



**Welcome to the Friends of the Western Ground Parrot Newsletter
No. 88 – Spring Months 2020**

Get up-to-date information about the latest efforts to save this critically endangered parrot unique to Western Australia

The Thanks to Anne Bondin Edition



Anne Bondin with the western ground parrot mascot 'Kyloring', Photo - Jennene Riggs

It was with great regret that Anne Bondin finally decided to “call it a day” after being a member of the Committee for some 18 years. The extraordinary work and commitment of Anne to the parrots (even though she likes shorebirds and puffins more!) and the Friends has included being:

- a foundation member of the Friends with Brenda Newby,
- Chair,
- Vice Chair,
- Secretary,
- Treasurer,
- social media officer,
- membership officer,
- merchandising officer,
- attending numerous events where she has promoted the Friends and the plight of the parrots, and
- the holder of the Friends’ “Corporate knowledge”.

Anne you will be greatly missed although you will continue to support the Friends!!

Brenda Newby has kindly provided the following contribution about Anne.

A survey for Western Ground Parrots in the Waychinicup-Manypeaks National Park in March 2003 showed clearly that there had been a dramatic decline in their numbers since 1998. This was serious as at that stage, although there were still ground parrots in the Fitzgerald River National Park, it was very doubtful that any WGP's remained at Cape Arid National Park as they had not been recorded there since 1989. Anne was one of the volunteers for the devastating Waychinicup-Manypeaks survey and she and I decided to form a Friends group for the parrot. We decided that awareness of this species should be raised and that we would have a newsletter to keep members informed and involved. The first News update was sent out in April 2003.

We were an informal group. Anne kept the member list and used to send out the newsletters: some were hard copies as not everyone had email back then. The newsletters were bi-monthly to keep attention on the WGP.

At first we had no autonomous web presence. Anne put a page for Friends of the Western Ground Parrot on the Albany Birds website and she was always instrumental in recruiting volunteers for the many surveys of those first few years following the installation of the first departmental WGP officer in late 2003, as well as organizing and participating in surveys in Waychinicup and west of Albany. She also wrote articles on the plight of the Western Ground Parrot for various publications.

One of these had far-reaching consequences. In 2009 it was read by John Linton CEO of telecom company Exetel Pty Ltd. He offered to help financially. He was particularly interested in captive breeding. The WGP Recovery Team was not ready for captive breeding so at first Exetel supported some research into the use of Automated Recording Units. The Exetel involvement propelled our small community group to become formally structured. Anne took on the roles of Vice Chair and Treasurer. She found and adapted our constitution, and steered us successfully to incorporation and tax deductibility.

Membership Reminder and Thank You

Thank you to all the members that renewed their membership by paying their annual fees, or in some cases, life time membership fees. We greatly appreciate the support from our membership base, including their advocacy to the broader community on the plight of the western ground parrot and the recovery efforts being undertaken through the consortium of partners undertaking these actions.

If you are yet to pay your membership fees or have friends or family that wish to join, please visit

western-ground-parrot.org.au

Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) Western Ground Parrot Spring Months Update

Sarah Comer and Deon Utber

Spring has been a busy time for the team on the south coast, but the team has increased back to full capacity for the first time in three years. Support from the Commonwealth Bushfire Recovery for Wildlife and Habitat Grants programs has enabled us to increase our focus on post-fire recovery efforts and monitoring.

Mark Blythman joined us at the beginning of November, filling the technical officer role vacated by Jeff Pinder. Mark has been working with DBCA for over ten years and was involved in a variety of projects including the Rainbow Lorikeet and Introduced Corella control program, Great Cocky Counts and numerous bird and mammal translocations. Mark has a keen interest in birds and bird banding and also volunteers' time to help coordinate the Bold Park Bird Banding Group's efforts to recover the Rottnest Island rock parrot population. Mark is looking forward to meeting and working with Friends of the Western Ground Parrot and to achieving successful outcomes for the WGP in the years to come.

Helena Stokes, who is a BirdLife project officer based in Albany working with the DBCA team, also joined us in November. Helena studied zoology in the U.K., and has worked on Australian parrots since 2016. Helena recently completed her PhD on avian disease ecology in Victoria, where she has also been working on the orange-bellied parrot mainland release project. She is passionate about conservation and is very excited to start working with BirdLife and the DBCA team on the western ground parrot project. The collaboration with BirdLife is a very exciting development in ground parrot conservation, and having a representative working as one of the project team is an exciting first.

In November the project team and Esperance staff had programmed a field trip to Cape Arid and Nuytsland to complete feral cat control following the spring Western Shield cat baiting, service solar ARUs (collect and change data cards), and collect spring monitoring ARUs. Unfortunately, the plans for this trip were disrupted by 76 mm of rain falling in the first few weeks of November. A very welcome soaking for the park, but not conducive to completing the spring works. While some ARUs and predator monitoring cameras were accessible on public access, most of the tracks could not be accessed. This work will be completed before Christmas.



Wet weather can be a hindrance to field access and the program needs to be flexible to avoid to introduction and spread of Phytophthora dieback, a deadly soil borne disease that can impact vegetation that forms the habitat of the Western Ground Parrot – Photo: Mark True

Although access was restricted, one exciting find from the cameras that were collected in spring was the first ever photo of a WGP on a camera trap! We've been using cameras to monitor introduced predator activity across Cape Arid and Nuytsland since 2013 and have never detected a WGP before. Western Shield provided new cameras to continue this work following the 2019 bushfires, and it was on one of these that Abby Thomas's keen eyes spotted a ground parrot. Coincidentally this camera is located adjacent to one of the solar ARUs that has detected good calling activity.





The elusive western ground parrot captured on motion sensing cameras deployed in conjunction with Solar ARUs – Photo: DBCA

Since the last newsletter the Fitzgerald River National Park solar ARUs purchased by the Friends of the WGP have also been serviced and the autumn – winter monitoring units collected. Thanks to the Friends and their fundraising, this was done very efficiently in a day. There is now a large backlog of data to process, which will be started in the coming months.

We were also thrilled to be able to watch the official launch of the song ‘Kyloring’ written and sung by Parklands Primary School’s Grade 4 students. This class researched ground parrots as part of their science work, writing great lyrics to capture this knowledge. A fabulous note to end 2020 on.



Abby Thomas (DBCA) and Helena Stokes (BirdLife Australia) with students from Parklands Primary School at the launch of their song “Save the ground parrot”. Check out western-ground-parrot.org.au for more details – Photo: Sarah Comer, DBCA

Parks and Wildlife staff would also like to acknowledge the enormous body of work undertaken by Anne Bondin in her 18 years as a committee member with the Friends of the Western Ground Parrot. Anne has provided amazing support to the community group and the WGP Recovery Team over the years, as well as leading many field trips out to places such as Waychinicup to survey for this elusive bird. Anne is stepping down from the Friends committee but staying on the Recovery Team representing BirdLife Australia, so thankfully we will continue to benefit from Anne's knowledge for a few more years to come.

Western Ground Parrot Update from Perth Zoo

December 2020

The 2020 breeding season presented with some initial signs of hope with pair formation and allofeeding between male Zephyr and female Kopin, and beak to beak contact between male Monak and female Kangal. Male Mingko also showed a level of interest towards female Leuca with him spending increased time in her area and feeding from her feed station.

Unfortunately, the initial positive developments petered out by mid-October and pairs did not progress to mating. This was disappointing, however, as with every breeding season it provides an opportunity for learning which will strengthen our position to work towards a future successful breeding outcome.

On a more positive note we are pleased to report that Perth Zoo was successful in applying for a grant from the Zoo and Aquarium Association Australasia Wildlife Conservation Fund. We are very grateful for this funding which will be used to construct an additional aviary facility, purchase and set up a new transportable building, construction and installation of hatches in the existing aviaries, construction of new holding boxes, upgrades to the current CCTV monitoring system and purchase of a new hospital box.

The additional holding aviary will be some distance from the existing aviary complex and will be used for holding select birds. It could also be used for quarantine and to support testing of breeding strategies. The new transportable building will provide temporary holding capacity, isolated medical management and assisted reproduction management in the form of egg incubation and rearing of young birds if required. The installation of hatches in the existing aviaries will provide opportunity to further explore social requirements and further refine breeding systems including providing opportunities for least intrusive mate choice.

Male Zephyr is getting on in age and he is now thought to be a least 13 years old. There is very little information available on longevity of western ground parrots and Zephyr is currently the oldest recorded individual. All other birds have remained in good health and they are in the process of moulting their winter feathers in preparation for summer.



Male Zephyr, Photo – Perth Zoo



Chirpings from the Chair *Paul Wetten*

Best wishes from me and the Friends Committee to all of you and your families for the upcoming festive season!

The extent of the wildfires at Cape Arid/Nuytsland over the past five years has been highlighted by DBCA, including maps of each of the fire scars from these events. This has resulted in a loss of some 80 percent of the potential ground parrot habitat in this area.

Recently I had occasion to fly from Sydney to Perth, with the plane returning to land from the Bight over Cape Arid. At 11,000m and being on the “right” side of the plane, and in a window seat, I was able to survey the full extent of the Park. Despite my knowledge of the fires and mapping, I was astounded at the extent of the very obvious fire scars and particularly how little recently unburnt ground parrot habitat remained. There was a small “island” surrounded by devastation and, for me, a very visual appreciation of the perilous circumstances for the survival of the parrots with the potential for another fire onslaught!

If any of you are undertaking similar flights I recommend you trying to get the “right” seat and having a look for yourselves.

Lobbying and Awareness Raising

A written submission was made to the Commonwealth's proposed 10 Year Threatened Species Strategy and 5 year (21-26) Action Plan (<https://haveyoursay.awe.gov.au/1new-threatened-species-strategy>). This submission highlighted the Friends' view that, with regard to the western ground parrot, there were significant failures in implementation of the 2015-2020 Strategy, primarily funding support and community engagement from the Australian Government. We asked that these failures not be repeated for the new Strategy and Action Plan.

Our submission also identified that we have contributed nearly \$350,000 to Recovery Plan activities in the period 2015-2020. This does not include the committed grant funding of over \$45,000, and the availability of over \$33,000 in our Rescue Fund identified below.

We are currently updating our 2015 brochure on the parrots. We received a grant from South Coast Natural Resource Management which will cover all of the costs. So thanks to them!!

I attended the launch of Year 4 students at Parklands Independent School in Albany for the *Save the Ground Parrot-Kyloring Song* by the *Bird Band*. It was absolutely delightful to hear the song and see the enthusiasm of our future. Thanks very much to the School, teacher Margaret Sefton and the volunteers who helped with this event and production of a CD of the song. You can listen to the song on our website.

Fund Raising and Donations/income for the Recovery Plan

I identified in my last Chirpings the availability of Friends' funds for the Recovery Plan. The current status of these funds is:

- The \$10,650 Grant from the Commonwealth Government's Communities Environment Program provided via the Member for O'Connor, Rick Wilson. These funds are to be used for helicopter hire for ARU/data cards recovery in 20/21. The retrieval of ARUs/data cards occurred on 4 December, with Committee member Liz Tanner having the "joy ride" for the day with Abby Thomas of DBCA and Helena Stokes of BirdLife - see photo below. We look forward to the analysis of the song files, which will likely take a while as there are thousands of hours of recordings coming off the data cards and there is a backlog of song files from Cape Arid too. Yours truly has volunteered to help with this analysis...
- The \$15,000 Grant from the Australian Wildlife Society (www.aws.org.au) from the Kinder Project. These funds have been used to purchase 15 cameras which will be installed soon by DBCA into potential translocation sites for predator detection and management purposes.
- The \$20,000 Grant from the WIRES and Landcare Australia Wildlife Relief & Recovery Fund. These funds are also to be used for helicopter hire for ARU/data cards recovery in 20/21, which will most likely be at Cape Arid/Nuytsland in February/March.

We have over \$33,000 in our Rescue Fund mostly coming from donations and which will be used, again, on priority unfunded activities identified at a recent Recovery Team meeting. The Committee considered these activities and the following contributions are likely to be made soon:

- \$5,000 for a Disease Risk Assessment (DRA) for any parrots captured for the translocation. The DRA is recognised as being part of best practice for wildlife translocations.
- \$10,000 for additional camera traps for predator monitoring and management at the potential translocation sites.

Annual General Meeting and Committee

Our AGM was held on 10th November with the following outcomes regarding the Friends' Committee:

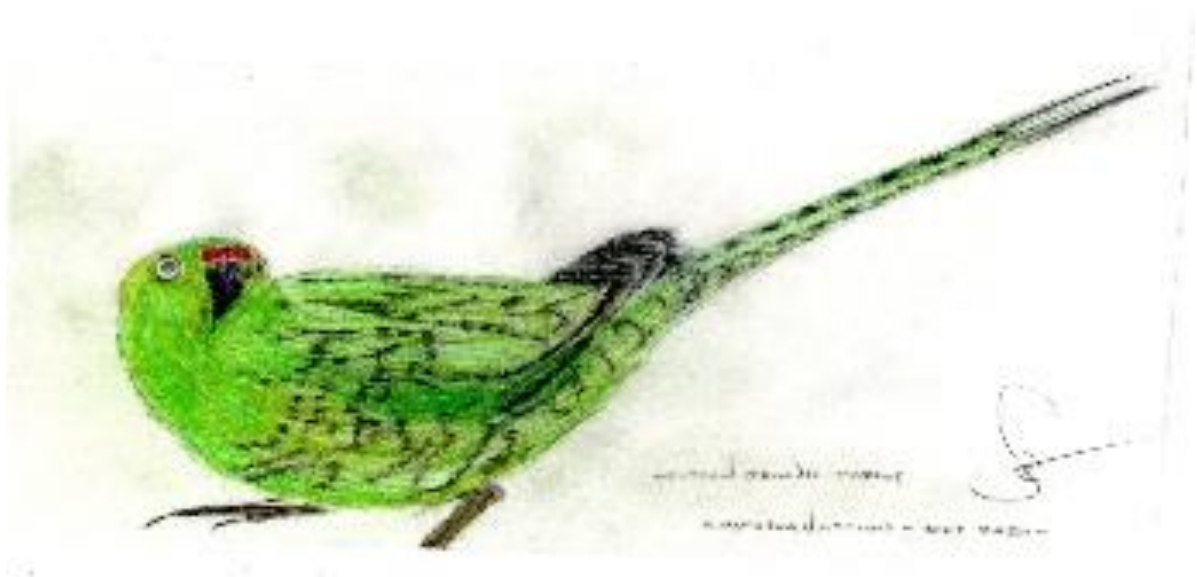
- Chair - me
- V/Chair - no nomination
- Secretary - no nomination although we received an EOI after the meeting
- Treasurer - Phil Bailey
- Members - Julie Lee, Peter Stewart, Liz Tanner, Deon Utber, and Chris Young.

At our Committee meeting on 8th December we received and accepted a nomination for Secretary from Sue Plewright and Committee membership from Georgette Hawes, who recently completed her Honours degree on the genetics of the Western Ground Parrot. More information about Sue and Georgette can be found on our website.

Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the following support to the Friends and especially for the parrots:



From a friend in Greece (Dr Kyriakos N Papathanassiou):





Automatic Recording Units (ARU) that were systematically deployed across the Fitzgerald River National Park to survey for the presence of the Western Ground Parrot, last heard in the park in 2012, were retrieved in December 2020 with support from funds provided to the FWGP through the Australian Government Communities Environment Fund. Committee member Liz Tanner participated in the retrieval and provided the above photo of Helena Stokes (BirdLife) and Abby Thomas (DBCA) retrieving the data from a solar ARU.

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