

AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE SOCIETY

(ACN 134 808 790)

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2020

A Year in Review

The past year has been catastrophic, to say the least, with the brunt of the 2019-2020 summer bushfires, flash flooding, and COVID-19 pandemic devastating the country. The Society was extremely fortunate that we were still able to continue our work to protect Australia's precious wildlife during these difficult times. I was honoured to be elected as President following the Annual General Meeting. We were delighted to welcome two new members to the Board – Brian Scarsbrick, the former Chief Executive Officer of the National Trust of Australia New South Wales, and Doctor Robin Crisman, Head Veterinarian, Director, and Principal Owner of Somersby Animal Hospital. For the first time in over one hundred years, the board of the Society decided to establish a new National Office in Hurstville, New South Wales, to cope with its expanding wildlife conservation work across Australia. We also welcomed a new Clerical Assistant to our team – Sisilia Citrajaya.

One of the highlights of the year was the presentation of our four awards – the **Serventy Conservation Award**, **Community Wildlife Conservation Award**, **Wildlife Rehabilitation Award**, and **Youth Conservation Award**. We know that many organisations and thousands of volunteers are working tirelessly to save Australia's threatened wildlife, as well as the humble and more common species and the habitats in which they live. We are aware of the wonderful work being carried out by wildlife conservation organisations and volunteers across the country. We are very proud to acknowledge and reward these individuals and wildlife conservation groups and encourage them to continue their wildlife conservation work on behalf of the whole community.

Another highlight was the awarding of our ten University Scholarships offered to honours or postgraduate students at Australian universities. Each year, ten \$1,500 grants are awarded. Grants are available for research projects of direct relevance to the conservation of Australian wildlife – flora or fauna. We also awarded three special scholarships at the University of Technology Sydney, University of New South Wales, and Western Sydney University.

E-newsletter

Our monthly e-newsletter, *Manager's Messages*, has also proven to be very popular with our members, and we encourage members to forward the newsletters to their family, friends, and associates to help spread the important message of wildlife conservation across Australia. We launched 'AusWildKids', a section in the newsletter dedicated to educating and engaging young people in wildlife conservation. We extend a big thank you to Linda Dennis, Editor of the E-news bulletin, for her valuable work in keeping us regularly informed on wildlife matters.

Website

We continue to update our website to make it more user-friendly. Changes to the structure and layout will be an ongoing process. This year also saw the improvement and development of the 'Members' Resource Centre, the destination for member resources and materials on various animals and wildlife-related topics – the *Australian Wildlife* magazine, e-books, presentations, videos, forms, guides and so much more. The 'Members' Resource Centre contains resources for parents, teachers, university students and young adults, and children.

Social Media

Social media is now a critical part of the way people in most walks of life communicate. We are now actively involved in five social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube). We aim to keep our followers up to date with important actions of the Society and the collective work being promoted nationally. Our followers continue to grow each month. We reached over a massive 11,000 followers on Facebook and 12,000 followers on Instagram. Thank you to all our volunteers for assisting us with managing our social media platforms. A special thank you to Dr Jai Green-Barber (Instagram), Linda Dennis and Kate Dutton-Register (Facebook), Nyssa Braid (Twitter), and Greg Dawson (Facebook photography).

Australian Wildlife Magazine

The *Australian Wildlife* magazine, the flagship of the Society, has proved to be extremely popular amongst all our members. We invite members to distribute copies to family and friends and invite them to become members. A special thank you to our Sub-editor, Megan Fabian, for her valuable contribution in assisting with editing the magazine.



Summer Cover



Autumn Cover



Winter Cover



Spring Cover

Annual General Meeting and President's Luncheon

The 111th Annual General Meeting of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Limited, trading as the Australian Wildlife Society, was held on Wednesday 4 March in Sydney. The Annual President's Luncheon was held after the Annual General Meeting, in Cello's Restaurant at Castlereagh Boutique Hotel in Sydney, and attended by an enthusiastic group of supporters. Megan Fabian, National Office Manager, welcomed the guests and introduced Suzanne Medway AM, President, who proposed a toast to 111 years of wildlife conservation by the Society. The Society was pleased to announce the winners of its prestigious awards for 2019 during the luncheon proceedings.



The Society's Board of Directors cut the 111th anniversary cake. L to R: Philip Sansom, Ken Mason, Suzanne Medway, Stephen Grabowski, Julie Old, Brian Scarsbrick, Alice Suwono, Trevor Evans, and Patrick Medway.



L to R: Suzanne Medway, Malinda Ly, Justine Pacampara, Hollie Deste, Michael Manahan, and Patrick Medway.



L to R: Robin Crisman, Katerina Skarbek, Julie Old, Roz Holme, and Kev Holme.

Membership

This year saw the launch of Australian Wildlife Week. Australian Wildlife Week is commemorated across the country during the first week of October, each year, to encourage a positive relationship between humanity and nature. To celebrate this inaugural event, we offered fifty percent off membership in hopes to raise awareness of wildlife conservation issues across Australia and inspire all Australians to develop a deeper understanding of environmental issues, gain the necessary skills to make informed decisions, and take action to improve the environment.

Our Mission

Part of our Mission Statement reads: **"Our mission is to conserve Australia's fauna and flora through education and involvement of the community. We are dedicated to the conservation of our unique Australian wildlife in all its forms through national environmental education programs, political lobbying, advocacy, and hands-on conservation work."** To fulfil this goal, we introduced the University Student Grants Scheme in 2005 and since its inception, we have awarded over 155 grants to very worthy recipients. In 2016, we increased the grant from \$1,000 to \$1,500 and, in the future, plan to steadily increase the dollar amount of the grants subject to further donations, which are always welcome.

Wildlife Science Ecology Research Scholarships

The **University Technology Sydney Wildlife Ecology Research Scholarship** was awarded to UTS Centre for Compassionate Conservation PhD student Chris Hasselerharm for his research on 'Provenance detection using novel real-time forensics and its application in the illegal wildlife trade.'

The **University of New South Wales Wildlife Ecology Research Scholarship** was awarded to UNSW School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences PhD student Ben Stepkovitch for his research on 'Ecosystem effects of western quolls (*Dasyurus geoffroii*) reintroduction on prey species inside a fenced reserve.'

The **Western Sydney University Wildlife Ecology Research Scholarship** was awarded to WSU Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment PhD student Ivan Kotzur for his research on 'Understanding and mapping how thermal and dietary constraints combine to restrict koala habitat and determine refugia.'

Life Members

Life members play a significant role in the conservation of Australia's wildlife. We recognise and award their efforts and commitment to protecting Australian wildlife.



Ken Mason being presented with his Life Member's certificate by Patrick Medway.

Wildlife Conservation Awards

The winner of the **Serventy Conservation Award** was Alexandra Seddon of Merimbula, New South Wales. Alexandra has devoted her life to the protection of Australia's wildlife. Since she and her husband bought their first property, in Crowsnest in Candelo New South Wales in 1975, Alexandra has acquired three other properties, all devoted to wildlife conservation. In 2001, Alexandra purchased the Batty Towers Flying Fox Sanctuary to protect local flying foxes. Batty Towers Flying Fox Sanctuary became the main roosting site on the South Coast of New South Wales for the vulnerable grey-headed flying fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*). In 2006, Alexandra used an inheritance to purchase Potoroo Palace at Yellow Pinch, New South Wales. Alexandra established Potoroo Palace as an environmental education centre, a charity, and handed the rights of the property to the local community so that it can never be sold. Today, Potoroo Palace is an active educational centre where people visit to learn about native wildlife.



Brian Scarsbrick presenting Alexandra Seddon with the Serventy Conservation Award.

The winner of the **Community Wildlife Conservation Award** was Belgian Gardens State School of Belgian Gardens, Townsville. This school, for several years, has been an active participant in the conservation of the black-throated finch (*Poephila cincta*). It has an active partnership with the Northern Queensland Dry Tropics and black-throated finch recovery program. The school has a specially designed enquiry unit for year four students. Under this program, the students learn about the life cycle of the finch, the threats it faces, and the actions taken by science to help it. Learning is not just theoretical but also practical. The school maintains its own aviary and students are involved in the care of the birds and make regular observations. Learning is not confined to the students, as the school informs the community through its school newsletter. Furthermore, an open day was held to educate the community about the program. The event attracted four hundred people.



Toby Salmon, Keira West, and Jarrah Walker accepting the Community Conservation Award on behalf of Belgian Gardens State School.

The winner of the **Wildlife Rehabilitation Award** was John Creighton of Bundanoon, New South Wales. John cares for orphaned, injured, and manged wombats and educates the community about the common wombat or bare-nosed wombat (*Vombatus ursinus*). In the field, John follows wombats and installs medicated burrow flaps. Wombats become treated for mange when they enter or leave their burrows. John is the founder of Wombat Care Bundanoon (WCB) and is dedicated to looking after wombat populations in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. John runs community workshops, attends conferences, and manages volunteers. A group of sixteen university students, and their teacher, were inspired by John's work and flew over from California to volunteer their time at WCB. John has an in-depth understanding of the implications of mange for wombat populations on a broader ecological scale. He educates children about wombat care and biology at local schools and engages with and encourages the wider community to take action in wombat conservation in hopes to preserve the Australian icon for future generations.



Suzanne Medway presenting John Creighton with the Wildlife Rehabilitation Award.

The winner of the **Youth Conservation Award** was Caitlin Gallagher of Bundanoon, New South Wales. Caitlin has been focusing on supporting efforts to reduce the incidence of sarcoptic mange in bare-nosed wombat populations. Furthermore, she has shown a commitment to wombat conservation in the field by setting-up and monitoring burrow flaps to treat wombats, as well as being heavily involved in fundraising and educating the public more broadly regarding wombat conservation and sarcoptic mange. Caitlin volunteers her time every Saturday morning at Wombat Care Bundanoon, assisting John Creighton to treat wombats for mange. Caitlin also regularly checks roadkilled wombats for in-pouch joeys. Caitlin collects recyclable bottles and returns them for 10 cents each and has raised over \$1,200 which purchases 15 litres of cydectin, a medication that is used to treat wombats for mange. Fifteen litres can treat up to thirty-five mange-affected wombats. Caitlin also presents at conferences and local schools to help raise awareness of the plight of the bare-nosed wombat and encourage wildlife conservation action.



Associate Professor Julie Old presenting Caitlin Gallagher with the Youth Conservation Award.

Wildlife Photographic Competition

The annual judge's prize of \$1,000 was won by Wes Read for his photo of a golden-eyed gecko (*Strophurus trux*) which was only recently described in 2015 and is not yet classified. The annual people's choice prize of \$500 was won by Tiffany Naylor for her photo of a dingo (*Canis lupus dingo*), an apex predator contributing to the control of many feral species that threaten Australia's wildlife and plays a very important role within the environment, keeping natural systems in balance.



Golden-eyed gecko (*Strophurus trux*). Image: Wes Read



Dingo (*Canis lupus dingo*). Image: Tiffany Naylor

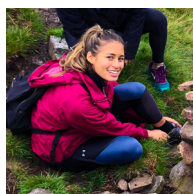
University Students Grants Scheme

The Australian Wildlife Society's University Research Grants are offered to honours or postgraduate students at Australian universities. Each year, ten grants of \$1,500 are awarded. Grants are available for research projects of direct relevance to the conservation of Australian wildlife – flora or fauna. The winners for 2020 were:



Angela Rana

School of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Sydney
Project Title: Assessing the success of the rewilding of small mammals into North Head.



Bali Lee

Faculty of Biology, Medicine, and Health, University of Tasmania
Project Title: Are microplastics causing inflammation in seabirds?



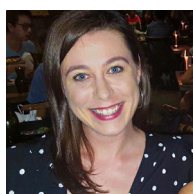
Ben Stepkovitch

School of Biological, Earth, and Environmental Sciences, University of New South Wales
Project Title: Ecosystem effects of western quoll (*Dasyurus geoffroii*) reintroduction on prey species inside a fenced reserve.



Carolyn Wheeler

ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, James Cook University
Project Title: A novel approach to investigate reproduction in a model shark species threatened by ocean warming.



Christine Mauger

School of Biological Sciences, University of Queensland
Project Title: The effect of fire regimes on habitat structure, demography and predator avoidance in northern brown bandicoots (*Isodon macrourus*) and northern quolls (*Dasyurus hallucatus*).



Emily Jarvis

School of Biological Sciences, Monash University
Project Title: Artificial microhabitat use of the agile antechinus (*Antechinus agilis*) in wet-forest environments.



Joshua Zimmerman

School of Environmental and Rural Science, University of New England
Project Title: Next-generation sequencing of *Felis catus* in Australia: Helping to elucidate feral cat population dynamics and interaction with domestic cats.



Julianna Santos

School of Ecosystem & Forest Sciences, University of Melbourne
Project Title: Mammals on the move in fire-driven mosaics.



Moses Omogbeme

School of Veterinary & Life Sciences, Murdoch University
Project Title: Dingoes and trophic interactions in landscape-scale cell fencing.



Kelly Williams

School of Life Sciences, La Trobe University
Project Title: Surviving predators: Assessing antipredator behaviours in an endangered wallaby to improve threatened species conservation.

Conservation Group Grants

The Society carefully considers all requests for grants from conservation groups that places special emphasis on wildlife and the preservation of wildlife habitat.

This year, we were fortunate to be able to offer two Conservation Group Grants:

Invasive Species Council

Funds provided, \$5,000, assisted the Invasive Species Council to take politicians and media representatives to Kosciuszko National Park to help raise awareness about the impacts of feral horses on native wildlife and their habitat. It is now more important than ever that the government effectively controls feral horses and other invasive species in Kosciuszko National Park.

Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting (RVOTDS Inc.)

A coalition of forty-three wildlife conservation groups, including the Australian Wildlife Society, called on the state government to honor its commitment to review the state's annual duck-shooting season. Funds provided, \$1,000, assisted RVOTDS to promote and publicise the campaign against duck-shooting.

Key Projects

Kinder Partnership

The Australian Wildlife Society accepted a significant sponsorship from family-owned confectionery brand, Ferrero Australia, as part of their new Kinder Natoon series. The contribution is part of the Society's ongoing partnership with Ferrero which has delivered more than \$100,000 in vital funds to support wildlife conservation projects across Australia and New Zealand. The Society selected five wildlife conservation programs, in Australia, as recipients of conservation funding under this program.

Cedar Creek Wombat Rescue Inc. and Hospital

Through the support of the Australian Wildlife Society, as part of the Kinder project, Cedar Creek Wombat Rescue Inc. and Hospital was able to expand and upgrade its hospital, adding additional intensive care unit pens, to ensure that Australia's native wildlife receives superior treatment and support.



Tasmanian Wildlife Rehabilitation Council

Through the support of the Australian Wildlife Society, as part of the Kinder project, a purpose-built microbat rehabilitation flight aviary was built enabling Tasmania's wild and injured microbats to develop flight fitness. Furthermore, resources such as flight surveillance night cameras and Intensive Care Unit humidity cribs were also purchased.

Save the Bilby Fund

Through the support of the Australian Wildlife Society, as part of the Kinder project, Save the Bilby Fund were able to upgrade their bilby captive breeding facilities, build new crèche-ing pens, and make enclosure improvements, including new feral-proof fencing. Save the Bilby Fund has already witnessed several births with more on the way! Great news for the conservation of this species.

Friends of the Western Ground Parrot

Through the support of the Australian Wildlife Society, as part of the Kinder project, Friends of the Western Ground Parrot mounted camera traps in prospective translocation sites. The camera traps are required to undertake predator surveillance (foxes and feral cats) to guide predator control management actions.

Australian Ecosystems Foundation Inc.

Through the support of the Australian Wildlife Society, as part of the Kinder project, a new breeding facility was established to assist in the preservation of the mountain pygmy-possum and help save this species from a changing climate and possible extinction.

Snip Rings for Wildlife campaign

The Society initiated a new campaign called *Snip Rings for Wildlife*. The campaign aimed to raise awareness and encourage individuals to protect Australia's wildlife, by cutting through plastic rings, rubber bands, hair ties, the loops of facemasks, and plastic dome-shaped lids before disposing of them. Each year, thousands of birds and air-breathing semi-aquatic wildlife such as platypus, turtles, and water dragons become entrapped, obtain significant injuries, and often die horrific and preventable deaths from these discarded ring-shaped items. These ring-shaped items wrap around an animal's beak, bill, or muzzle, preventing it from eating. These items can also tangle up their feet, wings, or fins, limiting their movement. Young animals can become entrapped in these items and as they grow, these items cut into their flesh, sometimes amputating limbs, or killing the animal. Other animals mistake these items for food and ingest them. The Society contacted numerous manufacturers, informing them of the threat that ring-shaped items pose to native wildlife and encouraged them to take action to improve their products, however most companies did not respond.

New South Wales Platypus and Turtle Alliance

In 2019, the Environment Minister, Matt Kean, expressed his strong support for our new Alliance and promised to give us a 'timeline' for the implementation of the ban on the use of opera house nets, to help save platypus and other air-breathing semi-aquatic wildlife from drowning in New South Wales rivers. However, the announcement on the ban was not made in 2020. With continued pressure, we are hopeful that the announcement will be made in 2021. Furthermore, there was increased pressure from the Alliance to have the platypus listed as Vulnerable on a national scale. Land clearing, drought, and bushfires, accelerated by climate change, are destroying critical platypus habitat, with research indicating that platypus habitat has shrunk twenty-two percent in the last thirty years.

Conferences and Wildlife Webinars

Due to the impact of COVID-19, the Society became actively involved in attending and contributing to several important wildlife conservation online conferences, webinars, events, and meetings throughout the year. We attended the Nature Conservation Council Conference and Australian Wildlife Management Society Conference to network and discuss important issues with key stakeholders in the field of wildlife conservation. We attended the Invasive Species Council

yearly update, Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting monthly meetings, Wildlife Preservation Society Queensland Protecting the Platypus webinar featuring Tamielle Brunt, and Melbourne Water's Urban Platypuses: threat and challenges webinar featuring Josh Griffiths, to name a few. The Society also strives for continuous improvement, consequently the National Office Manager attended several online courses, hosted by Western Sydney Business Centre, to learn how to develop and improve our impact on wildlife conservation outcomes.

Donations, Bequests, and Gifts

During the year, we continued with our bequest program to encourage donors to support our wildlife conservation work across Australia – through the website and general publicity. We developed a new Bequest Information Pack to make the donation and bequest process clearer and easier to follow. We are very grateful to all our members for considering using the bequest program to help the Society with its long-term planning. Please contact the National Office for more details on the bequest program and how to join Friends of Australian Wildlife Society to make a regular monthly donation to support our national wildlife conservation programs. We are a tax-deductible gift recipient and registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission. Our public fund is listed on the Register of Environmental Organisations under item 6.1.1 of subsection 30-55(1) of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997.

Financial Report Summary

The Society's directors, Finance and Investment Committee, and the Public Fund Committee continue to exercise tight and effective control over our finances, reviewing and adjusting the investment portfolio as required during the year. Although slightly impacted by COVID-19, the investment funds of the Society have continued to grow. The board will conduct a review of our investments in line with ethical issues.

A special thank you to all our members

I wish every member of the Society a happy, healthy, and prosperous 2021. This will mark our 112th anniversary. We thank you all most sincerely for your tremendous support and continued dedication and commitment in helping the Society to preserve and protect Australia's native wildlife for future generations.

Suzanne Medway AM | PRESIDENT | 31 December 2020

New National Office Opens in Hurstville



L to R: Ken Mason, Wayne Greenwood, Suzanne Medway, Councilor Kevin Greene, Julie Old, Patrick Medway, Philip Sansom, and Stephen Grabowski.