



Threatened Species Conservation: Powered By Partnerships

Megan Fabian

On Wednesday, 7 September 2022, Threatened Species Day, the Society attended the Minister's Threatened Species Conservation: Powered by Partnerships event, hosted by the Taronga Conservation Society. The event took place at Taronga's Institute of Science and Learning. Many individuals and organisations were in attendance to celebrate this special occasion, including representatives from Taronga Conservation Society, New South Wales Government Environment and Heritage Group, World Wildlife Fund-Australia, University of New South Wales, University of Sydney, Australian Wildlife Management Society, Woolworths, Australian Geographic, World Animal Protection, and, of course, Australian Wildlife Society.

As we entered Taronga's Institute of Science and Learning, we were welcomed by some drinks and nibbles where we could speak with like-minded individuals from various organisations on the importance of threatened species conservation. We were then ushered into the lecture hall, where Cameron Kerr AO, Chief Executive, Taronga Conservation Society, welcomed the guests and invited Susan Moylan-Coombs, Founding Director, The

Gaimaragal Group, on stage for the Acknowledgement of Country.

Cameron then followed with an introduction on why we were brought together for this special event. Cameron's key message was that we must work together to achieve conservation outcomes. As the title states, when conservation strategies are 'Powered by Partnerships', working together to achieve the same goal, we are most likely to succeed in protecting Australia's native flora and fauna. Not just professional partnership but also community involvement and participation in citizen science projects. Citizen science projects such as the University of New South Wales Environment Recovery Project and WomSAT are vital to informing future conservation efforts.

The Guest of Honour, The Hon James Griffin MP, New South Wales Minister for Environment and Heritage, was then invited to say a few words. Minister Griffin mentioned some critical conservation efforts that are to take place over the next few years, such as:

1. The New South Wales government's Saving our Species program being backed by a \$175m commitment over the next ten years,

2. A record \$200m for koala conservation to help double the state's population of the endangered Australian icon, and
3. New South Wales is further expanding its rewilding efforts with 65,000 hectares of national parks that will be feral-free and provide a significant conservation benefit for more than fifty species.

Minister Griffin also highlighted the success of the Wild Deserts Sturt National Park rewilding program. As part of the New South Wales government's feral-predator free area partnerships project with the Sturt National Park site, managed by the University of New South Wales Wild Deserts, reintroduced mammals such as the greater bilby (*Macrotis lagotis*), crested-tailed mulgara (*Dasyercus cristicauda*), Shark Bay bandicoot (*Perameles bougainville*) and golden bandicoot (*Isodon auratus*) are thriving in the landscape since their reintroduction to Sturt National Park.

Top left: The event took place at the Taronga Institute of Science and Learning. Image: Megan Fabian.

Top right: L to R: Patrick Medway AM and Trevor Evans. Image: Megan Fabian.

These mammals were translocated to the area between 2020 and 2022. The project is run in collaboration with Ecological Horizons, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, and Taronga Conservation Society and was partly funded by the Australian Wildlife Society.

“We set out a bold plan backed by science to create areas where we could eradicate feral predators and reintroduce locally extinct animals like the bilby, which have been extinct in the wild in New South Wales for more than one hundred years,” Mr Griffin said.

“It is incredible to see that in such a short period of time, we are on track to remove at least ten animals from the New South Wales extinct list – the first time this will have happened anywhere in the world.”

“These results are so important for the long-term goal of restoring this magnificent desert ecosystem to something like it once was,” says University of New South Wales, Professor Richard Kingsford, Wild Deserts project lead – who was also present at the event. *“Every year’s results are exciting. We are looking to transform this environment out here by putting these animals back in and establishing food webs that were once here.”*

The Wild Deserts Sturt National Park rewilding program is an excellent example of what can be achieved for native species conservation when Powered by Partnerships.

Rachel Lowry, Chief Conservation Officer, World Wildlife Fund – Australia, was the next to speak. Rachel provided insight into the importance of Threatened Species Day and why it matters. *“It is a day of reflection,”* Rachel said. *“On 7 September each year, many people stop and reflect that on that same date in 1936, Australia’s Tasmanian tiger, also known as our thylacine (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*), slipped over that extinction line.”*

Threatened Species Day allows us to reflect on Australia’s flora and fauna worth fighting for. It encourages us to share stories with our family and friends, celebrate the uniqueness of our native species, and learn more about the current threats and what we can do to help mitigate them.

Rachel also played a sound recording of the last Christmas Island pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus murrayi*) to exist. The Christmas Island pipistrelle was a species of vesper bat found only on Christmas Island, Australia. The species is now extinct, with the last individual bat seen in August 2009 with no further sightings despite intensive efforts to locate the species.

However, *“Threatened Species Day is a day to remind people that there is hope,”* Rachel said. *“If we scale up our ambition, move faster, and work together, we can get ahead of the extinction crisis.”*



L to R: Panel discussions: Cameron Kerr AO, Chief Executive, Taronga Conservation Society, The Hon James Griffin MP, Minister for Environment, Rachel Lowry, Chief Conservation Officer, World Wildlife Fund – Australia, Atticus Fleming, Coordinator-General, Environment and Heritage Group. Image: Megan Fabian.



L to R: Trevor Evans, Professor Richard Kingsford, Director of the Centre for Ecosystem Science, UNSW, Patrick Medway AM. Image: Megan Fabian.



L to R: Cameron Kerr AO, Chief Executive, Taronga Conservation Society and Patrick Medway AM. Image: Megan Fabian.



The Hon James Griffin MP, Minister for Environment. Image: Megan Fabian.



L to R: Patrick Medway AM, Paul Maguire, Director of Education, Taronga Conservation Society, and Trevor Evans. Image: Megan Fabian.



An Australian brushturkey (*Alectura lathamii*) on the grounds of Taronga Zoo. Image: Megan Fabian.

A panel discussion then took place. On the panel were The Hon James Griffin MP, Rachel Lowry, and Atticus Fleming, Coordinator-General, Environment and Heritage Group. The audience asked some robust questions, encouraging great discussions concerning protecting our marine species, especially about the lack of available data. Minister Griffin responded, “*creating databases is innovative, but more can be done to help inform better policy decisions*”. Minister Griffin referred to the Sydney Harbour restoration project – a new program that will improve marine habitat and water quality in Sydney Harbour. The \$9.1m restoration project is a partnership between the New South Wales government agencies, Taronga Conservation Society, and the Sydney Institute of Marine Science.

There was a question regarding tackling the threats to biodiversity. The response focused on short-term goals, being better at taking risks, tackling a changing climate, being adaptable, implementing sustainable farming, managing feral cats and foxes, encouraging community and political action, and working together to break conservation barriers.

Professor Katherine Belov from the University of Sydney asked how we can tackle habitat fragmentation when seventy-one per cent of Australia is privately owned. The response was to engage with landowners and talk to key stakeholders, implement strategic conservation and urban planning, address the housing crisis, speak with developers, change how we look at protecting biodiversity, and consider the role of community regeneration through an innovative psychology conservation lens.

We then broke into one of three workshops. The Society selected workshop two – Education for Conservation Outcomes which took place in the Guru/Burra Meeting Room. We were welcomed by Paul Maguire, Director of Education, Taronga Conservation Society. Paul introduced us to the behaviour change model where you ‘connect’ with people through ambassadors or species, ‘understand’ the situation or conservation issue, and ‘act’ using appropriate tools and incentives to engage people in conservation action. The conservation action must be fun, multi-sensory, positive, layered, and comfortable to keep people proactive and engaged.

We returned to the main foyer when the workshops concluded, where a light dinner was served. We had the opportunity to continue our discussions before the evening ended.

Saving threatened species is vital for a healthy and diverse ecosystem. Once flora and fauna become extinct, they are gone forever. Today, most species become endangered due to habitat destruction and the invasion of non-native species. However, with effective management and conservation strategies like Powered by Partnerships, threatened species can be protected for future generations.