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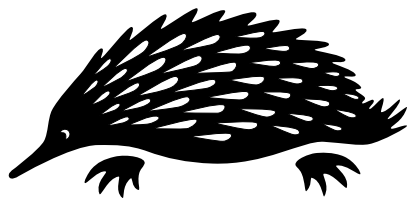
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## 'AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE'

*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.*

Print Post Approval No. PP243459/00117

Price \$5.00 (for non-members)

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Production/ Printing: StuDio DiseNo  
Budget Printing

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## REGIONAL COUNCILLORS

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

Such Regional Councillors would be sent the minutes of our  
Council meetings so they would know more 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...*

## ***2004 AGM of the NCC***

A great gathering of conservationists and environmentalists from across New South Wales came together at the Royal Botanic Gardens Theatre in October for the Annual General Meeting of the Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales. Many issues were discussed, and some very interesting guest speakers from major government departments responsible for native vegetation and wildlife management were featured. We were fortunate in getting our three motions passed by a majority of the delegates. We proposed an integrated system of marine sanctuaries around the whole coastline of Australia for the maintenance of marine biodiversity within marine environments with around 50% of the total area of marine parks to become marine sanctuaries; the establishment of a South Pacific Whale Sanctuary which would protect the breeding grounds of most of the species of migratory great whales that are found in the region; and support for the establishment of the Hunter Wildlife Corridor Regional Park from the ocean to the mountains along the Hunter River system.

## ***Wildlife and Animal Expo Display***

The Society again mounted an impressive wildlife preservation display at the 2004 Expo in Rosehill Gardens in November. We joined forces with the Crocodile Encounter team to present a real life experience with hands-on touching of crocodiles and snakes which proved to be very popular with the young people attending the show. Crocodile Encounters also presented a delightful environmental education stage show each day, demonstrating how to handle and protect snakes and other reptiles. The stage show gave a powerful conservation message to a very large audience. We can always use more volunteers on the display, so please contact us to register your interest.

## ***Kangaroo Island Conference***

Suzanne and I had the pleasure of attending the 2004 Australian Wildlife Management Society's Annual Conference on Kangaroo Island in December. It was a very rewarding experience both professionally for the richness of the papers being presented and for the opportunity to see at first hand the quality of the native wildlife on the Island. The South Australian government reassured everyone that the culling of koalas on Kangaroo Island was not an option being considered, after strong lobbying by ourselves and the Australian Koala Foundation.

## ***Reduction of roadkill***

We are continuing with our commitment to reduce the terrible road toll of our native Australian wildlife on our roads. We are seeking advice from the Minister on how we can coordinate our efforts nationally to reduce this terrible destruction and waste of our precious native wildlife.

## ***Environmental Education Seminar in 2005***

At the NCC meeting we were invited to sponsor an environmental education seminar in 2005. As environmental education is a primary focus for our Society, I was pleased to put the proposal to our Council for consideration.

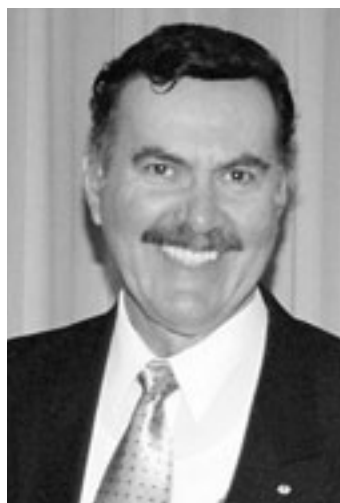
## ***Towra work completed***

I am pleased to report that the major restoration work on Towra Point Nature Reserve beach area has now been completed by the contractor. The serious environmental degradation of this important RAMSAR site was highlighted and work initiated by our Society back in 1996 and pursued with vigor to a logical conclusion. The total cost so far is in the vicinity of \$1.5m and is one of the first RAMSAR sites ever to be restored in Australia for migratory wading bird habitat. We are now preparing photographs and documentation of our efforts to restore this site for the future reference of our members.

## ***New Year greetings***

On behalf of Suzanne and myself, I wish every member and their respective families a bright and prosperous New Year and extend a personal invitation to you all to attend our 2005 AGM on 14 March 2005.

Patrick W Medway AM  
NATIONAL PRESIDENT



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

Notice is hereby given that the 96th Annual General Meeting of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Incorporated will be held in a special room of Parliament House, Sydney on Monday 14 March commencing at 11:00am.

### **Business**

1. Welcome and recording of those present.
2. To receive apologies.
3. Minutes of the 95th Annual General Meeting.
4. President's Report, Executive Director's Report and Treasurer's Report for 2004.
5. To receive and adopt the Balance Sheet and Income and Expenditure of the Society for the year ending 31 December 2004 in accordance with our Constitution.
6. To elect and confirm
  - A) the Officers of the Society: President/Chairman, Two Vice Presidents, 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 28 January 2005.
7. To appoint an Auditor for 2005.
8. General Business as submitted by 28 January 2005.
9. Closure.

## ***Annual Luncheon***

***Monday 14 March 2005***

The Council extends a cordial invitation to all our members to attend our Annual Luncheon in the Parliamentary Dining Rooms on Monday 14 March 2005 commencing at 12 noon. The cost of the Luncheon will be \$55 for members and \$75 for non-members, which includes one year's introductory membership. Bookings essential.

### ***Guest Speaker: Richard Morecroft***

Richard is perhaps best known as the principle news presenter for ABC Television in New South Wales - a position he held for two decades. He is also a former presenter of 'Nationwide' where he conducted a wide range of studio interviews as well as making film reports for the programme. In addition to his roles in news and current affairs, Richard has frequently been involved in other broadcasting projects, covering a range from TV and radio education projects to election night specials.

Richard is now renowned for presenting the ABC programme 'WildWatch Australia', where he explores Australia and its vastly differing backyards - from crowded city life - where there are as many as 700 of us per square kilometre - to areas of bush where you would be hard pressed to find one human in 700 kilometres!



*Guest speaker - Richard Morecroft*



## *Kangaroo Island*

Kangaroo Island is the third largest island off the coast of Australia. 155 km long, up to 55 km wide, and covering an area of 4,500 square kilometres.



### *History*

In 1800, the British Government commissioned Captain Matthew Flinders to explore and map the coastline of Terra Australis in HMS Investigator. Flinders made the first recorded European sighting of the Island in March, 1802. He came ashore on the North coast, and named Kangaroo Island. On the afternoon of 8 April 1802, as the Investigator tacked towards the mainland, a sail appeared on the horizon. It was the French corvette, Le Geographe, under the command of Nicolas Baudin. Despite Britain and France being at war, both parties soon realised that neither had hostile intentions. Information was exchanged about their explorations, with Flinders advising Baudin of the large island nearby with the opportunity to replenish supplies with fresh meat and water. Baudin returned to the Island in the summer of 1802-3, mapping much of the rugged South and West coastlines. Many of the features along this part of the coastline bear French names.

### *Early European settlement*

The first white people to live on Kangaroo Island were sealers, escaped convicts and runaway sailors, who sought refuge there in the early 1800s. They lived a self-sufficient life which was not to everyone's taste. Living on kangaroo and other wildlife, they traded salt plus seal, kangaroo and wallaby skins for spirits and tobacco.

### *From wool to wallaby skins*

By the late 1800s, the Island's pastoral industry was well under way. Sheep were the main focus, as wool could be easily shipped to the mainland. Barley and other grains were grown. At the same time as farmers battled to clear the land, their livelihood was derived from the bush. They felled and sold timber, snared possums, kangaroos and

wallabies for their skins, collected yacca gum and distilled eucalyptus oil.

### *Flora and fauna*

Kangaroo Island is an area of outstanding natural beauty. Due to its isolation, it has suffered less than mainland areas from the impact of European development. Today, the Island still possesses rich and diverse flora and fauna seldom found elsewhere. Substantial tracts of bushland still remain undisturbed and, free from the ravages of rabbits and foxes, continue to support an abundance of wildlife.

Some of the abundant wildlife that is native to Kangaroo Island is the Kangaroo Island kangaroo, tammar wallaby, brushtail possum, short beaked echidna, southern brown bandicoot, western and little pygmy possum, endemic sooty dunnart, bush and swamp rat, six bat species, six frog species, Rosenberg's sand goanna, black tiger snake, pygmy copperhead, Australian sea lion, New Zealand fur seal and Australian fur seals. Wildlife is most visible during winter and, in summer, during the cooler parts of the day.



*Kangaroo Island kangaroo*

The koala, platypus and ringtail possum were introduced and still survive on Kangaroo Island. The Kangaroo Island kangaroo, a sub-species of the western grey kangaroo is smaller, darker and has longer fur than the mainland species. It shelters in the bush during the day, coming out to graze as dusk approaches. Areas where bush and pasture adjoin make ideal places to observe them. At Flinders Chase National Park, a few extremely docile kangaroos can usually be seen around the Headquarters area, even though feeding is no longer allowed.

The tammar wallaby (*Macropus eugenii*), with smaller and finer features than the kangaroo, are abundant on the Island. By comparison, mainland populations are extinct in South-eastern Australia with a small remnant population in Western Australia. Wallabies are frequently seen at night along the roads, where they are easily confused by vehicle lights.



*Tammar wallabies*

Rosenberg's sand goanna, a reptile up to one metre in length, is a predator of smaller reptiles, young birds and eggs. It is often seen on warm days scavenging on dead animals along the roadsides.

The echidna (spiny anteater) is an unusual egg-laying mammal. Sightings are unpredictable, but you might see it searching and digging for ants and termites, or even licking up ants with its long pink sticky tongue.

Many marine mammals are found along the Island's 450km of largely undeveloped coastline.



*Echidna (Tachyglossus aculeatus) eating termites*

### ***The Australian sea-lion***

The Australian sea-lion spends as much time on land as at sea. They are one of the rarest seal species, with a total population of only about 12,000 animals. Approximately 8,500 Australian sea-lions live around the South Australian coast and 3,500 live around the Western Australian coastline. From 1803 until 1836 over 500 sealers were attracted to the coastline of Kangaroo Island almost hunting the colonies of Australian sea-lions to extinction. Seal skins and seal oil were amongst Kangaroo Island's first exports.



*Australian sea-lions (Neophoca cinerea) at Seal Bay*

Australian sea-lions can be seen, by guided tour, at the sandy beach at the Seal Bay Conservation Park, which is home to a colony of some 600 wild Australian sea-lions (*Neophoca cinerea*). Sea-lions usually spend three days at sea hunting and feeding and three days on shore resting and renewing energy levels ready for their next hunting trip. The beaches and bays of Seal Bay Conservation Park provide an ideal home for these Australian sea-lions. While they may come ashore to rest on other parts of the coast, the majority live, breed and die around Seal Bay. The adult female sea-lions come ashore to rest and to suckle pups. The rocky coves of the breeding areas provide sheltered retreats for the pups. Pups learn to swim in the reef-sheltered bay before venturing out into the ocean waters. The sand dunes provide protection against the cold southerly winds and rain.

Sea-lions are opportunistic feeders, taking a large range of prey, including squid, octopus, scale fish and some crustaceans. They usually fish alone, diving 900-1200 times during their three days at sea. Bulls have been recorded diving up to 275 metres and staying underwater for approximately seven minutes. Females usually dive to around 80 metres and remain underwater for 4-5 minutes. Sea-lions have an amazing agility and speed, useful not only in chasing their prey, but also escaping their main predators – large sharks. Most sea-lions can out-manoeuvre sharks, but the slow, weak and the un-alert fall prey.



*Seal Bay Interpretation Centre*



*Patrick and Suzanne Medway at Seal Bay*

The mating and pupping seasons occur simultaneously over a six month period. Females mate 7-10 days after their pup is born. The bulls are aggressive throughout the breeding season, fighting for dominance and the opportunity to mate. In breeding areas bulls occupy loose territories defending either a particular female or a popular pupping site. Sea-lion pups are born every 17-18 months, usually in the cliffs or sheltered coves adjacent to the main beach. The pups are generally suckled until shortly before the birth of the next pup. One out of three pups live to become an adult. Fit and healthy animals may live to 20 years or more.



*Baby Australian sea-lion (Neophoca cinerea) at Seal Bay waiting for its mother to return*

About 6,000 New Zealand fur seals live and breed around Cape du Couedic. They breed in summer and can be seen energetically interacting in and around Admiral's Arch in the Flinders Chase National Park.

It's easy to remember the difference between 'true seals' and 'sea lions': true seals (no external ears) have small front flippers and can only move awkwardly on land by shuffling their large bodies, while the eared sea lions not only have the larger front flippers on which they can walk, but they are also able to turn their hind flippers forward under their body, thus enabling 'four-footed' locomotion.



*New Zealand fur seal (Arctocephalus forsteri)*



*Admiral's Arch*

## ***Flora***

The Island's plant catalogue lists over 850 species, as well as approximately 250 which have been introduced from other parts of the world. The spring months of September and October reveal spectacular flowering of much of the flora.

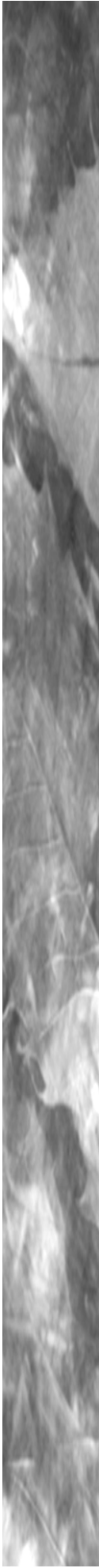
## ***Birds***

Kangaroo Island is a paradise for birdwatchers, with a diverse range of habitats to explore. From the wild coastline of cliffs, beaches and estuaries, through coastal heath and mallee, to river and creek systems, wetlands and lagoons where many of the Island's 251 recorded birds can be seen.



*White-bellied sea-eagle (Haliaeetus leucogaster)*





Among the most spectacular is the superb fairy-wren. The bright blue male is often seen with a family group. Also brilliant are the members of the cockatoo and parrot families. Noisy rainbow and purple-crowned lorikeets are locally nomadic, moving to where eucalypts are flowering, to lick the nectar from the flowers with their brush tongues.

Little penguins are found around the coastline, living and breeding in burrows under shrubs, rocks and other sheltered places. On shore at night they call noisily.

Kangaroo Island was part of the mainland until around 9,500 years ago. Since then the plants, animals and birds have survived in isolation with some evolving differently from mainland species. For example, the crimson rosella and some honeyeater species show a colour variation.

As with the Island's fauna, and for the same reasons, many species that are uncommon or threatened on the mainland are still abundant here. The bush (Southern) stone-curlew, Southern emu-wren, beautiful firetail, Bassian thrush, Western whip bird, white bellied sea-eagle, osprey and hooded plover are surviving well. In addition, the only South Australian population of the glossy black cockatoo - a large black cockatoo with striking red tail panels - is found. The population, when surveyed in October 1998, numbered 246. This is an increase of 58 on the 1996 census, due to the dedicated protection of natural and artificial nesting sites.



*Bush stone-curlew (Burhinus grallarius)*

### ***Wilderness protection areas***

There are several reasons why Kangaroo Island has become well known as a place to see wildlife in its natural habitat. More than half the Island has never been cleared of vegetation, with about one third conserved in National and Conservation Parks, including five significant Wilderness Protection Areas.

The remaining uncleared areas form bush corridors between larger areas of vegetation. In addition, the absence of foxes and rabbits ensures the integrity of this uncleared bushland. Many of the roadsides exemplify a dense understorey of intact, thick eucalypt scrub and smaller herbaceous plants; it is therefore not surprising that there is abundant wildlife, much of which is uncommon or extinct on mainland Australia. Even the casual visitor will see many wildlife species throughout the Island, particularly if two points are remembered: most of mammals are nocturnal; wild animals also frighten easily and are most successfully observed (and least stressed) from a distance, so as not to interrupt their natural behaviour.

### ***Flinders Chase National Park***

While the introduced platypus is only seen in Flinders Chase by the patient and dedicated, koalas are now widespread and are found wherever their favoured food trees - the big gums of the river systems - are located. Not native to Kangaroo Island, koalas are now devastating, through overeating, these eucalypts. Their entire diet consists of the mildly toxic eucalypt leaves. The lengthy digestive process and the low nutrients gained from this diet means the koala has little energy and needs to sleep for about nineteen hours a day.



*Flinders Chase National Park headquarters*



*The flora of Flinders Chase National Park*



## *Roadkill on Kangaroo Island*



*Roadside sign*

While driving around the Island, Patrick and I were horrified at the amount of local native roadkill. Many local people warned us to make sure we were off the roads before sunset as this was the time when most native wildlife was killed on the roads. We were also told that a lot of roadkill of wildlife occurred on the main roads by transport trucks travelling at high speeds during the early hours of the morning to reach the first ferry leaving the Island for the mainland.

Typical roadkill consisted of kangaroos, wallabies - including the beautiful little tammar wallaby, echidnas, galahs, snakes, goannas, lizards, honeyeaters, native hens, coots, ducks, etc.

On one part of the Island we saw five dead tammar wallaby carcasses in a one kilometre strip. On another occasion on the road to Stokes Bay near the Latham Conservation Park we saw three dead wallabies in a 100 metre strip of roadway.



*A feral cat feeding of a kangaroo in Flinders Chase National Park*

As in many other parts of Australia, there is abundant habitat on the road verges and wildlife is attracted to the young, juicy plant life growing on the road verge. We also saw many instances of carrion eaters feeding off the roadkill, and in some instances become roadkill victims themselves, ie goannas killed while feeding off dead wallabies.

Another interesting observation was a feral cat feeding off the dead carcass of a kangaroo alongside a local roadway. We drove past and noticed the cat feeding behind the dead animal. We turned around and drove slowly back past the dead kangaroo and took a photograph of the young feral cat feeding off the roadkill.

The delegates from AKF spotted a very large goanna feeding of a dead kangaroo and took a fascinating video of the goanna shaking the tail of the carcass to tear off flesh.



*We saw dozens of dead ringtail possums on Kangaroo Island roads*



*The predators become roadkill victims*

## *South Australia's first ecological site*

Kangaroo Island will become an environmental model for the rest of the world through a major 50-year internationally-linked research project.

The Island will become South Australia's first long-term ecological research site, joining a network of sites across about 40 countries. It is believed to be the biggest study of its type. Australia only has four ecological research sites, all in the eastern states. Because of the long-term decline in conventional agriculture and increasing commitment to repair long-term damage, Kangaroo Island is likely to be one of the first places where environmental solutions are implemented.

The research site, which includes the entire 440,000ha of the island and nearby Islands and seaways, will look at issues including dry land salinity, fire ecology and management, biodiversity, the impact of tourism, geology and threatened species.

Members are encouraged to visit Kangaroo Island if they ever have the chance and to see for themselves the wonderful examples of Australia's unique wildlife in all its forms.

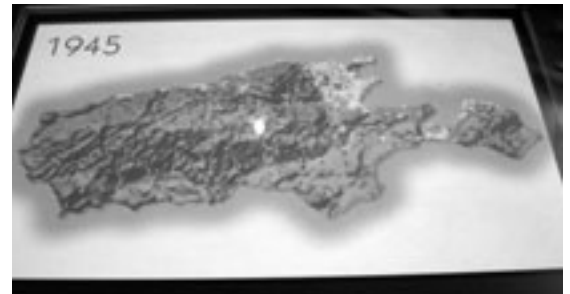
## *Koalas and Kangaroo Island*



The koala is an Australian icon and is recognised around the world. However, the koala has suffered dramatic declines in numbers and distribution since the arrival of Europeans. Although not currently considered threatened on a national basis, the conservation status of koalas varies throughout Australia.

Having faced extinction in South Australia and Victoria in the early 1900s, koalas have since been returned to much of their former range in these states, as well as some areas where they were not recorded historically, as a result of protective legislation and active intervention. Surveys in NSW indicate that since 1949, populations of koalas have been lost from many localities, particularly on the southern and western edges of their distribution. Most populations in NSW now survive in fragmented and isolated habitat and many of the areas in which koalas are most abundant are subject to intense and ongoing pressures, in particular clearing for agriculture and urban expansion.

The loss and degradation of habitat is the most significant threat facing koala populations in Australia.




*These two reproductions of an aerial view of Kangaroo Island show the land clearing that has taken place between 1943 and 2000*

## *Koala genetics*

Koalas in NSW are very different genetically to koalas in South Australia and Victoria. In the early 1900s a small number of koalas were moved from the Victorian mainland to Phillip and French Islands in Western Port Bay. The purpose of this translocation was to establish new colonies where the threats from fire and human activities were less. These koalas bred very successfully and, because they were on islands, were not able to disperse. The result was that over-browsing of the available habitat became a major management concern. At that time, koalas were extinct in South Australia and numbers were very low on the Victorian mainland. Koalas from the island populations were used to re-stock mainland Victoria and South Australia, where koalas had once occurred, and were introduced to Kangaroo Island, where koalas had not occurred historically. Up until 1969 translocations also occurred from Kangaroo Island to populations on the South Australian mainland, and translocations still occur in Victoria today.

As a result, the majority of today's wild koalas in Victoria and South Australia are the descendents of translocated stock. While this programme has been successful in returning koalas to much of the area they originally inhabited (as well as some areas where they were not present historically), Victorian and South Australian animals have very low genetic diversity as a result of severe bottlenecks (periods of time when population numbers are very low) and the long-term programme of active translocations. The result is that these koalas are showing characteristics



which result from 'inbreeding depression', such as albinism, the absence of reproductive features and abnormal sperm in males.

Potential problems resulting from low genetic diversity include a reduction of fertility, high juvenile mortality, low disease resistance and a reduced ability to respond to environmental changes. In contrast, koalas in NSW have comparatively high genetic diversity.

Some scientists believe that if koalas were to be moved from South Australia or Victoria to NSW and allowed to breed, the gene pools would mix and would result in a reduction of genetic diversity and health of NSW koalas, and this could be detrimental to the recovery and long-term survival of koalas in NSW.

### *Social structure*

Koalas live in breeding associations, generally comprised of a dominant male, a small number of mature females, as well as juveniles of various ages. Animals often have overlapping home range areas. Some scientists believe that if new koalas were brought into an area where animals already exist, this complex social structure may be disturbed. Similarly, the social structure of the source population from which koalas are removed for translocation could be affected, potentially causing the source population to decline.

### *Suitable habitat and climate*

Koalas have specific habitat requirements and rely on a small number of eucalypt tree species as their primary food source. The trees which make up the bulk of their diet vary across different parts of their range, so koalas from Victoria and South Australia may rely on tree species which do not occur in NSW. If familiar food trees are not available, a forced change of diet may cause stress which could be detrimental to translocated koalas. Therefore the suitability and quantity of available habitat is an important consideration. Physical and physiological characteristics may also affect the success of translocations. Koalas in South Australia and Victoria, which are larger and have longer, thicker fur, may not adjust to the local climatic conditions in NSW. Koalas at the extremities of the species' range may also have adapted to the unique environmental conditions. For example, Pilliga koalas may be adapted to cope with heat, low humidity and low rainfall, and may not cope well with conditions elsewhere in NSW. If koalas have never lived in an area proposed for translocation, it may be that the area does not contain any suitable habitat. Therefore, such an area may not be able to support koalas, and translocation may fail. If koalas are known in the locality, it may be that the animals will expand

naturally into new areas. Rather than translocating koalas to such an area, a better approach may be to actively reduce threats on existing populations, re-establish suitable habitat and allow natural growth and expansion of the species.



*Kangaroo Island koala*

### *Threats*

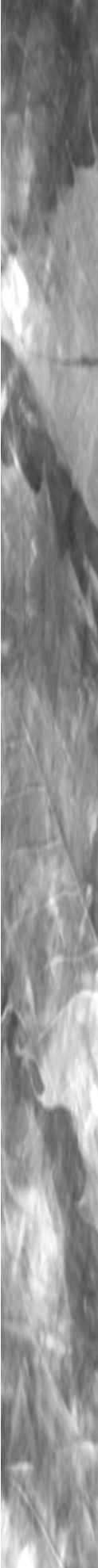
Koalas face many threats, such as attacks by wild and domestic dogs, being hit by cars, loss of habitat and wildfire. If koalas did once occur in the area proposed for translocation, why did they disappear? If koalas are translocated back into such an area, they may be placed under direct threat. The size and fragmentation of the habitat is also an important consideration. The area would need to be large enough to allow translocated koalas to move in search of food and mate without having to cross large areas of cleared land and roads where they are at risk. Also, if the area is small and cut off from nearby habitat, there may not be enough food to support the number of koalas, leading to over-browsing and loss of habitat. The long-term success of translocation requires that animals are able to disperse into and out of the new population, which may not be possible where the habitat is isolated or highly fragmented. Unless these potential threats are adequately considered and actively managed, there is a risk that translocation may not be successful.

Moving any animal to a new area will have an effect on the plants and animals that are already there, some of which may also be threatened.

### *Disease*

Koalas in NSW carry Chlamydia, a bacterial infection which usually lies dormant. Koalas are thought to display symptoms (such as urogenital tract infection) when exposed to stress. This disease reduces fertility and is thought to regulate population numbers such that the animals do not become over-abundant. However, many koala populations in Victoria and South Australia,





including those on Kangaroo Island and French Island, do not carry Chlamydia and have little or no resistance to the disease.

Translocating Chlamydia-free animals into areas where Chlamydia is present, and vice versa, is likely to cause the translocated animals to become infected resulting in reduced health, fertility and longevity.

### ***When is translocation of koalas OK?***

Translocation of koalas may be appropriate to remove koalas at extreme and immediate risk, to repopulate areas which once supported koalas or to supplement very small and isolated populations to prevent inbreeding. Any translocation proposal of koalas needs to be able to demonstrate that the long-term security of the animal and the habitat will be preserved.

### ***NSW Government and the translocation of koalas***

Our Society wrote to the NSW Minister for the Environment, Bob Debus, exploring the possibility of translocation of koalas from Kangaroo Island to NSW. We had received a letter from Allen Stien of Grenfell on this subject.

Bob Debus' reply is quoted below:

'Thank you for your letter of 27 September 2004 and the copy of the letter from Mr Alien Stien of Grenfell, who makes several suggestions for the possible translocation of koalas to Weddin Mountains National Park.

'Several similar suggestions to translocate koalas to various parts of NSW, particularly from Kangaroo Island, have been given considerable thought over recent years. However, there are several obstacles that would need to be overcome before any translocation program could be undertaken, even between different locations within NSW. Translocation is a complex process and a large number of matters need to be considered in order to ensure its success. In particular, it is important to consider that koalas from one area can be genetically different from those in other areas. For instance, the movement of koalas from South Australia to NSW may result in a mixing of the gene pools and a subsequent reduction in the genetic diversity and health of NSW koalas. This would not assist the recovery of koalas in NSW.

'In addition, koalas rely on a small number of eucalypt tree species as their primary food source. For instance, it is likely that koalas from

Kangaroo Island rely on trees which do not occur in NSW, and there is very little information available on whether koalas can adjust their diets if preferred food trees are not available. It is even likely that different populations of koalas within NSW would feed on different tree species. Extensive testing of viable eucalypts would be necessary, which means that trees from Weddin Mountains would have to be grown in the koala source area or flown from Weddin Mountains to the koala source area to test their suitability. Without such a trial a forced change of diet could be fatal to translocated animals. Importantly, koalas face many threats, such as attacks from wild and domestic dogs, being hit by cars, loss of habitat and fire. Unless the factors that caused the disappearance of koalas from an area in the first place are addressed, they would prevent the successful translocation and establishment of a new colony of koalas.

'For this reason, the NSW Government's preferred strategies to protect koalas generally involve actions that remove or reduce these threats. A draft NSW Koala Recovery Plan has been prepared by the DEC and was publicly exhibited in 2003. Submissions have been reviewed and it is anticipated that a final plan will be submitted to me for adoption in late 2004. The final plan will detail a very large range of actions designed to protect koala populations where they are found to occur, reduce threats to koalas (eg, cars and domestic pets), and even encourage the repopulation of bushland areas that once would have had koalas.

'I understand that translocation of koalas is an option that will be actively considered to help increase or to restore genetic diversity to some koala populations, but because it is such a complex process it would only be considered by the DEC and the Koala Recovery Team as a recovery strategy where it has clear advantages over other conservation options.

'A few examples of actions proposed in the draft Recovery Plan to help koala populations recover include such diverse things as mapping existing koala habitat, incorporating koala conservation measures into development planning processes, creating a list of koala blackspots on our roads, and planting the right kinds of trees as part of bush regeneration works. The draft Recovery Plan can be found on the national parks web site [www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au).

'Thank you for bringing Mr Stien's suggestions to my attention and I trust this information is helpful.'

## *Koalas on Kangaroo Island*

When our Society was invited to attend the Australian Wildlife Management Congress on Kangaroo Island, we knew that the question of culling or translocation of koalas would be discussed in detail.

Scarcely visited until a few years ago, even by Australians, Kangaroo Island is acquiring a reputation as a place where tourists can spot all the unique native wildlife for which the country is famous: kangaroos, wallabies, possums, platypuses and koalas. The plentiful opportunities to glimpse native animals in the wild are the principle draw, especially for foreign visitors to the Island.

We made enquiries from the Department for Environment and Heritage South Australia on whether translocation of koalas had ever been tried and received a reply from Angela Duffy, Wildlife Management Officer, Kangaroo Island Region.

We were advised that there have been at least two surveys assessing the fate of koalas translocated from Kangaroo Island, both were conducted in 1997. The first, by Barbara St John (National Parks and Wildlife SA), involved the sterilisation and translocation of 20 radio collared koalas on 4 and 5 March 1997, to three sites in south-east SA: Telford Scrub Conservation Park (5 koalas), Honans Scrub (5 koalas) and Glenroy Conservation Park (10 koalas). Collars were removed from the Telford Scrub and Honan Scrub animals on 8 June 1997. All but one koala had survived: one male koala from Telford Scrub was found moribund on 5 April 1997, treated in Mt Gambier and flown to Adelaide where it was dead on arrival. Post mortem revealed a systemic infection.



*Baby koala on Kangaroo Island*

Simon Clark conducted an Honours project at the University of Adelaide in 1997/98. The study examined the response of twenty sterilised koalas that were translocated from Kangaroo Island to the south-east of South Australia. The koalas had been sterilised in late February 1997, released on Kangaroo Island, and then recaptured for translocation to south-east South Australia in August 1997 (10 released at Fopperies and 10 released at Yarrabera). Clark also included results of radio tracking the ten Glenroy koalas (mentioned in the study above). He reported that the Glenroy koalas continued to be radio tracked until March 1998. During that period, five of the ten animals lost their collars (presumably pulled off/fell off). The koalas released at Topperweins and Yarrabera were also tracked to the end of March 1998. Three of these animals died over the 8 month study period:

- 1 female at Topperweins died three months after translocation, possibly as a result of an eye infection
- 1 male at Topperweins died four and a half months after translocation; this animal was assessed as being in poor condition before translocation
- 1 male at Yarrabera was found dead about five and a half months after translocation. The reason for this death was unknown.

The weight and condition (body, coat, muscle condition and presence of external parasites) was assessed for each koala at the time of translocation and at the end of the study period. None of the surviving koalas' health or weight had changed significantly by the end of the study period. The degree of dispersal after translocation was also assessed: Clark noted that 'Koalas at both sites demonstrated a measure of site fidelity, with half the koalas establishing a 'stable home range', and the others slowly dispersing away from the release point.'

The Department for Environment and Heritage South Australia planned for further translocations to the south-east in late 2004, and plan to conduct another study (probably involving an Honours student) to monitor the fate of translocated koalas. While the logistics of the translocation program are being finalised, they will work within the following parameters to minimise the risks to koala welfare:

- efforts are made to minimise holding times as far as practical, eg, koalas are to be sterilised on the day after capture (or on the same day), and translocated and released by the following morning
- koalas are translocated in clean pet-packs with a supply of fresh leaves

- koalas held at the veterinary surgery prior to sterilisation are housed in large segmented cages with branches, water and a supply of fresh leaves
- no koalas assessed as being in poor health or body condition will be translocated
- koala catching will not take place when the ambient temperature exceeds 30 degrees Celsius.



*Mother and baby, Kangaroo Island*

### ***Kangaroo Island vegetation***

The tree-killing fungus, *Phytophthora*, was first identified on Kangaroo Island in 1994 and trees began dying in 1995. Forest dieback has been observed on the Island, in association with koalas, but no research appears to have been conducted to determine whether koalas are the primary cause. Research into dieback is urgently needed. Dying trees, for instance, may produce more sugars, thereby attracting koalas to them.

Salinity is an already-apparent and emerging land degradation issue on the Island as is the monoculture spread of exotic plants. Disease, habitat fragmentation, poor fire management and salinity are amongst the many possible contributors to tree deaths on Kangaroo Island. Feral animals and weeds wreak further havoc, while feral bees oust native birds and other pollinators from their tree hollow homes.

### ***The anti-koala lobby***

Some environmentalists believe the koalas of Kangaroo Island are vicious pests who are destroying the environment and murdering indigenous species, and want to cull them as they believe they are wreaking havoc, stripping their favourite gum trees of leaves and destroying precious habitats.

The proponents of the culling of the Kangaroo Island koalas say that conservationists have tried to solve the problem by relocating some koalas to the mainland, and even sterilising them. Now they say there is no alternative but a mass cull. The South Australian Government agrees - but says

that it is out of the question: the country's image would be irrevocably tarnished, it argues, and tourism would go into free fall. There are particular fears about the impact in Japan, which supplies a large proportion of Australia's foreign visitors, most of them keen on spotting a creature that is regarded - erroneously - as the epitome of cute and cuddly. 'The media there goes absolutely berko every time this issue is raised,' says John Hill, the South Australian Environment Minister. 'This issue has to be resolved in a sensitive way and that's what the government is trying to do.' Hill has yet to come up with an alternative plan, apart from 'fencing off critical areas'. Environmentalists say that if a cull is not carried out, the dilemma will eventually disappear, because competition for food among koalas is so fierce that many will starve to death. Hardly the most humane solution, but unlikely to cause lurid headlines in Japan.

### ***Local Government comments***

Kangaroo Island mayor Michael Pingilly clearly has an eye to the future of tourism as well as the koala. 'The best solution is to reduce the koalas,' he says. 'I'm not going to say we need to shoot the koalas, no.' The South Australian Government knows this issue is so controversial that supporting a cull could mean losing an election. But for the experts who work with these beautiful animals' day in and day out, there's no other way.

'We just want the public to understand we are not happy about it either; we are the ones that will have to do it but it's going to have to be done'.

### ***1920's***

In the 1920s, things looked very different. Back then it was believed that the species was in danger of extinction because of hunting, disease, fire and extensive forest clearance. Eighteen koalas were released in Flinders Chase National Park, at the western end of Kangaroo Island, in an attempt to safeguard their survival. They thrived, they bred - and now there are unsubstantiated reports that more than 30,000 of them are chewing their way through the Island's eucalyptus trees.

With well-established koala populations all over the Island, the culling lobby reports that even a cursory drive reveals the trail of devastation left in their wake. A local eco-tourism guide reported that 'in a grove of red gums near the Cygnet River, koalas are draped lazily over the high branches, snoozing in the afternoon sun. One has a baby in its arms. It is an enchanting sight. But nearby stands a forlorn skeleton, stripped of leaves and dying. 'Killed by koalas,' he says.





*Cygnet River on Kangaroo Island. We were told this is where the koalas were causing the worst damage and that "the koalas were falling out of the trees". Despite searching for three days, we never saw one koala along Cygnet River*

In the west of the Island, the culling enthusiasts report that the manna gums that used to line the river systems have been all but wiped out. They say that koalas eat a kilo of leaves a day, and manna leaves are their favourite. But they are not fussy. They report that as the mannas die out, the koalas are devouring the leaves of other species of eucalypt, including stringybark and the regionally rare swamp gum and, as a consequence, they believe that the wildlife that is native to Kangaroo Island is losing its habitat.



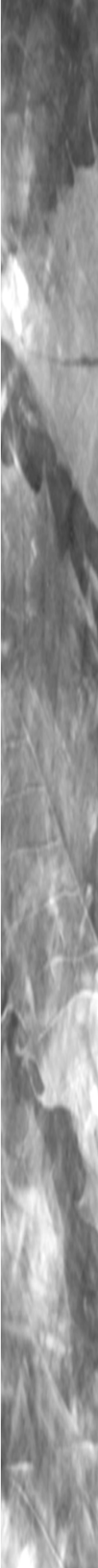
*Koalas strip the manna gum eucalyptus trees they favour. When the koalas are removed, the trees recover*

Grinter, a passionate environmentalist, supports a cull. 'Whenever we talk about shooting them, there's a storm of protest,' he says. 'It's the Bambi syndrome and it's clouding people's judgement. Visitors get a warm, fuzzy feeling when they see koalas. To us, they're just pests.'

Professor Hugh Possingham, the director of the University of Queensland's ecology centre and a member of a taskforce that examined the problem, says the government is not acting rationally. 'We cull millions of kangaroos in Australia every year and we cull Cape Barren geese, which not long ago were a threatened species,' he says. 'As a scientist, I see no reason why koalas should be any different.'

The culling proponents recently reported: 'Caught between a rock and a hard place, the South Australian Government has tried most measures short of a cull. It has not followed the example of the neighbouring state of Victoria and put female koalas on the pill. But some 3,000 males have been surgically sterilised in a costly, laborious exercise that involved climbing trees and bringing them down one by one. After spending more than A\$1m, officials admitted that they had vastly under-estimated the population and had thus been wasting their time. The programme was suspended. Relocation also proved expensive, as well as being stressful for the animals. Scientists and conservationists are now united in their belief that shooting up to 20,000 koalas is the only option if Kangaroo Island's biodiversity is to be preserved and irreplaceable habitats protected. Foxes and rabbits were never introduced to the Island, so it harbours a rich variety of wildlife. Those animals are increasingly threatened as koala numbers continue to spiral and the marsupials munch their way through a limited supply of vegetation.'

Matt Turner, scientific officer of the South Australia Nature Conservation Society, agrees. 'I think many people would argue that we are in the middle of an ecological disaster on the Island,' he says. 'In some areas, the trees are so heavily defoliated that they are dying. Koalas are having a devastating effect on the Island. The bottom line is that the government has a responsibility to manage the environment.' The government's own environmental body, National Parks and Wildlife, holds the same view. There is no outcry in Australia or abroad about the culling of kangaroos, which are a pest to farmers. Dingoes, the wild dogs that have been in Australia for centuries, are also shot. Australians eat kangaroos, wallabies and emus without a qualm. But koalas, because of their teddy bear image, are seen as 'out of bounds'.



Yet unsentimental observers say koalas are far from being the cute and cuddly creatures of popular perception. In reality, they can be quite vicious. 'They're antisocial,' says Grinter. 'You rarely see two together on the same tree, except during the mating season, and even then the females sometimes jump out of the tree to get away from the males. There's no roses and champagne when marsupials mate. They have a tiny brain. They sleep for 16 hours a day and rest for another four. All they do is eat leaves and mate once a year.'

Minister John Hill MP, though, is convinced there would be a fearful backlash if thousands of koalas were killed. He believes that the reputation of South Australia, at the very least, is at stake. 'Every time that someone jumps up and says we ought to do this, it makes things that little bit more difficult,' he says.

The dilemma was summed up by Adelaide's The Advertiser newspaper a couple of years ago. In an editorial entitled 'When science confronts sentiment', it said: 'Merely to think of the huge revulsion occasioned by whaling and the clubbing to death of seal pups on Canadian ice should be sufficient to send a shudder down the spine of anyone concerned with what brute reporting of a koala cull would do to our state's and nation's reputation.'

It added: 'Against the weight of [scientists'] recommendations must be put the likely impact of front-page or prime-time television images of unresisting koalas being shot, trapped or otherwise killed. 'Kangaroo Island: the Koala Killing Fields' - the prospect of such headlines is enough to undo years of good tourism selling work.'

### ***Our opinion***

Patrick and I spent three days driving all over Kangaroo Island, and spent considerable time along the Cygnet River looking for koalas. We did not spot even one. And found no instance of a 'forlorn skeleton, stripped of leaves and dying'. We believe that the 'devastation' left by koalas and 'the well-established koala populations' must be hidden on private land and it is the farmers who want to clear their land for more crops that are spreading the reports of an over-population of koalas and dying trees.

From personal observations and inquiry it is obvious that there is NOT an over population of koalas on Kangaroo Island. We drove all over the island looking for koalas in the wild and were unsuccessful. We finally drove into the Hanson Bay Sanctuary area and found 7 wild koalas living in the very large gum trees which form an avenue in this sanctuary resort. This sanctuary was one

of Dr John Warmesley's early reserves in his Earth Sanctuary Limited complexes. It now operates as an eco-tourism centre offering accommodation on a beautiful area of Hanson's Bay on Kangaroo Island. See their web site for more information.

Clearly many people visit Kangaroo Island to see the local native wildlife such as the kangaroos, seals and sea lions and the koala. After spending over a week travelling around the Island, we finally had to go to a wildlife sanctuary to see live wild koalas in trees!



*Koala at Hanson Bay Sanctuary*




*This "big boy" was trying to get into the Hanson Bay Koala Sanctuary where you drop a dollar in the slot for each adult and go for a wander. You'll find koalas in their natural surroundings and some will be active no matter what time of day, caring for their young or nibbling on a gumleaf*

### ***Translocation***

From our research, our Society believes that the introduction of a few new koalas into a new or foreign population actually INCREASES genetic diversity. Of course the whole argument about this and the possibility of introduction of disease is avoided if the introductions are into areas that are no longer populated by koalas, provided the factors which caused the earlier local extinction are controlled or removed.

The Kangaroo Island population is derived from a small sample of koalas from islands in Westernport Bay, which themselves were derived from a small sample of koalas taken from the



mainland. So, if the NSW population(s) were to be swamped by koalas from South Australia, the variation could go down. However, if the SA animals were simply added to a substantial NSW population, variation would not decrease, and possibly increase. Probably more important is the possibility of differences of genetic adaptation - the fluffy short-limbed koalas of Victoria and SA would probably find the NSW north coast too hot for comfort; while the rest of the state would probably be all right.

Our Society disagrees with much that is written about the genetic perils and advantages of relocations. In forming these opinions we consulted our mammal scientific adviser, Dr Mike Augée, and Associate Professor William B Sherwin from the School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of New South Wales. They advised we consult two papers (the first is an overall summary; the second is about low variation in Vic/SA):

Sherwin WB, Timms P, Wilcken J, and Houlden B. 2000. Analysis and Conservation Implications of Koala Genetics. *Conserv. Biol.* 14:639-649.

Houlden BA, England PR, Taylor AC, Greville WD and Sherwin WB. 1996a. Low genetic variability of the koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) in south eastern Australia following a severe population bottleneck. *Molecular Ecology* 5:269-281.

### ***Australian Koala Foundation***

Deborah Tabart, from the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) believes a cull would severely damage Australia's international reputation and points to broad-scale tree clearing and the Island's poor land management as the real issue.

'The question of whether to kill or not to kill has been hotly debated for decades. A cull was seriously considered back in 1996 but the South Australian Government got cold feet with the prospect of being labeled 'koala killers' an image it wasn't looking for.



'In an effort to avoid an unpopular cull, the State Government undertook expensive alternatives and since 1997 almost 4,000 koalas have been captured and sterilized. Some were relocated to the southwest of South Australia but after lacking natural predators on Kangaroo Island, they've struggled to survive on the mainland.'

### ***AWMS Conference on Kangaroo Island***

The 17th AWMS Conference was held on Kangaroo Island and the venue offered a unique opportunity for our National President, Patrick Medway, and our Executive Director, Suzanne Medway, to see a wide variety of wildlife and to experience the beauty of Australia's third largest island with 480 kilometres of coastline. Three AWMS members live on the Island and work with the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service which supported the conference.

A number of AWMS members are also members of the our Society and are actively supporting our wildlife conservation work. We were able to monitor the current thinking in wise wildlife management and to hand out our magazine and brochures on the Society to a new group of interested wildlife people.

Koala scientists and South Australian wildlife managers met under a neutral umbrella at the (AWMS) Conference to discuss koala management and other issues.

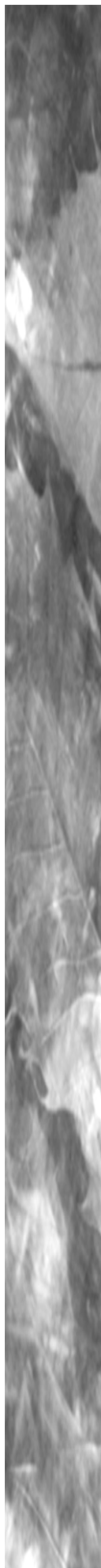
The four-day conference held at Kangaroo Island brought together many of this nation's top koala experts, including the conservation and research staff from the leading not-for-profit, non-government organisation dedicated to koala conservation, the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF).

Deborah Tabart, AKF's Executive Director, said, 'The issues of koala management, particularly in respect to Kangaroo Island and introduced and isolated koala populations can, at times be a minefield of politics and arguing factions.' However, it is hoped that a thoughtful, healthy debate regarding koala management activities will be generated from the proceedings, as well as a nexus of ideas and sharing of knowledge from all parties involved.'

### ***AWMS***

In response to a growing need for a body committed to wildlife management in Australia and New Zealand, the Australasian Wildlife Management Society (AWMS) was established in May 1988. AWMS has about 400 members from all regions of Australia, New Zealand and from





other countries. Members come from all sectors of wildlife management and a wide range of institutions and private organisations.

Our Society has increasingly become aware of the necessity of having sound scientific research available to us to identify appropriate management principles and practices, to develop plans of management and to implement and review these plans. By becoming members of the AWMS organisation our Society now has access to a wide range of people and organisations engaged in such research. The people involved in this process include scientists, wildlife managers, wildlife users, educators and extension/interpretation officers.

The objectives of AWMS are to promote the study and application of scientific wildlife management and to provide opportunities for discussion and the dissemination of information among members by appropriate means such as meetings, workshops, and publications.

### *The 'vulnerable' koala*

The AKF's nomination to list the koala as 'vulnerable' brings together the scientific findings of what is likely to be the largest body of research undertaken for any one species in Australia. The nomination reflects the collective effort, knowledge and expertise of specialist AKF staff as well as the significant contributions of many external individuals, organisations and groups within Australia and beyond. It presents the collated results and analyses of data collected at 1,109 field sites, including some 51,447 trees.

Among other things, this nomination is supported by:

- Koala Habitat Atlas maps generated using habitat mapping methodology that has been 11 years in the making. The methodology is so advanced and visionary that was awarded the highly prestigious Computerworld Smithsonian Award for innovative use of technology in Washington, DC in 1998. To date, the Koala Habitat Atlas maps cover approximately 4 million hectares.
- Analyses of detailed records (eg koala hospital data) contributed by a number of special interest groups such as koala carer groups. These people – most of whom are volunteers – work at the 'coal face' of koala decline.
- Detailed case studies (eg South East Queensland) that point to highly alarming, unsustainable rates of decline in populations considered to be the continent's 'koala strongholds'.

This mammoth undertaking has taken \$5.2 million dollars to fund, raised largely through the sale of T-shirts, merchandise and donations from a generous world public.

### *Our Society's koala history*

From 1 to 31 August 1927, Queensland held what was to be the last open hunting season on koalas in Australia. David Stead, President of the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia, warned that 300,000 would be killed. This figure was ridiculed in certain quarters, but as later events would show, even Stead underestimated the carnage. The Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Stock for the year 1927-28 gives the number of koalas 'secured' as being 584,738. Before 1927, it was possible in certain parts of Australia to see large numbers of koalas in their natural habitat. Today, few Australians have ever seen them outside zoos. Little has been made of this remarkable episode in Australia's history.

At a meeting of the executive of the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia on 5 September, it was decided to appeal to the Prime Minister to enforce the Federal Proclamation of 1923, which prohibited the exportation from the Commonwealth of the skins of native animals 'unless the consent, in writing, of the Minister of State for Trade and Customs has first been obtained'. The Society was not aware, however, that permission to export koala skins had been granted by the Minister (Herbert Pratten) as early as 13 August. Understandably, the fact that this permission had been granted was not publicised. In the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia, Annual Report for the year 1927-28, page 4, is an extract from a letter written by D G Stead to S M Bruce, dated 8 September 1927, 'In effect,' he contended, 'it was simply an invitation to the dealers to get their stock of skins out as quickly as possible, and even to add to them in the meantime'.

In 1930, the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia, under David Stead's presidency, informed US President Herbert Hoover that koala skins, usually labelled 'wombat', were still being imported into North America, and implored him to prohibit the importation of both koala and wombat skins into the United States. Hoover acceded to this request and in doing so effectively brought to an end the export of koala fur under the guise of other species. This action, perhaps more than any other, ensured that the koala was given some hope of survival. In 1933, Australia's Federal Government showed its support for state government initiatives in koala conservation by passing laws.

As early as July 1928, the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia was initiating schemes aimed at rehabilitating koala colonies and restocking formerly occupied areas in Queensland.



### *Our Society's position today*

Our Society's policy on the translocation and culling of koalas is that the Society's primary aim is to support a stable population of koalas. Where over-population occurs, to facilitate this position, we would prefer to relocate, and re-establish habitat for koala populations for the long term.

Our view is that there is a need to reverse the decline of the koala to ensure adequate protection, management and restoration of koala habitat and to maintain healthy breeding populations of koalas throughout their current range. Despite much research on koalas, it is disturbing to note that there is little or no existing information on the location of core koala habitat! We believe the identification and conservation of koala habitat is a matter of great urgency and should be addressed immediately. With regard to the key threatening processes, we believe that governments and the National Parks & Wildlife Services need to take a stronger stand against the clearing of natural vegetation. We also realise that this is a very sensitive issue politically.

With many koalas still surviving on private lands, it is of concern that habitat recovery is not binding on private landholders. To this end more emphasis should be given to partnership conservation efforts between National Parks and private landholders to preserve suitable koala habitat.

### *Wildlife and Animal expo*

The Society again mounted a major promotional display at the November 2004 Animal Expo at the Rosehill Gardens Showground at Parramatta, Sydney.

Our theme this year was the preservation of reptiles and we invited Crocodile Encounters to feature reptiles on the stand. Mark Richmond, a Herpetologist from Varanid Research and Information Centre, brought along a 1.5 metre crocodile, a turtle, two carpet pythons and a very large diamond python to attract visitors to our Society's stand and help promote the work of the Society to preserve and protect our native wildlife in all its forms across Australia.

Mark presented a very informative and entertaining demonstration on centre stage each day. For a bit of fun we called our "show" Never Smile at a Crocodile – with Crocodile Encounters and the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia.

People are fascinated by reptiles and the Wildlife and Animal Expo presented a wonderful opportunity to teach the general public about this important component of Australian wildlife.

The exhibition was staffed by our dedicated Society councillors who freely gave of their time and effort to answer the many questions on wildlife preservation and conservation work that the Society undertakes across Australia.

During the three days of the Expo we handed out thousands of copies of our leaflets, brochures and magazines on the Society's wildlife preservation work and answered an equal number of questions. We are very grateful to those members of the Society who helped staffed the display and contributed to educating the public about our wildlife conservation work.

As we plan for 2005, we will be reviewing each operation of the Society's work at our Strategic Planning meeting in May 2005 and hope to expand our opportunities for wildlife preservation and conservation.

### *Wildside*

*by Lance Ferris, Australian Seabird Rescue*

#### *Slow snakes or fast frogs*

Before you collect your mail, just check the letterbox first. A cool, clammy creature may have called it home. Recent rains have brought out many species of frogs, all searching for an upmarket residence. It is pleasing to note an increase in the numbers of green tree frogs. From a time around 5-10 years ago when sighting a frog was a rare treat, the drainpipes now resound with the incessant croaking of the males on the prowl. At the ASR centre, several species of these little amphibians pop, squeak and croak the evening

chorus around our freshwater lakes. So pristine is the habitat, we are considering breeding programmes for some of the endangered species. I can only suggest that Sergio, our Carpet Python is either deaf or a bit slow or the frogs are fast on their feet.



*Green tree frog (Litoria caerulea)*

### ***Sewer ponds attract birds***

The lack of inland water sources due to the drought could prove a death knell for thousands of exhausted and hungry migratory birds. Up to 40 species of wading birds from Russia and China have just begun their annual migration to New South Wales. However, according to an ABC report, Dr Kingsford says people's waste could be a saving grace for the birds. "It's a bit of a paradox, I guess, that we have these incredible water birds that end up in our sewage ponds," he said. "Sewage ponds, when they start to filter out the products of sewage, begin to behave like a wetland but they're very rich for the invertebrates that these species feed on."

### ***Snakey excuses wins the day***

How often do we attempt to mow the lawn and the dreaded beast, the mower refuses to start? One also wonders how many other excuses exist to avoid doing a particular chore. Here's one. If you need to avoid vacuuming the floor, we may just have the answer for you. According to a local homeowner, all attempts to get the vacuum cleaner to suck were in vain. Poking, prodding, shaking, all failed to make the infernal machine work. After dismantling the nozzle, a small tree-snake was found curled up in the device, totally refusing to budge from its safe haven.



*This tree snake was quite content to make the vacuum cleaner its home*

Now I've heard some excuses in my time, but "Dear, I can't do the vacuuming because there's a snake in the machine", is certainly a convincing winner. I mean, is the good wife really going to check out your story?

### ***Good news in Lismore***

Congratulations to the Lismore Council. Finally, after years of debate, the Lismore Lake is to be refurbished and become a sanctuary for wildlife. Islands will be built in the lake to accommodate the birdlife, no doubt providing habitat for many types of birds, including some endangered species. None too soon, it seems, as we care for another sick pelican rescued from the Lake. Currently in intensive care, the bird is one of four found suffering from some form of toxic poisoning within the last two months. Two have so far survived the ordeal.

### ***Tiny Tim set to go***

Nine months of care for Tiny Tim have paid off. The post-hatchling loggerhead turtle is now being considered for release. The turtle's rate of growth has been awesome, due primarily to the special care provided by ASR volunteers. Now the question of where to release it remains a concern. It would have missed the currents due to its ten months required in care, but the same seas will be running again soon. A year late for the mammoth ocean journeys perhaps, but the little endangered species seaturtle has a better-than-even chance, given it's excellent physical condition.



*Before and after. Following ten months of care, Tiny Tim, the loggerhead turtle is on the brink of returning home to the ocean*

### ***Colour confusion***

Surprisingly, the Aussie pelican has been the subject of little research, especially considering it's quiet, approachable nature. For a scientist embarking on a study of the species, it would be a gold mine as far as its accessibility goes. There are almost as many myths surrounding the species as there are facts, and these fables are told often



enough to become believable. No, they don't eat chihuahuas, nor do they store fish in their beak pouch, or have lice, which bite humans. They don't eat their body-weight of fish per day, thank goodness, or we'd have gone bust long ago! However, these stories rattle around the populous and somehow end up in a scientist's paper. Even the US Smithsonian Institute quotes the Australian pelican as having yellowish feathers on its chest during breeding season. This smudging is just natural grime, which often forms on the surface of the water, eventually adhering to the pelicans, feathers and it washes off!

### *The bigger the beak, the bigger the bite*

There are literally thousands of differing mouth-parts in the animal kingdom. Some chomp, others cut, some wave frilly fronds, while others use every conceivable biological gadgetry, to eat their tucker. Beaks are merely one of the many forms of catching and eating prey, but are not exclusive to birds. Amongst those species which possess beaks, are the octopus and squid. Looking remarkably like that of a parrot, the beaks do a similar job of grasping and despatching the food. The giant squid is known to reach a body-length of up to 20 metres, and has a beak which can purportedly tear through submarine communications cables. Large or small, their beaks are no defence against several species of whales, who consider the eight-legged creatures a delicacy.



### *Pelican at window*

During October Ballina received over 200 ml of rain. In one night, 117ml was recorded at the new Australia Seabird Rescue headquarters, filling the tanks and ponds. It seemed the rain was just a bit too much in one go, even for the pelicans. As I worked at my desk, the face of a bedraggled pelican appeared at the window, as if to say, 'It's raining, let me in'.

Across the north coast, many species of creatures suffered the effects of the big wet and the raging seas. Rescues included seasnakes, seaturtles, sandpipers, stints, and ducks. Other reports from as far north as Ocean Shores to Evans Head in the south, included waterlogged crows, and ducks sheltering in back yards. Our guess is, that after such a long dry spell, the downpour caught a lot of animals (and humans) off guard. Heavy flushing of stagnant lagoons, gullies, and creeks, has also released the botulism bug into the river. A pelican suffering from the condition is currently in intensive care at the ASR centre.



*Let me in! A sad and soggy pelican looks longingly in the window of ASR's operations office, during the recent storms*

### *The scourge of plastic*

Despite all our efforts, the seaturtle rescued from Patches Beach finally met its maker. After weeks of intensive care, the turtle succumbed to the effects of wildlife's worst nightmare the dreaded plastic bag. A post mortem examination revealed dozens of pieces of plastic bags and a rubber o-ring, locked into the intestines. The turtle suffered horrific internal complications as a result, including total gut blockage, peritonitis, and starvation. This makes the third turtle rescued this year, suffering from ingestion of foreign material. Luckily, the other two survived the ordeal after passing a lolly wrapper and a length of fishing line. The size of a piece of plastic piece is irrelevant, in terms of the damage it wreaks on these creatures. Enough pieces, even as small as a five-cent-piece, can cause major gut problems in these, and many other sea creatures.

Let's all make an effort to make plastic bags a thing of the past.

### *Snakes alive*

From a time when sea snakes were rarely found on North Coast beaches, it appears that their numbers may be on the increase. Several reports have been received of sea snakes washed up on beaches. These marine reptiles do not fare well out of water, even though they have evolved from land species. Generally, they appear limp, wrinkled, and moribund when found on the sand. However, they are often okay to be returned to the water, a job for specialist rescuers. Beware, these snakes often appear dead, but can strike without warning. All are renowned for their highly toxic venom.

### *700 pelicans and a thousand hooks*

Each time we place a bird into care, we often wonder where the next rescue will take us. Twelve years on, and ASR volunteers have captured around 60 pelicans per year, mostly from North Coast waterways. ASR volunteers have been placing bets on who would capture Pelican No. 700. As we glanced over the statistics, we estimated that, since 1992, over one kilometre of fishing line and a thousand hooks have been removed from pelicans in the district.



*Rambo Rod with his prize, Pelican rescue No. 700*

### *Ladybird, ladybug*

Despite the americanisation of the name to ladybug, ladybirds are actually beetles. They are probably one of Australia's best loved insects, conjuring up nostalgic memories of Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home.

There are nearly 300 species in Australia, most of which are an asset in the garden. These tiny insects are lethal killers of vegetable pests and are also used to control leaf beetle in eucalypt plantations. However, there are a few, such as the 28-spotted ladybird, which can demolish tomato, potato and zucchini plants. They deter their predators by exuding noxious ooze from the joints in their legs. Scientists have found that these colourful little creatures can still hunt prey in a weightless environment and are considering using them for pest control in space station plant nurseries.



*Ladybug or ladybird, these colourful little creatures can be treasures in the garden. (Photo: Rochelle Ferris)*

### *Evicted chick*

It is not uncommon for some chicks in bird's nests to kick out the occasional brother or sister. Even though wind and weather take their toll on young nestlings, there is also the eviction notice placed on some, by their siblings. Perhaps the nest is too crowded or it is nature's way of controlling the population of the species. Whatever the case, the occasional young bird gets a second chance when rescued by the passer-by. A daggy, ruffled white-faced heron is spending its growing years at the ASR centre. Rescued from east Ballina, the ball of fluff has now reached punk-rocker status. The rather dishevelled look of this little bird has given rise to its name, Punky. Beetles, moths, bugs and fish will be its foster diet for the next few weeks until it fledges.



*ASR's Marny Bonner with Punky, the White-faced Heron rescued from East Ballina*

## Wildlife Walkabout

by Dr Vincent Serventy AM  
President of Honour

### International

#### *A chilling message from Antarctica*

If anyone is waiting to find out whether the Antarctic would respond quickly to climate warming, according to Ted Scanlon a glaciologist from the US National Snow and Ice Data Centre, the answer is yes. Too far away for us to worry! If climate change spreads further south in Antarctica, where glaciers and ice bergs are much larger; experts predict a rise in all sea levels of about a metre.

The Maldives in the Indian Ocean, a group of islands with a population of about 80,000 expecting a rise to 100,000 in the next five years, is worried.

Global warming blame lies with the industrialised nations. Australia and the United States refuse to sign the Kyoto Protocol, though President Bush recently seems to be relenting. However, an article in New Scientist warned 'until the administration creates legally binding rules to curb greenhouse gas emissions such change is meaningless.'

#### *United Nations*

Recently there was a television programme on the Atlantic Charter. Almost forgotten now, though this meeting between the English Prime Minister and President Roosevelt had vital results. The British leader was desperate to gain American support in the bad days of World War II. The Americans had problems at home, so apart from giving a number of destroyers to help counter submarine attacks demanded some large changes from the world's greatest colonial power. The charter proclaimed at war's end every colonial power would allow every colony to decide if it wanted freedom or to remain with the governing power.

Even more important was the formation of what became the United Nations. What does politics have to do with the environment? Our Society has always had two major environmental principles. The first is we never completely lose a battle since we gain new friends for the next. Second until the new win is firmly in the political framework it is not a win. Our new book Conservation Victories with Battles yet to Win spells that out.

The United Nations is essential for the world environment's survival. UNESCO is their main conservation arm. The need for a new Bill of Environmental Rights to complement the 1948 Bill of Human Rights is part of the policy of our Society and now the Nature Conservation Council of NSW.

What good are human rights if Japanese fisher folk are dying from mercury poured into their bay from a fertiliser factory, millions are dying around the world from poison pouring out of car exhausts!

#### *Elephant culls*

No person likes killing animals, wild or domestic. Often we lose members because we approve of kangaroo culls. Many years ago the national government was urged to make accurate counts of kangaroos, allowing a license to thin populations becoming too abundant for farmer's future.

The same is true with elephants, too large to fear any enemy except humans. Southern Africa has 300,000 of the world's 400 to 600,000. Kruger National Park is suffering damage from the destructive power of the giants, The same is true of many other African nations.

In the last century Bishop Montgomery of Tasmania, the father of the famous Field Marshal of World War II, became worried about the fate of the local shearwater, usually known as the mutton bird because an early officer on Norfolk Island wrote it 'tasted like to mutton'. The Bishop laid down conservation rules so the species 'could be saved by slaughter' - a sustainable industry. Today the species is spreading its range to the islands north of Sydney; west to the Recherche Archipelago.



*Shearwater parent with the chick which is the basis of a sustainable industry. Humans have no trouble accepting the farming of chickens whose original stock was the wild Indian jungle fowl*

Every conservationist knows no species can take too much of the earth's resources. The human 'footprint' is becoming too heavy according to the Director General of WWF International. 'We are spending nature's capital faster than it can regenerate.'



Our Society has the solution - not by killing humans but through wise planning. Expanding populations today mean disaster. The United Nations must discuss our proposed Bill of Environmental Rights whose ninth commandment is 'all nations must develop a sustainable population policy'. Family planning is the only way for the world to go.

## ***Tasmania***

### ***Tasmanian devil***

New studies on disease or other causes that are killing thousands of devils in Tasmania are being carried out. Deaths first occurred on the east coast, and then spread to the central highlands. Fears are that the same can happen in the World Heritage regions of western Tasmania. Digital cameras can scan devils taking 700 images with the cameras being left for ten days at a time; clues may come from these images. One possibility is that herbicidal sprays used in timber plantations may be responsible. Devils only live about six years, but captive animals breed well in zoos.



*The Tasmanian devil (Sarcophilus harrisii) is a carnivorous marsupial found exclusively on the island of Tasmania. The size of a small dog, but stocky and muscular, the Tasmanian devil is characterised by its black fur, offensive odour when stressed, extremely loud and disturbing screeching, and its vicious temperament*

### ***Permaculture***

Possibly the most famous Tasmanian is Bill Mollison. Bill was born in 1928 and has been called the 'father of permaculture', an integrated system of design encompassing not only agriculture, horticulture, architecture and ecology but also money management, land access strategies and legal systems for businesses and communities. The aim is to create systems that provide for their own needs, do not pollute and are sustainable. Conservation of soil, water and energy are central issues to permaculture, as are stability and diversity. Now America is discovering it. How does this affect wildlife? For thousands of years agriculture has destroyed fertile land. Our best examples today are the Murray-Darling Basin and the Hawkesbury in NSW.

## ***South Australia***

### ***Good news for whales***

A new feeding spot for the world's largest animal has been found off Kangaroo Island in our national zone of protection. In 1973 only 360 survived in the world after commercial whaling; one of the cruelest hunts taken by humans. Now their numbers have risen slowly to 1700. Their only danger now is from seismic explosions, a noisy kind of search for oil.

Fortunately our national government is trialling methods of separating whales from under water bangs. It would be sad if the rise of this magnificent animal should be threatened for a search for an old energy source which is not sustainable. The government would be wiser to fund renewable energy sources, a field in which we once led, now passed by the Japanese

## ***New South Wales***

### ***Seahorses are charming fish***

This animal in a tank was an exhibit at a wildlife show. Crowds were thin until a press photographer shot a picture of a male sea horse giving birth to hundreds of babies, in the pouch he developed so the mother could place the eggs inside. Front page news so the show became crowded. Sadly sea horses around the world are suffering. Twenty million are caught each year for useless medicines, one million for the pet trade. The Paynes in a sanctuary north of Perth are breeding some for the pet trade showing beginners how easy it is to keep them for the delight of families.



*Seahorses are fishes with some remarkable adaptations including hard bony armour on the body, a prehensile tail (which can be used for holding onto things), binocular vision, and excellent camouflage*

### *Kurnell Sands*

These are in the news once more. Also close to our Society's interest in Towra Point. We would like to see the whole area conserved as a Regional Park. We once went to a dune area near Amsterdam in Holland which attracts six hundred thousand visitors a year.

Most play on the sand though many walk the nature trails. Kurnell and Towra Point have many similar attractions. Captain Cook's landing place with its museum. Also his watering place on Towra. The shorebirds would fascinate visitors.

### *Strategy dropped*

The Central Environmental Network CCEN news reports the sad dropping of the Wyong Conservation Strategy. Gosford, Umina, Ettalong, Pearl Beach and Patonga are more conservation conscious; like diamonds on nature's necklace.

One day I hope the whole area will become a Regional Park. Consider its attractions. Once the home of that great conservationist Minard Crommelin, whose property is now part of Sydney University's research station. The Crommelin Arboretum, walking trails into nearby Brisbane Waters National Park with its koalas, brush turkeys and lyrebirds. Patonga with its mangroves and soldier crabs. The delights are many. CCEN and the Gosford Council can supply details of a range of single day walks as well as ferry trips.



*Brush turkeys are also common; some living at Pearl Beach often to the alarm of keen gardeners who find their scratching for food destroys treasured garden plants*

### *Vale*

This State lost a great conservationist when Ivor Wyatt died recently. His work for the National Trust in NSW was legendary while his work for nature conservation helped the Trust to remember the other part of their work.

Ivor's work for the Nature Conservation Council of NSW was also untiring. In the words of Thoreau when Ivor came to die he knew he had lived.

### *Bushcare*

The newsletter of the Gosford Council is packed with fascinating information. For example, one item is on the value of tree hollows to wildlife. Noosa Council was asked to remove a tree containing 22 hollows. Very sensibly they asked a local organisation engaged in making artificial nest boxes for wildlife for help.

The cost of maintaining these over the life span of the tree estimated at 200 years came to 2.2 million dollars, the Council wisely decided not to remove the tree!

Also the Council held a meeting to discuss the fate of the increasingly rare bush curlew which has made the suburbs around Brisbane Water its home. 50 residents attended deciding to gather data.

Interestingly the Australian Farm Journal BUSH of November 2004 had an article on this bird. This woodland species is famous for its spine tingling wailing call, the locals call it Weeloo, or the Murdered Women Bird.' So secure is it in the camouflage it often becomes stick-like.

We hope they find a solution to the problem of conserving the species. Almost certainly this depends on killing off all feral foxes that pest which has already made extinct on the mainland many of our smaller ground living animals.



*The bush curlew*

### *Western Australia*

A relative of mine has now been appointed to take conservation charge of the Abrolhos Islands. How I would have loved to have that responsibility in my early days. I was first attracted by John Gilbert's account of the seabirds which were in such numbers to resemble the passenger pigeons of America. Gilbert, assistant of the great John Gould, exaggerated, yet these islands in my opinion have the greatest diversity of any in the world in terms of seabirds.



*Roseate tern*



*Dom Serventy one of the top hundred ornithologists in the world, working on Fisher Island, famous for his work on the shearwater*

## ***Queensland discovery***

*By Clive Williams*



Recently my wife and I had the opportunity to travel through Queensland from Brisbane to Winton, returning to Sydney through western Queensland and western NSW. There were a number of observations of interest to conservationists which can be made about the journey and the experiences it brought.

### ***Carnarvon Gorge National Park***

One of the reasons for our visit was to carry out a long held wish to visit the Carnarvon Gorge. Our expectations were not disappointed. Walking among the majestic tall straight stands of forest trees including spotted gums, grey gums, Sydney blue gums, turpentines, as well as Livistonia Palms

and macrozamia is an uplifting experience. The extremely slow growing macrozamia trace their lineage back to the age of the dinosaurs.

We were fortunate to be there at a time when butterflies were hatching. In one location our guide demonstrated their numbers by shaking saplings on which they were resting. As they flew off they appeared like showers of confetti. The moss garden in Violet Gorge and the giant King Ferns in Ward's Canyon provide great variety, while the galleries of Aboriginal cave paintings are a reminder that other people were enjoying the surroundings of this environment thousands of years before our visit.

The rangers of the Queensland National Parks do a great job in maintaining well graded walking tracks and providing facilities for visitors. There are even toilets located on the tracks – complete with toilet paper.

### ***Avocet Station***

Readers will remember that our Society awarded our inaugural Community Wildlife Conservation Award to the Bringing Back the Flashjack Project based in the Emerald District. The flashjacks (Bridled Nail-tailed Wallabies) were released on the property, Avocet, owned by Hugo Spooner. Avocet was originally part of a larger property but the holding was cut up and part of it sold to Australian Bush Heritage and it is now run by them as Goonderoo. Hugo has set aside about 3000 hectares of Avocet as a nature reserve, so, with the two nature reserves close to each other, there is scope for significant conservation activities to occur in the area. We were anxious to see the progress of the flashjack program and Hugo was kind enough to invite my wife and me to stay with him. Two volunteers were working on the property doing maintenance on the release compound. One of them was Yvonne Thompson who was one of the two persons to attend our annual dinner to receive the award. It was a pleasant opportunity to renew contact with Yvonne and to witness first-hand the dedicated hard work which the volunteers put in.



*Flashjack being examined after release from trap*





*Hugo Spooner picking up a flashjack signal*

Hugo arranged for Yvonne and her colleague to set some traps overnight so that we might see the flashjacks at close quarters. Since all released animals are radio-chipped, this would also enable him to identify the captured animals and monitor their health. One of the captured animals was quite docile and the carers were able to remove ticks from its ear and give it a good check-over. It also made it possible to take photos at close quarters. Hugo's tracking device was picking up signals from an unidentified source so we spent time trying to locate the origin of the signals. Sadly, after about an hour, the signal source was found with the remains of a flashjack which had obviously been eaten by a predator. Little of it remained. The culprit was probably a dingo, though Hugo has to maintain regular surveillance for feral cats and regularly engages a team to kill them. Elsewhere fresh tracks showed a dingo in pursuit of a wallaby and though dingoes are tolerated, as they are natural predators, when their numbers threaten the wallabies baits are laid.

We have recently learned that BHP, which provided the land for the captive breeding program at its mine at Gregory, now wishes to withdraw from the flashjack program as it wishes to mine the site. The volunteers have been seeking additional assistance to remove the animals to another location. In addition the wallabies are apparently badly worm infested and tick-ridden and are not in good health. To add to the woes the QPWS has cut back its funding to the project and has withdrawn the ranger at Idalia National Park, near Blackall, at which a further colony had been released. (Our Society has written to the Queensland Minister for the Environment to urge him to maintain funding for the program).



*Flashjack poses for its photo*

### **Roadkill**

The roads in central and western Queensland are good and traffic, including road-trains, travels at high speed. The result is an extraordinarily high number of native animals killed. A freshly killed carcass appears about every 100 metres and the ravens and kites and some wedge-tailed eagles are growing fat on the carrion. Kangaroos are the main victims but wallabies, echidnas and reptiles also suffer.

West of Barcaldine heading towards Longreach, there is a notice announcing a six-kilometre wildlife reflector trial. I made enquiries about this and was directed to the regional office of the Main Roads Department in Barcaldine. I was advised that the trial had been completed and lasted two years. One-kilometre sections of road were set up with reflectors and alternate sections left without reflectors over the entire six-kilometre strip. The result showed that there was no difference between the two conditions with respect to animals killed. This result is consistent with information reported at the seminar on roadkill conducted by our Society last year. It was good to see efforts being made to deal with the problem, but it is clear we are a long way from finding an answer.

### **Wildflowers**

September was a marvellous month to travel as we were constantly being delighted with the splashes of colour from wildflowers at the side of the road. This occurred through western Queensland to western NSW and included yellows, blues and white with the occasional red. However, what was outstanding was the brilliance of the wattle. This distinctive flower makes one glad to call Australia home.

## Weddells on ice

by our Antarctic correspondent Bruce Alden

Do you want to have a look Ken?

Yeah, why not?

Okay, I said, We will meet down here at 12.30. With that we departed to our dongas to get kitted up. It was a pleasant -12°C outside and as the wind was only a light NE'ly, it should not be too unpleasant down on the ice. Before I had left the Mess, we had two other starters. So, our party of four would venture down onto the sea ice and walk out to the basking Weddell Seals (*Leptonychotus weddelli*) we could clearly see through the large mess windows. The living quarters in the Red Shed at Casey Base are situated quite high on a hill. This gives a spectacular view over Newcombe Bay and out to the grounded icebergs.

Being just past the shortest day of the year, the only practical time for photographing wildlife is in the middle of the day and, even then, the light is never very good as my photos will testify. Throw in some low cloud and it's gloomy even at midday. The sun is really only above the horizon for about three hours, the rest of the time it's either sunrise or sunset. Either side of that of course it's dark!



*Dressed for travel*

Back in my donga, I gathered my gear. Firstly, I got my cameras organised, a three mega pixel digital, an old SLR and an even older rangefinder. Down here, it pays to be organised and leave nothing to chance. Next, seeing it was warm, I elected for only two layers of clothing on my legs, long thermals and a pair of jeans. A tee shirt covered by a light jacket and a warm cap completed the dressing in the donga. Next, into the spare room to organise my pack. I put a heavy sledging cap into the top of the pack and buckled it in case it was needed. Already in the pack is all the gear I need to survive if caught outdoors in a sudden

blizzard. At the onset of a blow, I would get into my sleeping bag and then get inside my bivvy bag, a bag made of windproof rip stop nylon. The sleeping mat underneath me would provide insulation from the snow. The end of my bag would go inside my pack for the increased insulating effect as well as to stop it blowing away. My supply of high energy food in the pocket of the pack would then keep me going till the blizzard abates. Not the most comfortable way to weather a blizzard, but certainly a life saver if needed. In the last month, we have had quite a few blizzards that have sprung up without warning. The wind will go from 10 kph to 100 kph in the space of a minute. Visibility will go from kilometres to 10 metres or even less! The only safe thing to do is to go to ground and wait till conditions improve. Also in my pack is a freezer suit, virtually a sleeping bag you wear plus spare socks and gloves.

We turned our fire tags and wrote down our proposed route on the intentions board. In the case of fire, while we were away, our turned tags would show we were not in the building and lives would not be risked trying to find people who were not even there. In the cold porch, on went the last items of clothing, a pair of heavy waterproof boots with thick felt liners and my thick jacket. On the bottom of the boots were chains, a necessary addition in a land where everything is slippery. A pair of gloves finished the dressing and away we went.

Although, it was relatively warm at -12°C, the light wind at around 20 kph gave us a wind chill factor of -26°C. I got my face frost nipped a week ago in a blizzard, so I was feeling that spot burn once again, ouch! We headed straight down to the sea ice. Even with chains on, Ken managed to slip over on the patch of clear ice, a bruised elbow but no serious damage. Further down, the snow sloped away quite steeply and the lead person had to cut steps in the hard drift snow so we could get down the slope. With a pretty heavy cloud cover and a whiter than white surface, it was quite difficult to see where you are going. The snow surface has no texture or definition as there are no shadows, so you go very gingerly, especially when you know you are on a steep slope.

At the bottom of the slope, we stepped onto the sea ice. When last drilled here a few weeks ago, the ice was one metre thick. There were no worries about going through; you could quite safely drive a truck on it at that thickness. The surface of the sea ice is relatively smooth with the odd patch of softer snow. Every now and then you would break through the crust and go nearly knee deep before you hit the firmer snow beneath. We stepped carefully when we came

across tide cracks where the ice breaks as it moves up and down against the coastline or rocks just beneath the surface. The breeze on the face made it cool but not extremely cold. It is hard to cover your face if you wear glasses, one breath in the wrong direction results in your glasses being covered by a layer of ice rendering them useless. The coat of ice is extremely difficult to remove, you just can't wipe it off, it sticks like super glue!



*Hello*

We walked for another 15 minutes and the black slugs we could see in the distance gradually turned into pretty Weddell Seals. I say pretty, as compared to an Elephant Seal, Weddells are darned right attractive. Any female at Casey is attractive; we are an all male wintering crew! The first Weddell was an adult female, (I think I am right, sexing seals is not my strong suit) and I would say she was pregnant too. The Weddells have their pups around October in a neighbouring bay. This one is just a bit early and we were very lucky to see her. With the very strong winds we have experienced lately, the sea ice has broken up and been blown out by the wind leaving a large area of exposed sea water. The seals had come in and were on the ice edge. When the ocean freezes again, they will retreat to pools of exposed water or where a tide crack enables them to have a breathing hole. I always equate The Weddell to a Labrador dog, well mine anyway. They are fat, very docile, have beautiful black liquid eyes and I am sure they would make a wonderful pet. Provided you are very quiet, move slowly and do not approach too closely, they hardly seem to be concerned with your presence. They seem to be experts at catnapping, if a seal can catnap. We try to keep our five metres away from her but as she is so docile and approachable, it is hard to do. The other two seals are smaller juveniles and also appear to be females. They seem a lot more flighty than the other larger adult and we don't approach them too closely.

After a few minutes of photography, the fingers are going numb and the operation of digital cameras has slowed somewhat, so we just stand and watch. Why does such a magnificent animal always have a snotty nose?

The digitals don't seem to like cold weather. Mine would not even turn on when left exposed to  $-24^{\circ}\text{C}$  for a long period; I find it hard to be too active at that temperature too! So, our photography session was over. What light we had had we started losing as the cloud cover thickened up. It was time to head for home and a warm cuppa.



*Weddell seal pup (*Leptonychotus weddelli*)*



*Never a backward glance*



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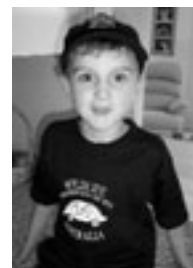
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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

Send this order by MAIL:

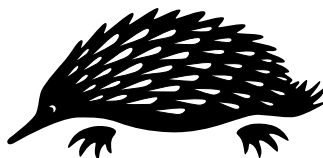
PO Box 42,

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: ..... Email: .....

### Membership category (please circle)

Individual: \$30      Family: \$45      Concession (pensioner/student/child): \$15

Associate (library, school, conservation groups): \$50      Corporate: \$150

(Includes GST and postage within Australia. Add \$10 for overseas postage)

### 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