's supervision. The study sought to establish accurate data on koala populations in Queensland's mulgalands, their density, distribution, diet and conservation status. The study was carried out over a four year period, 1995-1999. The results indicate that there are about 60,000 koalas in the region studied. Koalas occurred in greater density in riverine areas and occurred as far west as the Bulloo River. However, more than half were located in non-riverine communities. This indicates that large numbers would be threatened by clearing of non-riverine lands. The study showed that koalas ate leaves from 20 species of trees, including acacias.

Several speakers and discussants at the conference made the point that the koala is an icon of Australian wildlife and, by saving koala habitat, we also save habitat for other species, some of which are more threatened than the koala. One feature of the conference was the presence of representatives of several local governments. These included, to my knowledge, Gold Coast City Council, Redlands, Pine Rivers, Lismore and Gunnedah shires. It is apparent that local governments have a crucial part to play in preserving habitats for all native animals as well as native flora. Gold Coast Council, for example, imposes an environmental levy of \$25 per ratepayer and recently acquired a tract of land, over 70,000 hectares, to maintain as a wildlife habitat.

Development applications with which local governments have to deal frequently come into conflict with conservation ideals.

The conference included field trips to sites in the Redlands and Pine Rivers shires. Both these shires are "koala friendly". Redlands has its own environment centre, which includes a nursery for native plants indigenous to the area and they encourage citizens to plant them in their gardens. To make it easy for them they have created several demonstration gardens to illustrate how it can be done. Despite their public policy, however, both shires have experienced tremendous population growths, which have led to housing developments diminishing the available wildlife habitat. Koalas now are being killed or maimed on roads which carry increasing flows of traffic, as they seek to cross roads to gain access to food sources.

Delegates were able to plant trees suitable for koala diet in the Pine Rivers Shire.

Present at the conference was Ms Valerie Thompson from the San Diego Zoo, USA. The Zoo first acquired koalas in the mid 1920s and has obtained them from both NSW and Queensland on a number of occasions since then. A successful breeding programme has led to the Zoo now holding a large number of koalas, all of which have been bred at the Zoo. San Diego Zoo has maintained a Conservation and Education Koala Loan Programme since 1983. Under this programme koalas are lent to suitable zoos, both in the USA and overseas, for display or breeding purposes. Appropriate educational material is provided for the visiting public. One of the conditions of the loan program is that the recipient zoo must contribute financially to koala habitat conservation programmes in Australia. In appreciation of the work she has done for the koala, the Australian Koala Foundation honoured her with the Chairman's Award.

A clear message from the conference is that it is crucial that proper research be carried out into the status of our native flora and fauna. It was rewarding to see the collaboration between academic institutions, State National Parks and Wildlife Services and voluntary organisations. Finally, the AKF decided that it will no longer hold national conferences, but, in future, conferences will be held at State or regional levels.

At the conference the following resolution was passed: "The delegates of the 2003 AKF Annual Conference on the Status of the Koala call on the Queensland Premier and Minister for the Environment to immediately introduce regulations mandating that whenever trees are being removed in known koala areas, a suitably qualified and experienced biologist is on the construction site immediately before and during tree removal."

**Editor's note:** Our Society has been involved with protection of the koala and its habitat since we formed in 1909. In recent years we have become associated with and supporters of the Australian Koala Foundation whose mission is to be a highly credible, respected and compassionate international scientific organisation which will diminish the threat to the survival of koalas and be an example so as to increase the consciousness of all global citizens and enable them to reverse the rapid degeneration of all the world's flora and fauna. Our Society has written to the Hon Dean Wells MP, Queensland Minister for the Environment, supporting AKF's resolution.



*Koala and baby*

## ***A Walk to Mabel Hut***

*by our Antarctic correspondent Bruce Alden*



*Mabel Hut*

"The wind is okay, let's do it." I left Cliff in the Met Office and headed down to the Red Shed. The wind was 11 knots from the SSE and quite cool on the face. One thing you have to do down here, is to prepare for sudden changes of the weather, especially if you are venturing far from Base. My trip to Mabel Hut was only a few hundred yards but the rules dictate that you assume the weather will turn lousy and you dress accordingly.

So, I walked down to my donga, (bedroom) to get dressed properly and of course to grab the camera. What you see today, may not be there tomorrow, so you seize the opportunity. On with the long pants, thick shirt, quilted jacket, my old trusty sledging cap and the obligatory gloves to protect the pinkies. A pair of sunnies completes the outfit and with my camera in my pocket, I was ready to tackle the short walk to Mabel Hut. Down here, your digital camera lives in a pocket close to your body to keep it warm.

On a recent trip up onto the plateau, where temperatures got down to -25c, my digital had refused to even poke its lense out. The batteries die at such low temps, so keeping the camera warm is vital. Not that it was cold, only around zero. At the back of the Station, I crossed the famous moss beds, taking care to walk only on the tops of the rocks, and headed up the hill to Mabel. The moss beds, spongy fist size lumps of green, are found between the rocks at the end of the melt lake that supplies the station with its drinking water. With so little vegetable life down here, these mosses and the lichens further up the hill are much studied. The rate of PhD's generated per square metre of ground here is probably higher than anywhere else on earth! Botanists and zoologists spend the summer examining and studying these little life forms. Woe betide any heavy footed expeditioner who sets foot on areas

of interest to these summer Bios, usually women. These ladies are known by the quaint term of "Moss Girls." There are special areas, SSSI's, (Site of Special Scientific Interest), that require permits to enter to preserve these fragile life forms. In winter the mosses are covered in snow. The lichens on the exposed rocks higher up the slopes tend to be more exposed, depending on how the drift snow accumulates.

Half way up the hill something is wrong. The wind which had been in my face is now at my back, well, that was a waste of time! Oh well, not to worry; might as well go up to the hut and see that the equipment inside is all okay. The hut, affectionately known as Mabel, (for reasons unknown), sits atop a rocky ridge behind Casey Station. Its interior is very sparse, containing the air sampling machine, cases of flasks to be filled, a desk, a computer, and lots of gadgets with blinking lights, the property of our Met Bureau Technician. The hut is linked to sensors on the ground that measure seismic activity and this data are relayed to the Meteorological Office for archival and retrieval. My reason for the trip to Mabel had been to take a clean air sample. The air in the Antarctic is about as pure as we can get on this planet when the wind is from the south to southeast. That means it is blowing off the Antarctic ice cap and contains no contaminants and is a reflection of the base levels of key contaminants and green house gasses. The air is collected in glass flasks and transported back to Australia for analysis. With the wind in the wrong direction, contamination from the station in the form of smoke from the diesel generators, smoke from our high temperature incinerator or vehicle emissions can give false readings of these base line levels. So, from the hut, I phoned the Met Office and cancelled the reading and spent a few minutes checking that all was well.



*View from Mabel*

When I emerged from the hut, the weather had improved dramatically. The sun was shining and a light cooling breeze came off the ocean, the temperature, just above zero. The view over the bay out to the bergs was superb, however with the wind in that direction, it was useless for the clean air reading. It was blowing straight over the "polluting base." The view was so nice, I took a couple of photos and then prepared to walk back. Then, right in front of me one of the elusive quarries that I had been stalking for ages did its little aerobatic display right in front of me.



*Moss beds*

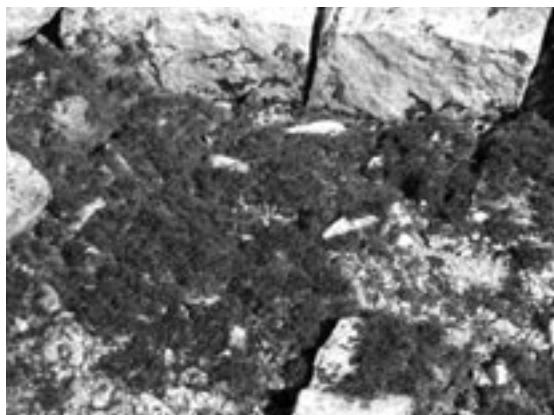
The Wilson's storm petrel, (*Oceanites oceanicus*), did his usual loop the loop and quick changes of direction but in essence he seemed to be hanging around a particular rock. Ah, I'll bet he/she has a nest around that rock. The little petrel is common on the Antarctic coast and ranges over vast areas on the world's oceans. We had seen quite a few on the *Polar Bird* on our way down to Casey. Seeing the petrel is easy, photographing it is not! Taking its photo, while observing the conventions regarding approach limits, without a good telephoto lens, makes this particular bird somewhat of a challenge.



*Brown Bay*

So, with my little digital and its small telephoto lens, I prepared to do battle. I sat down slowly and waited till he disappeared behind a boulder and then as quietly and slowly as I could I moved around to have a look from the other side. At first I could not make out anything. Nothing moved and nothing resembled a storm petrel. Then, I realized I had been looking at him for fully 5 minutes but not recognizing what I was seeing. In my photograph, I will leave it up to you, the reader, to pick him/her out, all you can see is part of a wing protruding from under the rock. I had nailed one at last, but afraid I will not be putting a copyright on this particular shot. Still, it's the only one I have, they are extremely hard to photograph. A black and white bird on a black and white background taken from 15m is no easy task.

So, while my trip to Mabel Hut was a complete waste of time clean air wise, I did get a couple of extremely poor shots of the mosquito of the Antarctic. Together with a spectacular view, all in all, the walk was well worth it.



*Lichens*



*Lichens*



*Wilson at nest*



*Spot the petrel*

## *A royal visitor*

*by our Antarctic correspondent, Bruce Alden*

Look, just out from the wharf! Yes there is was, a black and white blob moving slowly across the sea ice.

It's not an Adelie, is too big, got to be an Emperor!

It's Tuesday, 7th October, Casey Station Antarctica. We have spotted our first penguin for the season and now it was a mad rush to get down to the ice and capture this rare visitor to Casey. Emperor penguins (*Aptenodytes forsteri*) are rare visitors to Casey. There is a breeding site to the NNE of Casey but it is not readily accessible, so to see one at close range was an opportunity not to be missed. This one must have misread the signposts.

I raced back to my donga and grabbed my digital and film camera. In the cold porch, I donned my heavy jacket, cap and gloves. It was pretty warm at -8°C but the wind at 11 knots from the NNE made for cool faces and hands. The walk down to the wharf would have done us good. We are still carrying our layer of blubber built up through



*"So, there you are"*

winter. But, as speed was of the essence, we piled into a Hagglund, a tracked over snow vehicle, and headed off.

It was only a few bumpy minutes till we got down to the wharf. The other Hagg had beaten us by a few minutes and, sure enough, there was an emperor penguin sitting looking at a group of photographers. I wondered who was studying who. The emperor has to be one of the most regal, reserved and unflappable of all birds. The name is very fitting as they are very docile and don't seem to mind being the centre of attention. They seem as interested in us as we are in them. The Adelies who also visit Casey in great numbers are nowhere near as regal as these magnificent birds; they are the Clowns of the Antarctic. These birds belong to royalty. I quickly snapped a few long range shots with the digital and then cursed myself for not bringing my telephoto lense for the film camera.



*"Who is watching who!"*

Biting the bullet, I jumped back into the Hagg, returned to the donga, grabbed the lense and returned to the sea ice. The first Hagg load of photographers had by this time filled their cards and were ready to go back to Base. With Cliff, my Met OIC, we now had the emperor to ourselves. All this time, the emperor had remained



*"Cold Toes"*

motionless. He leaned back on his heels and his short stubby tail feathers. This kept his toes off the ice. That might keep the toes warm, but the heels must suffer. All the time, that blacker than black eye, seated in black feathers surveyed us. If he wasn't looking down at us peasants then I will be very surprised. How dare we even deign to be on the same piece of ice as his majesty! Around his neck was a beautiful scarf of orange and yellow feathers. It is a real novelty to see colour in the Antarctic. Everything is either black, brown or white. Your eye longs for a bit of colour. So, to be in the presence of this gaudy coloured bird was a real pleasure. He/she stood almost to top of leg height, much more beer barrel shape than the Adelie who is a much thinner and smaller bird. We kept our regulation distance of 5 metres but I am sure we could have got much closer without upsetting him. Indeed, later on in the afternoon, when some other fellows paid him a visit, he spotted them from a distance and raced up to meet them, he breached the 5 metre rule! Provided that you stay low, quiet and move slowly, the emperors really do not seem to mind company.

I had the same difficulty photographing the eye of the emperor as I had in 1976 at Davis. It is just so impossibly black on the black background that it is very hard to make it visible on film or digital pictures. The photo can be enhanced digitally, but even as the human eye has trouble seeing it even at close range, I think that that is cheating.

My card was full, so it was time to go up to lunch. While standing and sitting still, we had become quite chilled. Fingers were starting to lose feeling without gloves, so it was time to leave our visitor

alone. He looked very lost and even sad as we crunched our way across the sea ice and then up to where the Hagg was parked on a drift.

Our first penguin of the Spring had been sighted and the paparazzi had done royalty proud. We don't expect any letters of complaint.



*"I've been watching you"*

## **Conservation in Vietnam**

*by Dr Clive Williams, Senior Vice President*

In the latter half of the twentieth century Vietnam and the Vietnamese people suffered greatly from the effects of war. The enormous amount of high explosives dropped on the country is well-known, while the use of defoliants such as Agent Orange wreaked huge damage on the environment. The area in central Vietnam around Da Nang is one area which was badly affected. The effect of dioxins, particularly Agent Orange, was such that the soil remained poisoned for years and would grow nothing. In fact, as the recent ABC television program, *Battle's Poison Cloud*, highlighted, there are still places in Vietnam where the concentration of dioxins in the soil is still toxic.

Interestingly, one of the first trees to grow in the poisoned soil was the eucalypt, along with the pine tree. Now one sees whole forests - young forests of eucalypts and pines, where once indigenous forests grew. At some stage in the future, when the new forests provide a protective canopy, indigenous trees will be planted. However, rainforest trees typically take a long time to grow.

Not far from Da Nang is the little town of Hoi An. This is an old town with trading connections going back through the centuries with the Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, French, Dutch and other traders. The old town is now on the World Heritage list and is a delight to visit. For the conservationist it holds other surprises. Among

the many restaurants which cater for the tourist trade is Hai's Scout Café. Hai is known for providing cooking classes to groups of tourists, which he conducts in the front room of the restaurant. He is quite a showman, a humourist and the food is good. However, once you move from the front room to the rear, the scene is different.

Along the walls of the room are beautifully produced coloured photos of endangered species. Hai is a one-man conservationist. He uses his restaurant to educate people about the need to protect the environment - in fact, it's also known as the Conservation Cafe. He has a connection with WWF and displays the WWF panda logo prominently. Given the effects of Agent Orange on the indigenous forest in the region, outlined above, it is critical to maintain what remains of it, for it provides a haven to species such as langurs (rare monkey) and the saola (rare forest ox), which was only discovered ten years ago. The discovery of a new animal species in such recent years is quite remarkable, particularly since most of the larger animals in Vietnam virtually disappeared because of loss of habitat and because a starving population ate them to survive.

However, not only do animal species depend on the forests, but also ethnic communities. Indeed, it is significant that among the photos of endangered species displayed by Hai is a photo of a member of the Annamite community which now numbers only 350 people.

Communities such as these have been forest dwellers for centuries and the preservation of the forests is vital for their survival.

WWF, in conjunction with the Vietnam Forest Protection Department, have embarked upon the MOSAIC project, to meet the twin goals of biodiversity conservation and securing local livelihoods. Hai is supporting this project through education and by providing space for a young graduate, funded by WWF, to work from his restaurant. She is as yet inexperienced, but enthusiastic.

The Embassy of Spain supports the exhibition in Hai's restaurant and a banner proudly announces this. Since many of Hai's clientele are tourists, he is well placed to educate both local people and tourists about responsible tourism and that is much of his current focus. At the local level there is an effort to develop responsible ecotourism, while Hai encourages tourists to be responsible in their behaviour - both in their activities and in their purchases.

It is encouraging to see what one person can do, without any government assistance. No matter what the country, there will always be conservation issues and each community needs dedicated people like Hai to take them up. However, individuals working largely alone need support. I was glad to be able to spend some time with Hai and with his young WWF-funded graduate and bring to them best wishes from our Society in what they are doing. Conservation is an international activity and I am sure Hai would welcome contacts and messages of support from any of our members. He can be contacted at dvhai@hotmail.com.

Editor's note: Clive and Beverley Williams recently visited Vietnam and returned full of praise and enthusiasm for the natural beauty of this country.

## ***Coconut crabs, cockroaches and other coral island creatures in Kiribati***

*by Don Goodsir, Councillor*

The low lying Micronesian coral atolls in the Republic of Kiribati (pronounced Kira-bus) are in danger of flooding due to global warming. As the population of the capital Tarawa, a chain of islands on the main atoll, increases a number of wildlife species decrease and some become endangered due to urbanisation and loss of habitat. One of these animals is the coconut crab.

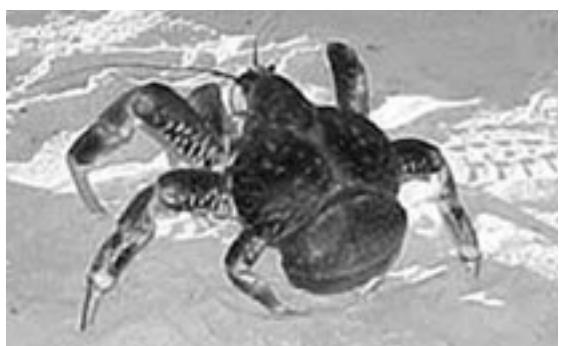
On the remote island of Abamama, where I recently worked as an AESOP Business Volunteer for a month in November 2003, the unique and menacing coconut crabs (*Birgus latro*) are still plentiful and are quite common in scrub areas. Crab holes abound everywhere and are a hazard especially when walking outside at night. The name coconut crab is derived from their feeding habits. When mature they climb vertically up coconut trees where they cut coconuts loose, which explain coconuts falling heavily to the ground on windless nights. They then climb down, tear off the husk and crack open the nut with their powerful claws to eat the meat. Naturally when cooked the flesh has a distinctive coconut flavour which I found quite pleasant and is a delicacy for the indigenous people. Some visitors find the taste too rich. However if these crabs have been feeding regularly on pandanus tree fruit then the flesh takes on a pandanus flavour. With such powerful claws I would hate to imagine what they might do to a human if provoked.

Coconut crabs begin life in the sea and after successive moults they look like a typical hermit crab as their soft coiled abdomen requires a protective shell. They start life in the lagoon and gradually move from the water to land, initially feeding on organic material near the shore, but gradually moving further inland. However as the islands vary in width from 200 metres to a maximum of a kilometre they are never far from the water. They carry their snail like shell for some time, burrowing into soft litter at the base of trees where they feed. Finally they abandon these protective shells. When fully mature they are 30-38 cm in length.

Other crabs are plentiful and on three nights each month they scramble to the sea to lay their eggs by the thousands. The locals grab a torch and an empty rice bag and clamber around the coral foreshore for a quick harvest. After one such expedition a bag of crabs was left tied up in our kitchen. Scratching noises during the night soon made us realise the crabs had torn the bag and escaped. Rounding up crabs under beds, behind cupboards and in toilets is no easy task by torchlight as the petrol generator goes off at 9.00pm. A week later we were still rounding up live crabs.

Needless to say cockroaches abound as they do all over the world but, without chemical baits, minimal refrigeration and food storage facilities, cockroaches are accepted as normal and not to be worried about. Having a shower at night meant sharing the facility with dozen of cockroaches.

The soil is poor but fish are plentiful and a part of the daily diet. There are not a great variety of birds however. Symbolically a frigate bird is on the national flag. Other birds sighted included the Lewin water rail, turnstones, white, sooty and crested terns, reef herons, cattle egret, gulls, sharp tailed sandpiper, rock dove, Pacific pigeon and Micronesian pigeon. Migratory birds include the golden plover, shearwaters and Arctic waders.



*The coconut crabs are named for their diet - coconuts - which explains why they have incredibly strong pincers that can tear open coconuts in seconds*

## Wildside

by Lance Ferris, Australian Seabird Rescue

### Disposable nappies

It was interesting to note in an article on disposable nappies that objection is on the increase to these items being used in landfill, but as marine wildlife rescuers, our concern is their disposal in and around waterways. I seriously question the mentality of those who continue to dump these atrocious packages in parks and public places. Not only are they one of the most offensive pollutants, they present a real threat to dozens of species of wildlife. As reported in the article, 38 cents per nappy at a laundering service sounds like a good deal for busy mums.

### Local ospreys harassed

Birds of prey may appear awesome and threatening, but they can also become the victim of attacks by other birds.

Ballina's osprey population is currently in crisis, following attacks by currawongs and magpies. A nest, sitting atop a local Optus tower, is now vacant following incessant swooping by nearby magpies. At another nest near the RSL Club, a young Osprey has fallen to the ground for the second time, supposedly as the result of magpie attacks.

By far, the worst case of victimisation has been at the nest precariously perched above the dish antennas near the Ballina Courthouse. Currawongs have been increasingly persistent in their harassment of the young osprey chicks in that nest, causing two to fall the 50 metres to the ground below. Raptor specialist, Wendy Lawrence, says it has been the worst season in memory for this endangered species. One has died as a result of the fall, and we are having real trouble placing these birds back in their nests, Wendy said. Country Energy were marvellous with their assistance in climbing the pole to return one chick, but sadly it was down again the next day.



*Down but not out: This young osprey is in care following its premature departure from its nest. Attacking magpies were believed responsible for its fate*

### Turtle remedy

Studies into relieving the gas build-up in stranded turtles has reached another milestone. Turtles that suffer from a build-up of gas are prevented from diving to feed. The float condition, which causes these turtles to strand on the beaches, is still shrouded in mystery. ASR volunteers are now satisfied that the procedure they use for releasing the gas is virtually 100 percent successful, if done at the site of the rehab pool. The floating turtles are removed from the water; a small needle is placed into the body and the gas withdrawn. Within a minute or so, the turtles are returned to the pool. So far, when the operation has been conducted poolside, ASR has achieved an almost 100 percent success rate. The last turtle under ASR care to undergo the procedure sank so fast, it crashed into the bottom of the pool. It had been floating for three weeks, prior to the de-gassing. It has since been tagged and released.

Editor's note: floating syndrome is the name given to turtles that float at the surface of water; are unable to dive, and often tilt to one side or bottom up. The causes of floating syndrome are varied and not always certain but they include: gas build up in either the coelomic cavity, intestines or gut. This gas build up can be caused through a hole



*Kristen Archibald prepares a Green sea turtle for release*

in the lung leaking through into the coelomic cavity, a hole in the carapace leaking air directly into the coelomic cavity, a gas by product from the digestion of a high cellulose diet such as seagrass, impaction of the gut through solid faecaloths, blood flukes (a parasitic worm), viruses or perhaps even bacterial infections. The major concern with floating turtles is that they are unable to dive, which means they can't reach food, and eventually this will lead to starvation or attack. The most common species of turtle to suffer from floating syndrome appears to be green turtles, however this is observational only. For green turtles this means they are not able to dive down and reach their primary diet of seagrass. Rehabilitation of floating syndrome turtles includes x-ray of body cavity to determine where the gas is situated; hydration in a freshwater bath; rinsing and removal of external parasites and barnacles through a freshwater rinse; feeding of squid, fish, prawns, lettuce, cabbage; protection from sun; antibiotics if required; and air aspiration procedures can be used if the gas doesn't leave unassisted. The majority of 'floating syndrome' turtles work the problem out for themselves if the gas is in the gut/intestines. Providing food on a daily basis, protection, etc, the gas eventually works its way out and the animal is able to dive again and sit on the bottom of the rehabilitation tubs. Animals with air in the coelomic cavity sometimes need to have the air aspirated. This technique is performed by a veterinarian.

This explanation was supplied by Sarah Pierce, Graduate Project Officer, Species Conservation, Conservation, Biodiversity and World Heritage Group, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.



*Tucker time: Mortle the turtle lunges at his free dinner, in the ASR rehab pool*

## **Monster at Evans Head**

One of the largest turtles ever seen by ASR volunteers was washed up on the beach at Evans Head. Most of the ASR staff have only worked with smaller turtles, and the loggerhead was a real eye-opener. Unfortunately, the 180-kilogram beast had died at sea and no cause of death could be determined.



*Ancient mariner: Likely 100 years old, this loggerhead turtle was found dead on the beach at Evans Head*

## **Marine Parks debate continues**

Along the coast of New South Wales, marine parks are under careful consideration. Sanctuaries for many marine species have been long overdue. Love them or hate them, grey nurse shark numbers are down to an estimated 300 individuals. The grey nurse shark is not recognised as a voracious man-eater, and the demise of this and other endangered species will create a serious void in the ecosystem. We strongly advise all who participate in discussion on the boundaries and restrictions of these proposed parks to think carefully about the longer term. Our planet survives because of a balance in nature. Upset that balance, and we risk our very existence.



*Critically endangered: This grey nurse shark was found sporting a huge fishhook. New proposals for Marine Parks will hopefully protect this species. (Photo Steve Thurston)*

## Volunteers under siege

With the rescue of pelican number 613, ASR has issued an urgent plea for fisher folk to take more care. In Fishery Creek, near Ballina, there are now five pelicans hooked with tackle with more becoming entangled on an almost daily basis.

Give us a break! were the words of the team of rescuers attempting to capture these birds before major infection sets in. Fishery Creek is, by far, the worst hit area. Accept it or not, all the injuries are consistent with fisher folk actually hooking the birds while fishing. The majority of fisher folk have a responsible attitude to the environment, there seems to be some who are bordering on blatant disregard.

Here are the cold, hard facts:

- Whoever hooked the birds, must have known, but didn't make a call for help
- In most cases heavy line was used and the bird could have been reeled in and freed
- Sadly, in most cases, the line was cut, leaving the birds with terrible injuries.
- On one day along the North Coast, 28 phone calls were received reporting pelicans with horrific fishing tackle injuries.

And to those who leave un-attended set lines in Fishery Creek, may the giant pelican poop on your pontoon.



*This pelican was the worst of five requiring capture in Fishery Creek. Two tethered hooks strapped its beak to its neck for weeks until rescuers were able to effect a capture*



*Close encounter: Kyuss and Ruby Dyer of Ballina, say farewell to pelican 610, as Ryan Dunn prepares for the release*

## Whale birth at Yamba

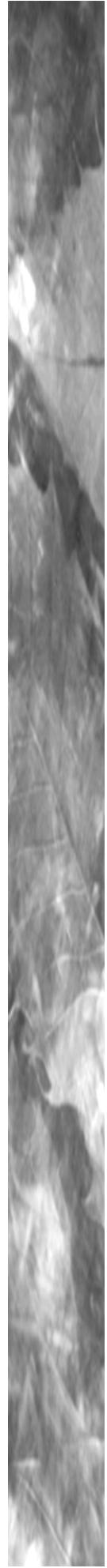
Hervey Bay may be the birthplace of many whales, after the parents long trek from the colder waters of the Antarctic. However, one whale must have been running a little late on the journey. A beach-goer was treated to a sight, not often observed by the average person, of a whale giving birth to a bouncing baby (5-tonne) calf. After a short loll around in the Bay, both were soon on their way.

## Disaster south of the border

One would think that eleven years of rescuing wildlife would be enough preparation for the unexpected. Not so, apparently. During our journey to Victoria and SA, we have visited several estuaries, checking out the wildlife issues. Narooma and Malacoota, both presented us with captures of injured pelicans, but by far, the southern end of the country has manifested our worst fears.

Lakes Entrance is a beautiful town, nestled by a crystal-clear estuary, and is undoubtedly a mecca for tourism. There are many jetties which extend out into the water off the shore. Fishermen are lined up, almost shoulder to shoulder on each jetty. Beneath the jetties, there are groups of pelicans foraging. Tangled, snagged line hangs from almost every rope tethered to boats moored at the jetties. The snagged line, coupled with the 'net' of fishing line from active fishermen, can only be described as a 'death trap'.

When we strolled out onto the jetties, the subtle reality became starkly obvious.



Foraging beneath us, were about a dozen pelicans. I counted at least ten with fishing tackle injuries. That afternoon and the following morning, we rescued five of the wounded. One died overnight from massive infection, while another was so badly injured that euthanasia was the only option.

I have visited several hundred estuaries over the years, but have never witnessed such mayhem. From the five pelicans rescued, we extracted a total of 26 fish-hooks!

We are currently working with local Victorian wildlife groups, and are arranging some extra workshops during our journey back home.

If I spent three months here, rescuing ten hours per day, I doubt I would have time to capture all those currently injured, much less keep up with the new injuries.

In one afternoon and one morning, we rescued five pelicans in less than 1km of waterfront. Here's the outcome of those rescues...

Five pelicans were rescued

- One was near death from systemic infection caused by fish hooks and sadly, it died overnight, despite all our efforts to save it
- One pelican was not only suffering horrific injuries from the hooks and line but its wing was smashed... there was no option but to euthanase
- Three were released after removal of hooks and line
- A total of 26 fish-hooks were removed from these five pelicans.
- 

There were more which needed rescue, but time was against us.

We have lost count of the estuaries we have visited in SA, Vic and southern NSW, and in all but a few, we have found hooked and tangled pelicans.

"Wherever there are pelicans, there are injured pelicans" and never a truer statement has been uttered.

I have shifted my thinking somewhat, on the issue of fishing and pelican injuries, and arrived at this statement...

"No other form of sport (other than shooting), inflicts as much damage on wildlife as recreational fishing."

The southern journey has given me an insight into why some conservationists go to such extreme

lengths to promote their cause, and after this journey, it will be hard for me to continue in a 'conservative' manner.

However, NSW Fisheries have rallied to the cause. With our photos and information, Fisheries have printed 21,000 brochures aimed at educating fisher folk in the art of responsible fishing practices.

Along the 6,000 kilometres, we have so far reached over 200 wildlife rescue personnel, along with Fisheries, National Parks and RSPCA officers, with instructional workshops.

As pristine as our coastline appears, not all is what it seems.

Change of attitude will take time. In the meantime, we can at least relieve the suffering.

On the long trek home from South Australia, we stopped briefly to conduct seabird rescue workshops in Victoria and the NSW South Coast along the way. I had never dreamed that I could be swayed from my pelican obsession, until I met the swans at Paynesville in Victoria, just south of Lakes Entrance. Within minutes of our arrival at the lake shore, a dozen glorious black swans waddled up the bank to greet me. The local residents had informed me that these birds too, are often the victims of fishing tackle injuries, but we found a much greater dilemma facing them. Along the shoreline, housing developments had converted much of the shoreline's waterfowl habitat into a clinically perfect barrier. Replacing the precious riparian zone, were rock buttresses, brick walls and jetties, all but destroying the ideal nesting habitat of these graceful creatures. Some swans had resorted to nesting in parking lots, on boat ramps, and squeezed up onto scant rocky pads between jetties. I couldn't help thinking that these birds are running out of ideas and that sadly time and progress are against them.



*HOME SWEET HOME: This swan makes the most of a small patch of dry ground*

## Dreams come true, Australia-wide

As our speedo clicked over at 6,600 kilometres, we arrived at Shoalhaven Heads, south of Sydney. Within two minutes, pelican 639 was captured at the local boat ramp. All along the journey back from South Australia, we have removed hooks and line from our favourite big birds.

The further we travelled, the more requests for workshops were received from wildlife groups along the journey. With still 1,000 kilometres left to travel, we have so far reached over 240 wildlife personnel at different locations.

Short of two new tyres, and a blown glo-plug our Toyota troop-carrier has comfortably made the distance, while our Zodiac inflatable boat has strutted her stuff in almost every waterway on the southern end of the continent.

The enthusiasm of other wildlife teams was overwhelming, with an impromptu lecture at the Eden Fishermen's Club attracting over 40 potential rescuers. Of significance in every State, was the attendance of officers from several government agencies including the RSPCA, National Parks, and Fisheries.

Our dream of establishing teams around the entire continent is fast becoming a reality. An urgent call from Western Australia will see us in Perth later this month, conducting seminars with our western counterparts. A major WA fishing tackle company, Fintackle, has rallied to the cause with an offer of sponsorship for the journey.



*Lance Ferris*

## Well done, Ballina

The evidence of gross pollutants in many estuaries down south has made us proud to live on the North Coast. Pieces of fishing nets, plastic bags, bottles and cans, are scattered as far as the eye can see in some of waterways we have visited. Without a doubt, Ballina remains one of the cleanest estuaries on the Australian coast. Well done, North Coast!

## Wildlife walkabout

*by Dr Vincent Serventy AM, President of Honour*

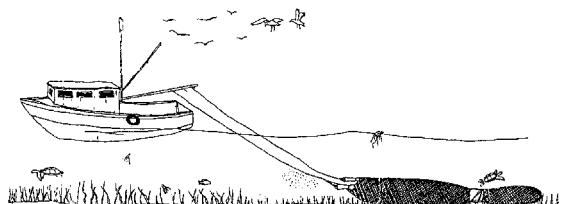
### National

#### Turtles in trouble

The Federal Minister for the Environment, Dr David Kemp, is working on a plan to make harvesting of marine turtles by Aboriginal people, as part of their way of life, sustainable for the species. At present they take 2,500 turtles a year which is not sustainable.

Other problems affecting turtles include kills by trawlers and destruction of marine habitats. In 1976, 3,500 female loggerheads nested on the Queensland coast. Today it is 300. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is working with Aborigines to develop sustainable harvesting, while Dr Kemp is asking all other States to help solve the problem.

Turtle excluders on trawling equipment is helping reduce the loss, while protected zones on all coastlines, in essence 'national parks', would assist in maintaining biodiversity.



*This diagram explains how turtles can escape the trawl*



*Portrait of an old loggerhead. Note the pronounced beak*

### ***Australia after rabbits***

Many conservationists feared that with the rabbit almost gone after the introduction of calcivirus foxes, cats and dingoes would impact more heavily on our rare native animals. This may not be the case as there are suggestions that these introduced pests have been severely depleted along with their prey.

A typical example was published recently in ECOS: "at Roxby Downs where RHD reduced rabbit numbers to 30% of their former numbers, cat sightings fell by 70% and previously abundant foxes were rarely seen...".

It is to be hoped that these findings will apply across the nation.



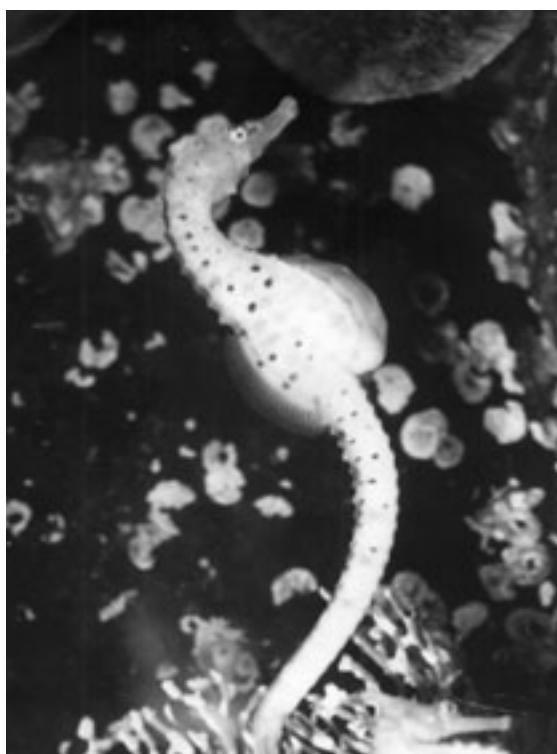
*Mulga country devastated by rabbits*

### ***Seahorses***

On a recent ABC Landline program was the heartwarming story of Australian seahorses and their conservation. Asian countries' folk medicines often threaten wildlife. The use of rhinoceros horn is a well-known example, contributing to the precarious plight of the black rhinoceros.

Seahorses are ground up for medicine. The seas of the world are being combed by wildlife pirates. Dedicated folk in Tasmania and South Australia decided that, if they could breed seahorses in aquaria, they could ease the pressure on the wild population. After some time they succeeded. Sadly, the stolen seahorses were cheaper on world markets than the farmed ones. Not deterred, the would-be wildlife saviours turned to the pet trade, then to ecotourism, with visitors paying to see these charming marine creatures.

Many years ago, in Western Australia, Water Life Shows were developed as an attraction. One year, with attendances low, a father seahorse gave birth to hundreds of babies. A newspaper photo brought visitors in droves during the following week, so helping to save the show. The report of the father giving birth was not a mistake. The mother lays the eggs in a special pouch the father develops, where he guards them till they hatch. Seahorses in an aquarium can live up to nine years, so persons buying them as pets can expect lots of interest for some time.



*A father with a full pouch*

### ***Bushfire threats***

With the bushfire season approaching, the threat increased by drought and with the fires from Europe's summer as an added warning, does our Society have anything to offer?

We do with regard to those folk whose houses are built near bushland, whether national parks, state forests or urban parks. Many years ago at Jervis Bay we saw a method used to hold back fires called 'trittering'. In essence, a giant lawnmower reduced bush to mulch on a twenty-metre strip by the side of all roads. This reduced the prospect of fires escaping, no matter what weather condition existed. In all our deliberations we try to consult leading experts and in this case consulted an authority on Australian bush fires, the American Professor Stephen Pyne. Professor Pyne spent ten years in Australia, studying bushfire control methods, finally publishing a classic book, 'Burning Bush'. We wrote to him regarding 'trittering'.

Here is his reply.

'All fire is local; the only solutions that make any sense are those that satisfy the particular needs of particular places. Changing the combustibility of the bush through mechanical treatment, or live stock or through fire...'

Councils throughout Australia, where fire is a problem, should consider purchasing these giant lawnmowers and offering their use to homeowners fronting bushland. Converting bush to mulch does no permanent damage to the environment since neither plants nor seeds are damaged by heat.



*Pinjarra a town destroyed by fire many years ago*

### **Native plants and drought**

With water shortages in the news Shirley Stackhouse, famous gardening botanist, recommends the following native plants will survive with very little water. We agree with her list:

Small trees: silver wattle, bottlebrush, peppermint willow, blueberry ash, Illawarra flame tree, various banksias, native frangipani.

Shrubs: many banksias, NSW Christmas bush.

Smaller plants: Geraldton wax, grevilleas, kangaroo paws, wonga vine, flannel flower, native violets, fan flowers, coastal rosemary, happy wanderer, once called sarsaparilla.

Grasses: Lomandra and others.

### **Climate change**

Recently the Business Council of Australia has been reported as stating that the National Government's 'voluntary approach to climate change will do more damage to the economy than any restrictions on greenhouse emissions'.

Professor Jared Diamond has pointed out how civilisations in the past were destroyed by 'disastrous decisions based on denial, ignorance and self interest'. It is a telling situation when business leaders and scientist both tell the same message and it is a brave government which ignores it.

### **Dingoes**

Recent studies cement the native feral dog or dingo as being brought from South East Asia five thousand years ago, first to Indonesia, and then with the Aboriginal settlers to Australia. The oldest fossil is 3,500 years old. In Eastern Australia most are hybrids with European domestic dogs.

### **Water catchments**

Dirt bike riders are the new human 'ferals' attacking our public lands. This danger is important in water catchments, costing the taxpayer \$250,000 in the Sydney Catchments alone, in the repair of damaged fire trails.

The Water Authority is running joint operations with police dirt bike squads and helicopters to catch offenders riding in prohibited areas. Our bushland is too precious to be destroyed by such human vandals.

### **World Environment Day**

136 nations around the world celebrate Earth Days, while the UN celebrates World Environment Day, which encourages nations to become involved in the environment. This new idea could do a great deal for urban wildlife. At present only landholders with more than the quarter acre block can apply so long as their property is managed to encourage wildlife. Particularly those whose land backs on to a reserve.

We suggest an extension to those landholders with less than a quarter acre that have a native garden.



*Kookaburras are a sign of a healthy garden*



*So too are honeyeaters like this miner*

## **Deer**

All ferals should be left in their own countries. Seven rusa deer were introduced in 1906 to the Royal National Park in Sydney as an attraction. They soon escaped to become a pest. There are now thousands found in a number of places. It would be a fairly simple matter to have all deer outside accredited zoos declared as pests. Since they are large animals shooting them out is easy. Complaints by the RSPCA and Human Societies should be ignored by conservationists. Such groups have worthy aims but have no expertise in conservation matters.



*Deer should be left in their own place, like these on a national trust property in England*

## **Tasmania**

### **Tasmanian devil**

After humans made our largest predator extinct, a mysterious disease seems to be killing our next largest, the Tasmanian devil. Not that it is at all dangerous. A zoo keeper assured me the animals are friendly, for him they made a good pet. Possibly it is some disease such as toxoplasmosis brought in by Europeans with their new pets.



*Fearsome in looks, not a devil in nature*

## Cape Barren goose

The Cape Barren goose is now a protected species, though sheep farmers claim in numbers they foul pastures. The perfect conservation solution has been found where Flinders Island farmers are allowed to collect eggs to incubate, so providing birds for the gourmet restaurant trade. Here they fetch \$200 a kilo. We have suggested the same scheme for the Tasmanian shearwater 'saved by slaughter' for the fresh chicks' trade as 'mutton birds'. We have suggested changing the name to 'golden shearwater'. Our Society is happy most island sanctuaries are safe, with the species spreading west to WA and north to NSW.



*Flying home to the nesting island*



*The vast migration to Alaskan seas to enjoy the northern summer*



*The chick*



*Taking the harvest of 'mutton bird' chicks to the sheds where whole families spend a six week holiday preparing the birds for the market*

## Queensland

### *Exotic plants*

The problem of exotic plant invaders has come to that State at Cape Tribulation. Our Society policy is clear. Introduced plants are marvellous for home gardens, street trees, and other changed vistas, though often there are native species that would be just as good. Privet, lantana, jacarandas, pines, camphorwood and coconuts are all beautiful or useful, as in the case of pines in plantations to be turned into timber or paper. The same applies to coconuts in plantations.



*An invader takes root in beach sand*

### **Prickly mimosia**

This feral pest of Kakadu has reached as far as Proserpine in Queensland. The Federal Government has encouraged Aboriginal communities at Acacia to turn the pest into briquettes for firing local power stations, with promising results. Spraying with pesticide is also showing a promising effect. Since the whole North is open to mimosa it is vital that more work is done to destroy this pest as efficiently as was once done with the prickly pear.



*An abandoned selection in Queensland overcome with prickly pear*

### **Western Australia**

#### **The short-necked swamp tortoise**

This is the world's rarest reptile. Our Society has had a long association with its conservation. Early in my career, I organised Australia's first Wild Life Show.

Later I did the same in Sydney, the first in the Town Hall, the second in the office of the Sunday Telegraph. At the Perth Show I was asked by a boy to confirm the identity of a strange tortoise. 'A long-necked swamp tortoise' I said confidently, without looking into the bag. 'Mine's got a short neck!' was the reply. The director of the Museum asked if he could have it after the show, recognised it as a new species, and described it in the Naturalist's Club magazine. This finally reached an American expert, who said it was not new, only a long lost specimen described in a Vienna Museum paper in 1839.

Scientists as well as naturalists became excited; later a new director described it as our most primitive reptile, a living paradox. The Government was urged to buy the two swamps in which the reptile still survived. They replied it was

a responsibility for naturalists, so the wildlife department started a public appeal.

Our President at the time, Thistle Stead, donated twenty pounds, a large sum in those days with our scanty resources. Later thousands of dollars was raised to build a protective fence to keep out feral predators, including human poachers, since a single animal fetched five hundred pounds in Germany. The most recent WWF newsletter described how their Threatened Species Network was digging artificial tunnels to shelter aestivating reptiles during the long dry summer.

The whole story is told in our new book *Conservation Victories with Battles still to Win*.



*The tortoise*



*A young Andrew Burbidge tracing a tortoise while studying for his doctorate, which he earned through work on its life history. Dr Burbidge spent many years with CALM, still keeping his interest in retirement*

### *Ningaloo Reef saved*

The Society welcomes news from Western Australia that Ningaloo Reef will be protected from the dangers of development. The Premier of WA, Dr Gallop, stated "We have drawn a line in the sand and said we will not accept developments that threaten this precious and fragile coast".

Our Society is mindful of the importance of the support of such public figures as the Western Australian novelist, Tim Winton, in achieving this outcome. We are reminded of the approach to our Society several years ago by the Nobel Prize winning novelist, Patrick White, for assistance in saving Sydney's Centennial Park. These are important alliances in gaining good outcomes for wildlife and the environment.

### *Weeping grass*

Recent reports from Western Australia are welcome. Scientists from the University of Western Australia have found 'a native grass not only good for grain and grazing, but great for our delicate soil'.

It is interesting to know that this perennial, with seeds equivalent to wheat and rice, was once eaten by Aborigines. Since it can be grown between December and May, when wheat and other crops have been harvested, weeping grass will remove any water which falls in that missing period. This stops subsoil salt rising towards the surface, preventing salination, a major problem in the area.

### *The Abrolhos Islands*

We have nominated these interesting Islands for World Heritage listing to the Federal Government. We have also suggested the Islands should be conserved as a Regional Park. The Premier has now replied to indicate they are well aware of their environmental significance. He writes: 'The Abrolhos coral reefs are particularly diverse, and unique compared to any other coral reefs in the world. The Islands provide significant habitat to a wide range of fauna, and are considered to be among the most significant seabird breeding areas in the world'.

The letter goes on to describe how the intention is to manage them in the way we suggested, with 'fisheries, education and scientific research being integrated with measures to protect the area's natural and cultural values'.



*Osprey bringing a fish to two chicks on the nest at Pelsart*



*Courting lesser noddy terns. John Gilbert, John Gould's assistant, compared their numbers to the passenger pigeons of America. Fortunately the noddies are still safe, unlike the extinct pigeon*

### *South Australia*

#### *Alternative energy*

A huge wind farm is being built on the Eyre Peninsula by a Queensland corporation for the South Australian Government. A second is in the planning.

The New Scientist estimates the world will run out of easily accessible oil in thirty years. It is understandable why business is investing in other forms of energy. There is a long list of sources, the

sun, the wind, tidal power, deep heat, ethanol from plants, the production of hydrogen to power fuel cells to drive buses and cars, nuclear - a dangerous option since these can easily be converted into making bombs, while their wastes take thousands of years to decay!



*A wind power tower being erected in Western Australia. They have also been used in Antarctica to supply power to Australia's research station*

### **Coongie Lakes wetlands saved**

Unknown to most conservationists this unique South Australian wetlands in the heart of one of our great stony deserts was listed by RAMSAR.

When we heard Santos was exploring the Lakes area for oil we visited this natural treasure. Exploration trucks in desert country leave scars which last for decades. Remembering how we saved Dryandra by going straight to the top, we appealed to the company director, sadly with no success.

Then the Premier, Mike Rann, visited this wonderful wetland, realised it was unique and decided it should be saved. Part will become national park; mining and grazing will be banned in some areas though grazing will continue in others.

We join with Simon Davies, Chief Executive of the Conservation Council of South Australia, in congratulating the Premier on his government's wise decision.

### **New South Wales**

#### **Land clearing**

A combination of farmers and conservationists has convinced the State Government that broad scale land clearing should end. The \$406 million land deal has been hailed by farmers and conservationists 'as the most profound environmental breakthrough in the history of NSW'. Our Congratulations to the Premier, Bob Carr, and the Minister for Natural Resources, Craig Knowles.

### **Montague Island**

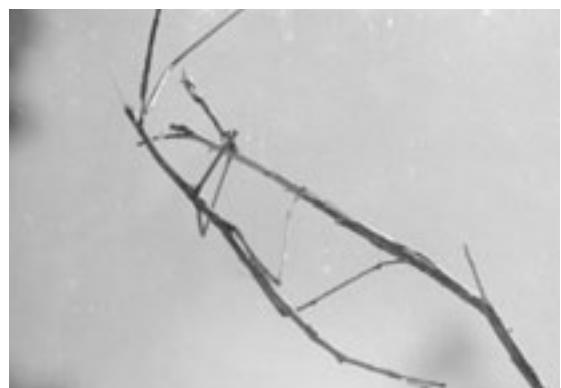
Montague Island on the New South Wales south coast is home to a colony of fairy penguins. Danger came in an unusual way through the introduction of South African kikuyu grass which creates a carpet so thick that the birds cannot dig burrows for their nests. This plant cannot survive shade, so thousands of native plants, lomandra and an acacia, have been planted and are flourishing. This is a valuable example of the use of local species to overcome the threat of imported plants which produce unforeseen problems. A successful conservation effort here will mean the same method can be used on other locations where a similar problem has arisen.



*Nesting penguin in its burrow*

### **Giant stick insect**

At twelve centimetres in length, the giant stick insect is not only the largest but also the rarest invertebrate in the world. Once common on Lord Howe Island, the arrival of rats meant the end for the insect as well as many bird species. They survived on Ball's Pyramid, a rocky island to the south of Lord Howe. Now dedicated work at Melbourne Zoo has reared a number of individuals. Releasing them on Lord Howe would be useless until the rats are removed. It is estimated that this would take between five to ten years - a worthwhile exercise on this World Heritage island, which, as a place for ecotourism, has economic benefits.



*A stick insect on a stick showing its camouflage*

### *Point Nepean*

The Nature Conservation Council has achieved a win for nature over the Federal Government's plans to sell for housing a strip of bushland between two national parks. The Government has agreed that it should be kept for community benefit and enjoyment. Our Society added its voice, though it was the Council's hard campaigning which won the day.

### *Queensland*

#### *Northern Australia*

Birds Australia had an article on one of the plagues of Egypt, also a pest in Australia - grasshoppers. A feast for birds, the article listed a whole host of birds who benefited, from ravens to black kites. Locusts are rich in protein (62% of dry mass, fat 17% and calcium, as high as vertebrates). Also, in preparation for migration, grasshoppers become even richer. It is no wonder tribes of hunter-gatherers found them good food. However, humans in fear for their crops use pesticides for locust control. Even worse, if the birds eat a lot in quick succession. Birds Australia saw a black kite eating four large insects per minute for several hours.



*Even budgerigars come to the feast*

### *Central Coast Network of NSW*

The NSW Network has developed an idea which may also spread around Australia and the world.

Growing out of a wildlife corridor local project, which 150 landholders in the Gosford and Wyong joined, a new Land for Wildlife has been set up. Jeff Bridges has been appointed by the Council to assist the corridor project.

### *International*

#### *Antarctica*

The media now has large photos of icebergs and Adelie Penguins, citing British scientists' warning of the threat to its wildlife through an influx of tourists. Before conservationists become alarmed they should study the history of tourists in that icy continent.

It was tourists who alerted the world to mistakes in that part of the world many years ago, warning of the killing of birds to be rendered down for oil and later the dumping of rubbish from research stations. As a result, the countries involved are busy cleaning their act, removing all rubbish back home. Not all, some still tip it into the sea. Ecotourists are careful taking no food onto shore. Also some even take plastic bags for faecal material to be disposed of on board ship!

The world over, it is tourists who tend to be the most concerned about the conservation of any pristine landscape and its wildlife.



*Macaroni penguin offering a stone to its mate, the material to be added to the nest*



**Bookings  
essential as  
numbers are  
strictly  
limited**

**Phone: 9556 1537**

# Central Western NSW Wildlife Tour

Featuring fossil caves, behind the scenes at Western Plains Zoo, rare plants at the spectacular Burrendong Arboretum and much more.....

## Itinerary

### *Monday 8 March 2004*

- Depart Sydney am
- Tarana. Enjoy lunch (at own cost) in this secluded and pretty valley halfway between Bathurst and Lithgow
- Wellington Caves Visit and Orientation at Fossil Studies Centre
- BBQ dinner at Wellington Caves included
- Accommodation at Wellington Cave Reserve.

### *Tuesday 9 March*

- Western Plains Zoo. A behind the scenes tour of bilby and mallee fowl research programme. Lunch included
- Nangara Gallery tour, afternoon tea supplied
- Wellington Caves tour, including Cathedral Cave and the Gaden Cave
- Dinner at Thai restaurant included.

### *Wednesday 10 March*

- Burrendong Botanic Garden and Arboretum overlooking beautiful Lake Burrendong. Picnic lunch at the Arboretum included
- Visit to Sturt Town and tour of Burrendong Dam
- Winery visit
- Visit to the Gould League tree at Wellington Public School
- BBQ dinner at Wellington Caves included.

### *Thursday 11 March*

- Leura. We will enjoy lunch (at own cost) in this small and pretty town which offers a pleasant afternoon in the cafes and dainty stores
- Return to Sydney pm.

For full itinerary or enquiries phone: 9556 1537 or email: [wildlifepreservation@optusnet.com.au](mailto:wildlifepreservation@optusnet.com.au)

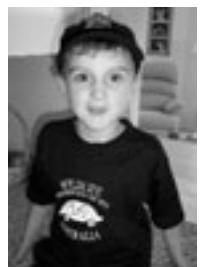
**Cost of Tour \$350 per person includes all travel in a comfortable coach, twin share accommodation (single supplement \$70 extra), breakfast, lunch and dinner each day (unless otherwise specified), and all entry fees.**

**Plus WPSA polo shirt, cap and bottle bag.**

**Deposit of \$100 required at time of booking.**

# W P S M E R C H A N D I S E

Many of our members have expressed interest in purchasing gift merchandise for friends and family (or even themselves)! This is a great way to support WPS, so we have responded below with a mail order system. Simply send your cheque or credit card details (with expiry date) and we will post your order out to you. All prices include GST and 20% member's discount. All proceeds go towards our conservation projects.



**Polo shirts: \$35.00**  
(navy with white logo/ white with navy logo)



**Cap: \$13.00**  
(navy with white logo)



**Kids T'shirts: \$15.00**  
(navy with white logo/ white with navy logo)



**WPS ceramic mug: \$6.00**  
(white with blue logo)



**Drink bottle bag: \$15.00**  
(navy with white logo, bottle not included)

Product	Quantity	Size	Cost per item	Total
Polo shirts	_____	S, M, L, XL, XXL	\$35.00	_____
Children's T shirts	_____	4-6, 8, 10	\$15.00	_____
Caps	_____	n/a	\$13.00	_____
Mugs	_____	n/a	\$ 6.00	_____
Drink bottle bag	_____	n/a	\$15.00	_____

Add 10% Postage & Handling (min \$5):  
Please allow 14 days for delivery **TOTAL:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### Delivery Details

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Payment Details (please tick)**  Cheque  Money order  Mastercard  Visa  Bankcard

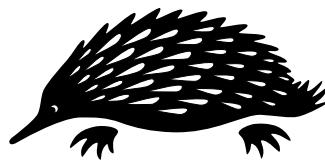
Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Send this order by MAIL:  
PO Box 42,  
Brighton Le Sands NSW 2216  
or for CREDIT CARD payments  
by fax to: 02 9599 0000

# Membership Form...



## WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA, INC.

Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia, Inc. (Founded 1909)  
PO Box 42 Brighton Le Sands NSW 2216

### *Membership*

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

Simply fill out this form.

Name: .....

Address: .....

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

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

#### *Membership category (please circle)*

Ordinary: \$30    Pensioner & Students: \$15    Associate conservation group: \$50    Corporate: \$150  
(Corporate membership is open to Schools, Associations and Institutions.)

#### **Payment Details (please tick)** Cheque Money order Mastercard Visa Bankcard

Card Number: ..... Amount \$ .....

Name on Card: ..... Expiry: ..... Donation \$ .....

Signature: ..... **Total** \$ .....

*Mail to the: Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Inc.,  
PO Box 42, Brighton Le Sands NSW 2216.*

#### *Consider - A Bequest*

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

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

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

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

VINCENT SERVENTY AM  
President of Honour

PATRICK MEDWAY AM  
National President