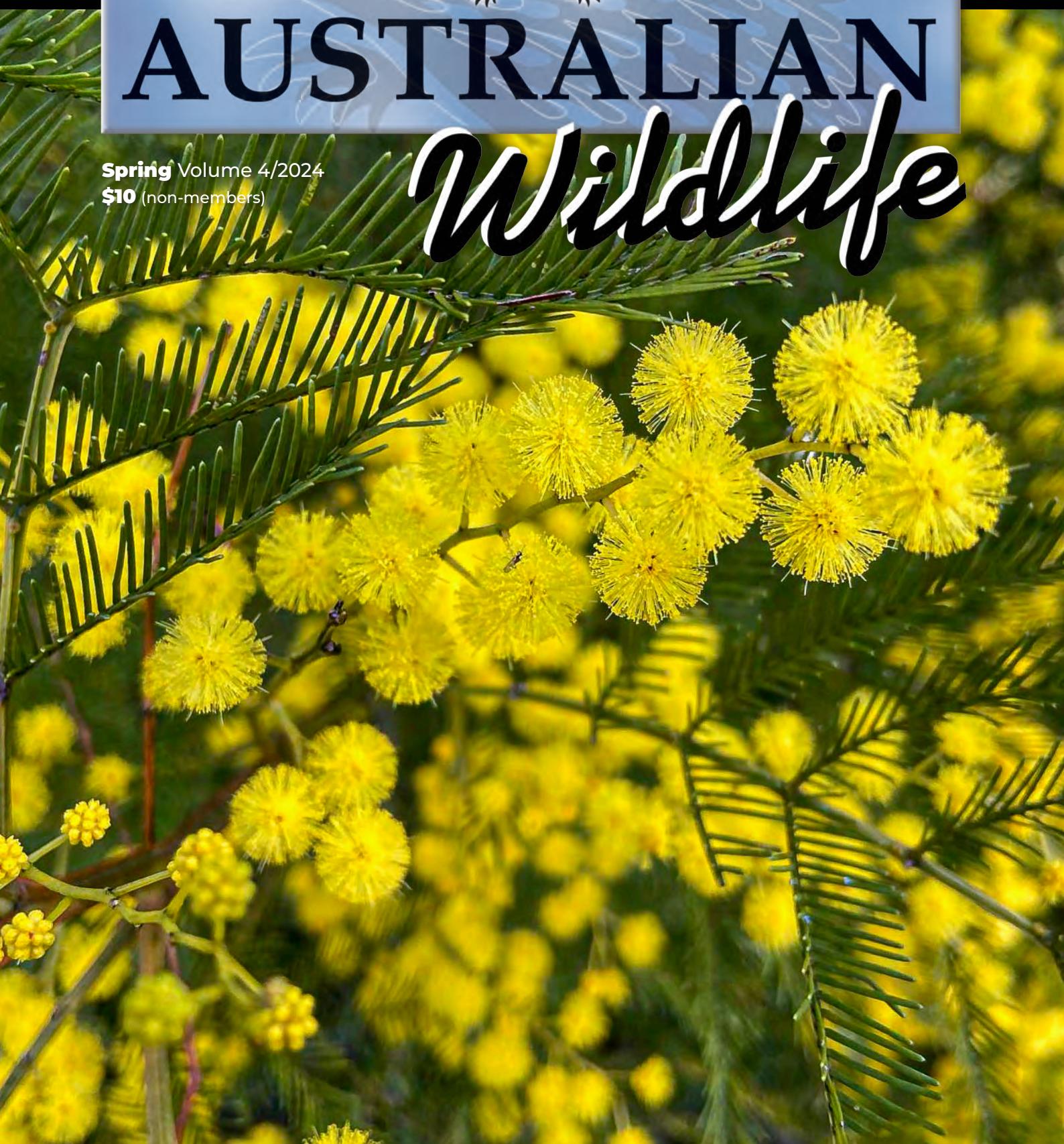




# AUSTRALIAN

# *Wildlife*

**Spring** Volume 4/2024  
**\$10** (non-members)



Journal of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia  
**Celebrating a new century of wildlife preservation in Australia**  
(Founded 1909)

# Opening of the Society's New National Office and Education Centre



Stephen Grabowski and Gregory Warren MP. Image: Megan Fabian.



Introduction by Gregory Warren MP, Member for Campbelltown. Image: Megan Fabian.



Michaela Beattie, Environmental Education Officer, and Michael Ellison, Bushcare Officer, Campbelltown City Council. Image: Megan Fabian.



L to R: Stephen Grabowski, Ken Mason, and Megan Fabian. Image: Sue Emmett.



Guests of the Society's New National Office and Education Centre Opening. Image: Megan Fabian.



John Creighton and Caitlin Gallagher. Image: Megan Fabian.

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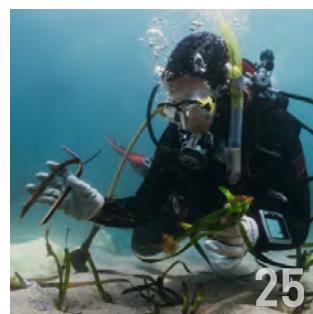
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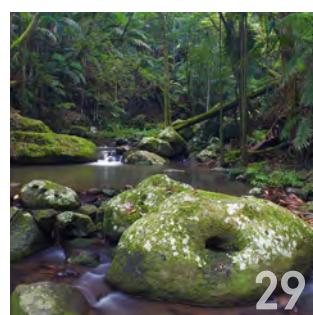
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**Megan Fabian**  
Editor, *Australian Wildlife*



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### Front Cover and Back Cover:

Black wattle, or early green wattle (*Acacia decurrens*), is a perennial tree or shrub native to eastern New South Wales. Images: Megan Fabian.



## Australian Wildlife Society

Conserving Australia's Wildlife  
since 1909 ®

### Membership

**Student Members: \$0** (Conditions apply)

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(Husband, partner, and children jointly)

**Concession Members: \$50**

(Pensioner, student, and child)

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(Australian Wildlife will be distributed via email as a PDF document - no hard copy of the magazine will be sent)

**Associate Members: \$85**

(Schools or incorporated or unincorporated associations with a principal object related to conservation, nature study, or education)

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(Incorporated or unincorporated associations not being associate members)

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### Member Notice

The Australian Wildlife Society (Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Limited) is managed and controlled by an elected Board of up to ten volunteer Directors. The Society is endorsed as a deductible gift recipient under Subdivision 30-BA and registered with the Australian Taxation Office. Its gift fund is also administered under the Australian Taxation Office.

Any member who might like to consider serving as a Director of the Society is invited to contact the national office for more details. The most important qualification to serving as a Director is 'a commitment to and love of Australian wildlife'. The Society holds regular monthly meetings on the second Wednesday of each month, excluding January.

Members are invited to consider submitting a short article with photographs for possible publication.

# Australian Wildlife

is the official journal of the Australian Wildlife Society (Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Limited).

Founded in 1909, the Society is dedicated to the conservation of our unique Australian wildlife in all its forms.

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### Our Mission

The Australian Wildlife Society (Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Limited) is a national not-for-profit wildlife conservation organisation, formed in 1909, and is committed to the preservation of Australia's precious flora and fauna. We act as a watchdog and provide advice to government agencies and institutions regarding environmental and conservation issues concerning all aspects of wildlife preservation.

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, advocacy, public awareness, community involvement, and hands-on conservation work.

Our Society has always known that a conservation battle is never really won until the victory is enshrined in legislation. We have always attempted to convince politicians of the necessity to include the preservation of Australia's precious wildlife and its vital habitat in all their planning, environmental issues, and discussions.

Articles and comments expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Editor, Society, or members. Articles contributed from outside sources are included for the reading enjoyment of members and to encourage discussion on different points of view.

Articles may be copied or quoted with appropriate attribution.

# From the President's Desk

**Stephen Grabowski – President**

"We are pleased with the success of our inaugural wildlife fiction short story writing competition, which received 166 submissions across the two categories - junior and senior. Our judges have now assessed the entries for ratification by the Board. The winners will be announced soon."



## Welcome to the Spring 2024 Edition of Australian Wildlife

I am delighted to advise our members of the success of the official opening of our new National Office and the start of a National Education Centre in Campbelltown, NSW, officially opened by Mr Greg Warren, Member of Campbelltown. Thank you to Campbelltown Council for their support and also to councillor Mr Warren Morrison. Thank you to the Campbelltown Chamber of Commerce and Anne Parnham from the NSW Business Chamber. I want to thank all Directors and staff for their support in the success of the opening of the new Centre. With the support of all who attended, we now begin building an education centre for the next generation of wildlife warriors, ensuring AWS continues its vital work for another 100 years.

Our Chief Executive Officer, Patrick Medway AM, attended the 3rd Australian Biosecurity Symposium at the Sea World Conference Centre and networked among the 437 delegates on



Stephen Grabowski at the Opening of the Society's new National Office and Education Centre.

our behalf. The Symposium provided an opportunity to share research outcomes, explore out-of-the-box thinking, and exchange knowledge and ideas across the biosecurity collective: agriculture (animals and plants), pest animals, weeds, wildlife, aquatics, humans, and the

environment. This year's Symposium theme was 'Innovation. Inclusivity. Immersion'. Australia's biosecurity system faces unprecedented pressure, and the Symposium provided the ideal platform to explore how to transform it to better protect our economy, environment, and way of life.



Patrick Medway AM at the 3rd Australian Biosecurity Symposium.



**HAVE YOU SEEN THIS MOTH?**

Follow these steps to help the Critically Endangered Mountain Pygmy-possum and the Endangered Bogong Moth.

**Step 1**  
See a Bogong Moth

**Step 2**  
Take a photo

**Step 3**  
Upload to Moth Tracker  
[zoo.org.au/moth](http://zoo.org.au/moth)

**ZOOS**  
VICTORIA  
*Fighting Extinction*

**VICTORIA**

# Fun FACT

**A HANDFUL OF TURTLES CAN BREATHE THROUGH THEIR BUTT, TERMED CLOACAL GAS EXCHANGE.**



The white-throated snapping turtle (*Elseya albagula*) inhabits Queensland's Fitzroy, Burnett and Mary Rivers and is known to absorb oxygen through its anus/cloaca while submerged. The cloaca is a chamber with gill-like structures that allow for oxygen diffusion.

# Threatened Wildlife Photographic Competition

## Winners Announced

The Australian Wildlife Society Threatened Wildlife Photographic Competition is a national competition that awards and promotes threatened Australian wildlife through photography. The Australian Wildlife Society invited photographers to raise the plight of Australia's threatened wildlife. The Society was delighted to receive a record number of entries, making it an extremely tough competition. Thank you to all our entrants.

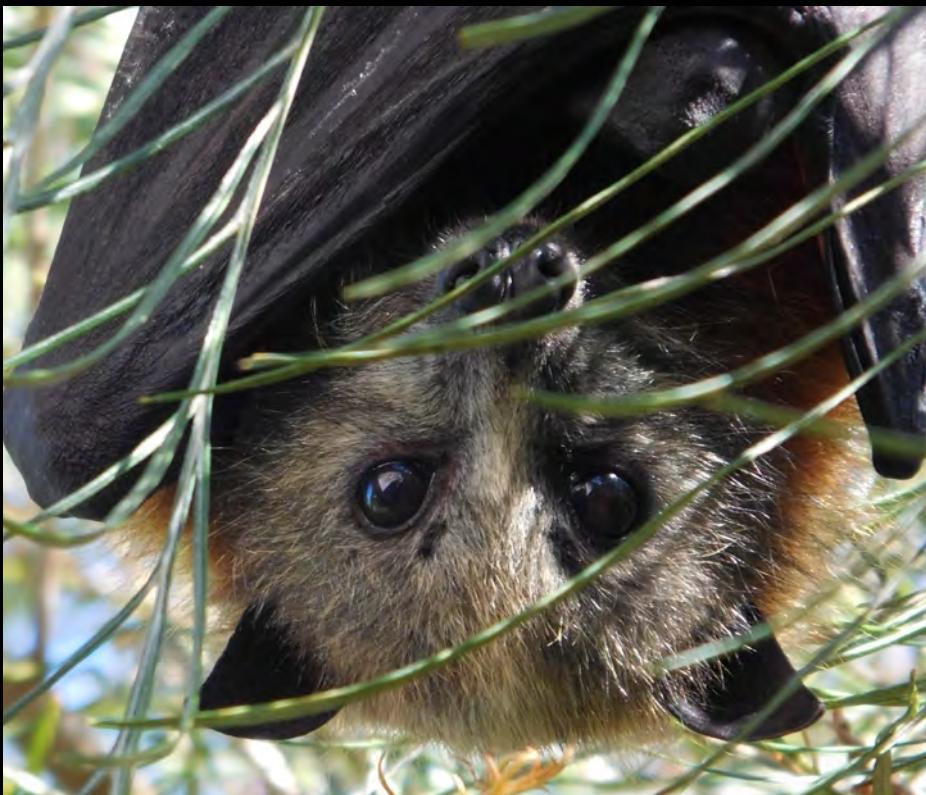
We look forward to continuing the successful Threatened Wildlife Photographic Competition again next year to raise the plight of threatened wildlife across Australia.

**Judges' Choice:** Diamond firetail (*Stagonopleura guttata*) **Greg Dawson**



**Greg Dawson** won the annual Judges' Choice prize of \$1,000 for their photograph of a diamond firetail (*Stagonopleura guttata*). The diamond firetail is a member of the grass finch family. They are listed as vulnerable. This image was photographed at Monarto Woodlands in South Australia. It is gated woodlands managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service South Australia. Two birds bathed in a puddle. Greg finds them strikingly beautiful and enjoys photographing them, learning about them, and seeing their numbers slowly increase in Monarto's protected area over the past few years.

## People's Choice: Grey-headed flying-foxes (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) **Judy Leitch**



**Judy Leitch** won the annual People's Choice prize of \$500 for their photograph of two grey-headed flying-foxes (*Pteropus poliocephalus*). The grey-headed flying-fox is listed as vulnerable due to droughts, flooding rains, tornadoes, cyclones, and heat stress events, significantly impacting pollen eaters like the grey-headed flying-fox. This species may perish in their thousands due to these weather events. Grey-headed flying-foxes are Australia's only endemic flying-fox. They are a keynote species concerning pollination and seed dispersal for many native trees. Many local councils have pages of information regarding grey-headed flying-foxes. Judy often offers her photographs to help promote the species to ratepayers. She would like her photography to alter public sentiment. Judy is a fully vaccinated member of Bats Qld. She searches vast areas, such as this camp at Maclean, New South Wales, to photograph this beautiful but misunderstood species.



## Yellow-footed rock-wallaby

(*Petrogale xanthopus*)

Image by Deb Farrimond

The yellow-footed rock-wallabies coat markings are spectacularly complex, being an overall fawn-grey with a white side stripe and cheek stripe, brown and white hip stripe and orange-yellow ears, forearms, hind legs, and feet, while the tail is orange/brown with darker bars or rings. They are listed as Vulnerable in South Australia under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972. They are grazers and browsers of grasses, forbs, herbs, and low shrubs, switching with seasonal availability. They are challenged by introduced herbivores such as goats and are threatened by predators such as foxes and feral cats. Other risks include habitat fragmentation and genetic risks associated with small, isolated colonies. Conservation programs in the Flinders Ranges include habitat protection and active threat abatement by controlling introduced feral species. Deb was fortunate to photograph wallabies in several Flinders Ranges locations, including The Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary.

## **Eastern osprey**

(*Pandion haliaetus cristatus*)

Image by David Killin

The Eastern osprey is an iconic and recognisable animal of the Sydney region. It is not a well-known fact that the animal is listed as vulnerable. This eastern osprey was photographed at Long Reef Headland, New South Wales. David hid behind rocks as he moved into a close enough position to take the shot, not to frighten it with his presence. David entered this image of the eastern osprey in the Society's competition because it is a majestic and adaptable hunter. His goal was to showcase its impressive wingspan.



## **Platypus**

(*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*)

Image by Neil Anderson

This photograph was taken at Obi Creek, Maleny, Queensland. The platypus is considered vulnerable in Victoria; a lack of comprehensive data means we cannot be sure of the vulnerability in Queensland. During the decade or more that Neil has been photographing the platypus in Obi Creek, he has noticed the reflection created when the water sheets off the platypus' incredibly dense fur can be pretty spectacular. In this instance, the sky was grey with a light cloud cover, providing a beautiful milky background and reflection.



## **Numbat**

(*Myrmecobius fasciatus*)

Image by Jules Guthridge

The numbat is an endangered species due to feral cat and fox predation and the clearing of its natural habitat for farming and development. Only an estimated 1500 of these tiny little animals are left in the world and need protection. Luckily, various organisations are committed to their survival, and their numbers are slowly increasing. It is taking a lot of hard work to control the feral predators, and government agencies such as the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and local farmers are working together to ensure the survival of this species. Perth Zoo also runs a unique breeding program that releases young individuals into the wild. Jules took this photograph in Dryandra, Western Australia, to promote awareness of their threatened status because they are the most adorable animals she has ever seen.





# A Blossom

## of Green and Gold

Patrick Medway AM and Megan Fabian

**Acacia, commonly known as acacias or wattles, is a genus of about 1,084 species of shrubs and trees belonging to the subfamily Mimosoideae of the family Fabaceae (the pea family).**

Wattles come in all shapes and sizes, from delicate shrubs to towering trees, making them a diverse and fascinating group of plants. Their rich history dates back to 1773 when the renowned Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus first described the species. It all began with the majestic African species *Acacia nilotica*, which has since been reclassified as *Vachellia nilotica*. It comprises plant species native to Africa, South America, and Australasia. However, it is now reserved for species mainly from Australia, with others from New Guinea, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean.

Many non-Australian wattle species tend to be thorny, whereas most Australian wattles are not. All species are pod-bearing, with sap and leaves often bearing large amounts of tannins. These tannins have been used historically for medicinal purposes and as preservatives.

Birds, mammals, and invertebrates benefit from the nectar of wattle species. For example, the seeds of wattles are eaten by birds,

including red-tailed black cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus banksii*), gang-gang cockatoo (*Callocephalon fimbriatum*), red wattlebird (*Anthochaera carunculata*) and various other honeyeaters. Certain birds glean insects directly from the foliage of wattles. Many wattles possess glands at the base of the leaves. During flowering, this gland may produce a sugary fluid that attracts birds, including honeyeaters such as the yellow-faced honeyeater (*Lichenostomus chrysops*) and thornbills such as the striated thornbill (*Acanthiza lineata*). Furthermore, wattle pollen has been observed in bird feathers, and birds, including spinebills, tree-creepers and several kinds of wren, are known to function as pollinators of some wattles.

Sugar gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*) and squirrel gliders (*Petaurus norfolkensis*) use wattle gum as an essential source of carbohydrates during winter when other sources of energy-rich food, such as nectar and some insects, are scarce. The quality and quantity of gum produced by different wattle species are highly variable. The gum of black wattle

(*Acacia decurrens*) is water-resistant and persists on the plant throughout the year, whereas the Australian blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) is not a gum producer. The critically endangered Leadbeater's possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*), which is found in the alpine ash (*Eucalyptus delegatensis*) forests of Victoria's central highlands, feeds on the carbohydrate-rich sap of certain wattles.

Most of the insects that visit or live on wattles do not pollinate the flowers but come to take leaves, pollen, or nectar. Ants, native bees, butterflies, and wasps are attracted to the sugars produced by wattle glands during the flowering period.

Wattles have inspired many Australians. The most notable is the golden wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*), Australia's national floral emblem. When in bloom, the golden wattle displays Australia's national colours of green and gold. It symbolises unity and resilience in harsh climate conditions like droughts, winds, and bushfires.

National Wattle Day is celebrated on 1 September, the first day of Spring. This

**Above:** A striated thornbill (*Acanthiza lineata*) perched on a wattle tree. Image: Penny Ash.



Golden wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*).  
Image: Sandid Pixabay.



Sydney golden wattle (*Acacia longifolia*).  
Image: Megan Fabian.

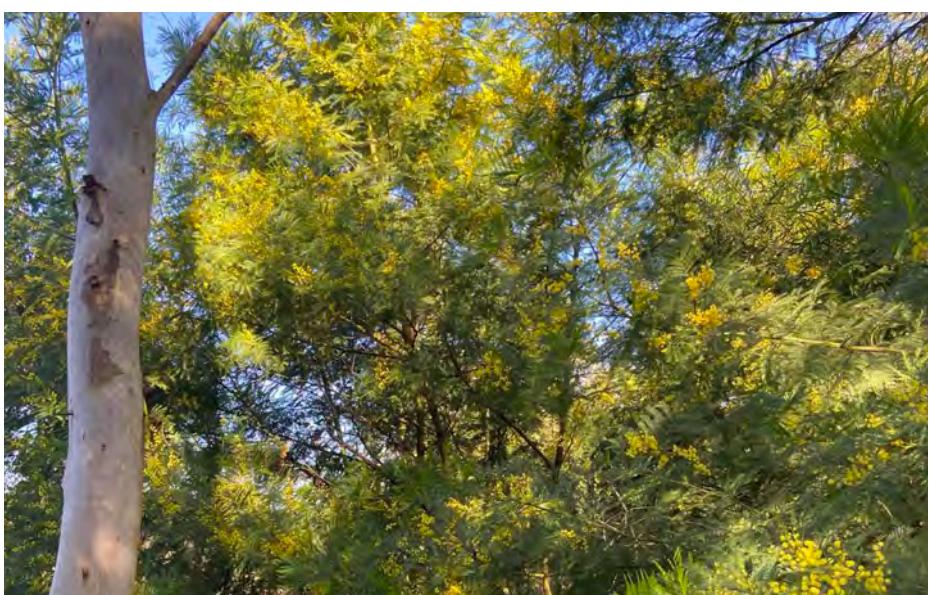


Snowy river wattle (*Acacia boormanii*).  
Image: Megan Fabian.

annual celebration commemorates the seasonal change by recognising our national floral emblem and all that it represents for the Australian people. It is a day for the unifying celebration of everything we love and value about Australia and Australians, symbolised by the wattle's beauty, diversity, and resilience.

Why not celebrate National Wattle Day by planting a variety of wattles in your back garden to encourage native wildlife? Prostrate forms of wattles (deliberate breeding and hybridisation), such as the Cootamundra wattle (*Acacia baileyana*), are beautiful additions to the home garden, mainly when space is limited. However, there is a wattle for almost every landscape.

The Order of Australia, established by the Federal Government in 1975, adopted the golden wattle as its official motif and incorporated the wattle



Black wattle, or early green wattle (*Acacia decurrens*), is a perennial tree or shrub native to eastern New South Wales. Image: Megan Fabian.



Knife-leaf wattle (*Acacia cultriformis*).  
Image: Megan Fabian.



Cootamundra wattle (*Acacia baileyana*). Image: Chesna Pixabay.

**Wattle has also inspired many Australian poets, including Miss Veronica Mason, who learned to know and grew to love wattles during her residence in Tasmania. Here is her poem:**

*"The bush was grey  
A week to-day  
(Olive-green and brown and grey);  
But now the spring has come this way,  
With blossoms for the wattle.*

*It seems to be  
A fairy tree;  
It dances to a melody,  
And sings a little song to me  
(The graceful, swaying wattle):*

*See how it weaves  
Its feathery sheaves:  
Before the wind, a maze it weaves,  
A misty whirl of powdery leaves -  
(The dainty, curtseying wattle):*

*Its boughs uplift  
An elfin gift;  
A spray of yellow, downy drift,  
Through which the sunbeams shower and sift  
Their gold-dust o'er the wattle.*

*The bush was grey  
A week to-day  
(olive-green and brown and grey);  
But now it's sunny all the way,  
For, oh! the spring has come to stay,  
With blossom for the wattle!"*

blossom in the unique design of the ribbon and medals of the Order. The Order has four categories, the highest being the Companion of the Order of Australia (AC), appointed to an individual for eminent achievement and merit of the highest degree in service to Australia or humanity. The Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia is the Head of the Order in Australia and uses the golden wattle motif on their official letterhead.

The Australian Institute of Botanical Science is on a mission to ensure wattle populations thrive in their natural habitat. They rely on the National Herbarium of New South Wales and the Australian PlantBank at the Australian Botanic Garden Mount Annan to achieve this goal. The Herbarium boasts an impressive collection of over 45,283 wattle specimens, showcasing 1,096 unique wattle species from Australia and beyond. Scientists tap into this treasure trove to guide their conservation efforts.

Right next door, the Australian PlantBank stands as the most prominent native seed bank in the country. With nearly three million seeds from 492 wattle species, the PlantBank is crucial in safeguarding plant species from extinction. This genetic repository is a safety net for wild populations, ensuring a flourishing future for wattle trees.

#### **Further Reading**

Berry, S & WB 1999, *Wattles and Wildlife*, Victorian Land for Wildlife Note No. 17.



Silver wattle (*Acacia dealbata*). Image: Penny Ash.



## The Grand Opening of the Society's New National Office and Education Centre in Campbelltown, New South Wales

The President of the Australian Wildlife Society, Stephen Grabowski, was delighted to announce the opening of the Society's new National Office and Education Centre at 9/121 Queen Street, Campbelltown, New South Wales.

For the first time in over one hundred years, the Board of the Society decided to purchase and establish a new National Office and Education Centre to cope with the expanding work of the Society in wildlife conservation across Australia.

"After some 115 years, the Society now has a new permanent home from which to operate and promote wildlife conservation and environmental education programs across Australia", Stephen said.

The new National Office and Education Centre was officially opened on Tuesday, 20 August 2024, at 11 am by Gregory Charles Warren MP, Member for Campbelltown, with some thirty-eight guests in attendance, including councillors and representatives from Campbelltown City Council, life members and members of the Society, and friends and family, joined us to celebrate this special occasion.

Steve Wisbey OAM, the Master of Ceremonies, officially opened the event and invited Gregory Warren MP, to say a few words. Mr Warren first congratulated the Society on its achievements to date and wished the Society and its President well for a successful future.

He communicated his concern for the future of the koala population in Campbelltown and articulated that balancing the needs of wildlife with an expanding community can be complex. He said the roads are needed to ensure members of the community can get from A to B, but it is also crucial that wildlife is not put at risk at the same time. Mr Warren voiced his support for the work of the Society and is committed to collaborating with the Society in the future to ensure our wildlife conservation efforts are successful.

Steve Wisbey OAM invited the Chief Executive Officer, Patrick Medway AM, to say a few words. Patrick spoke about the history of the Society and its activities

and our efforts to continue the legacy of our predecessors to ensure our native wildlife persists in the future. He said, "Since our establishment in 1909, we have advocated for legally protecting Australia's precious animals and plants. Throughout history, we have achieved significant milestones and victories for wildlife, such as ending the cruel practice of skinning koalas for their fur. We are committed to continuing this vital work and expanding our wildlife conservation efforts nationally".

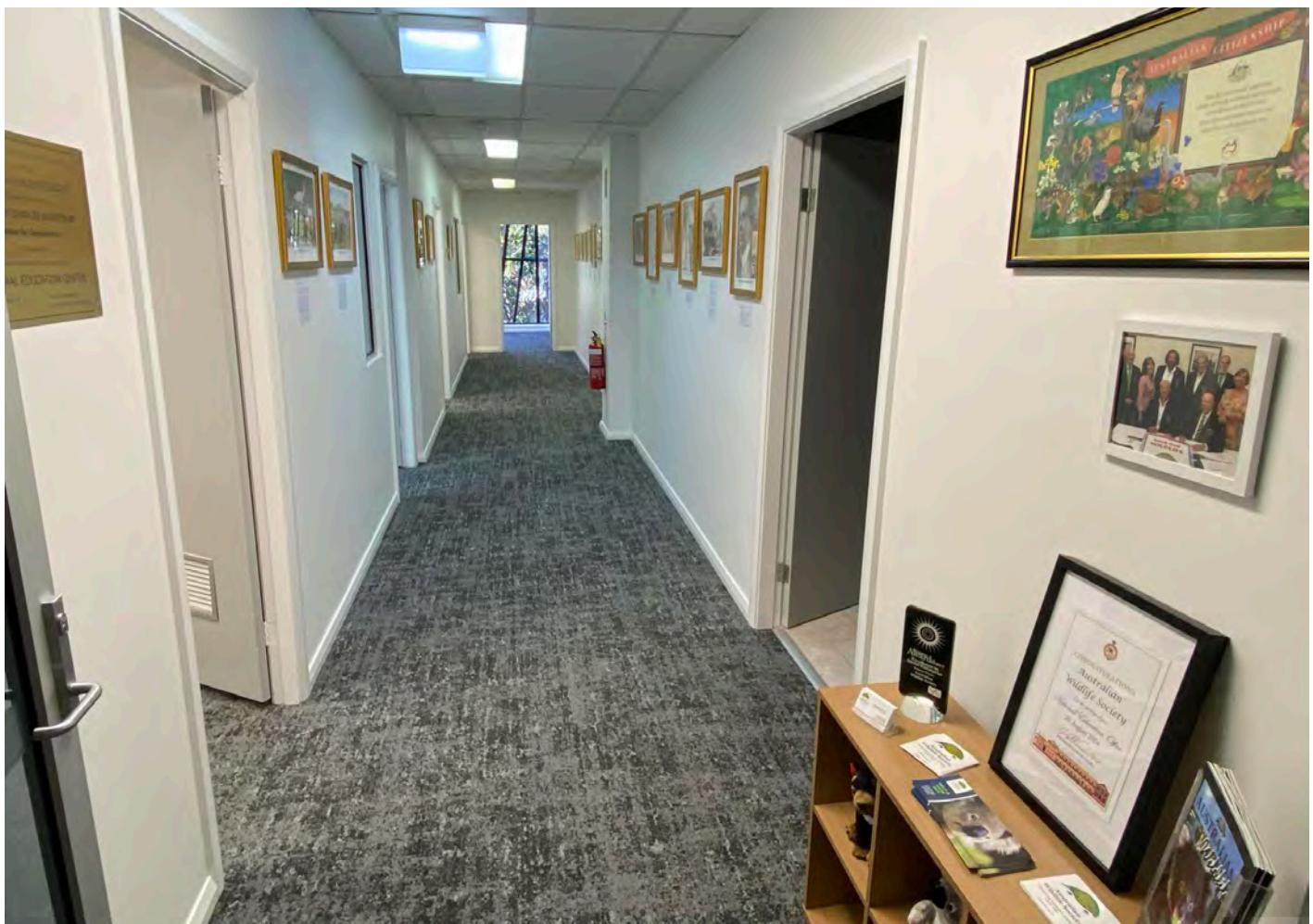
The President of the Society, Stephen Grabowski, was then invited to say a few words on behalf of the Board. He acknowledged and thanked everyone for their attendance and expressed the Society's hopes for the future. He mentioned that we look forward to forming solid connections and collaborating with key stakeholders to ensure local wildlife conservation. Stephen also

**Above:** Gregory Warren MP, the Board of Directors of the Society, Steve Wisbey OAM, and Councillor Warren Morrison cut the ribbon to mark the official opening. Image: Megan Fabian.

**Above Right:** The Australian Wildlife Society's Grand Opening Cake. Image: Megan Fabian.



Stephen Grabowski, Gregory Warren MP, and the Board of Directors cut the cake to celebrate the momentous occasion. Image: Megan Fabian.



The Society's National Office. Image: Megan Fabian.



Certificate of Congratulations.  
Image: Megan Fabian.



Stephen Grabowski and Gregory Warren MP unveiled the plaque. Image: Megan Fabian.

acknowledged Campbelltown City Council's contribution to gift bags and a variety of native plants handed out on the day, which was a great success. Coles Campbelltown also sponsored the opening event by providing cold beverages for our guests.

Councillor Warren Morrison of Campbelltown City Council was invited to speak a few words. He stated that the council was delighted to support such a momentous occasion and is excited to work together in the future to achieve positive outcomes for wildlife.

The official ribbon cutting took place, the President of the Society and Mr Warren unveiled the plaque, and the cake was cut. Mr Warren also presented the Society with a framed certificate congratulating the Society on the opening of its National Office and Education Centre.

The President of the Society then



President, Stephen Grabowski.  
Image: Megan Fabian.



Member for Campbelltown, Gregory Warren MP.  
Image: Megan Fabian.



Chief Executive Officer, Patrick Medway AM.  
Image: Nicholas Tisdale.



Councillor Warren Morrison, Campbelltown City Council. Image: Megan Fabian.



Master of Ceremonies, Steve Wisbey OAM.  
Image: Megan Fabian.



The Society's official opening plaque.  
Image: Megan Fabian.



Campbelltown City Council donated a variety of native plants. Image: Megan Fabian.



The Society's Education Centre. Image: Megan Fabian.

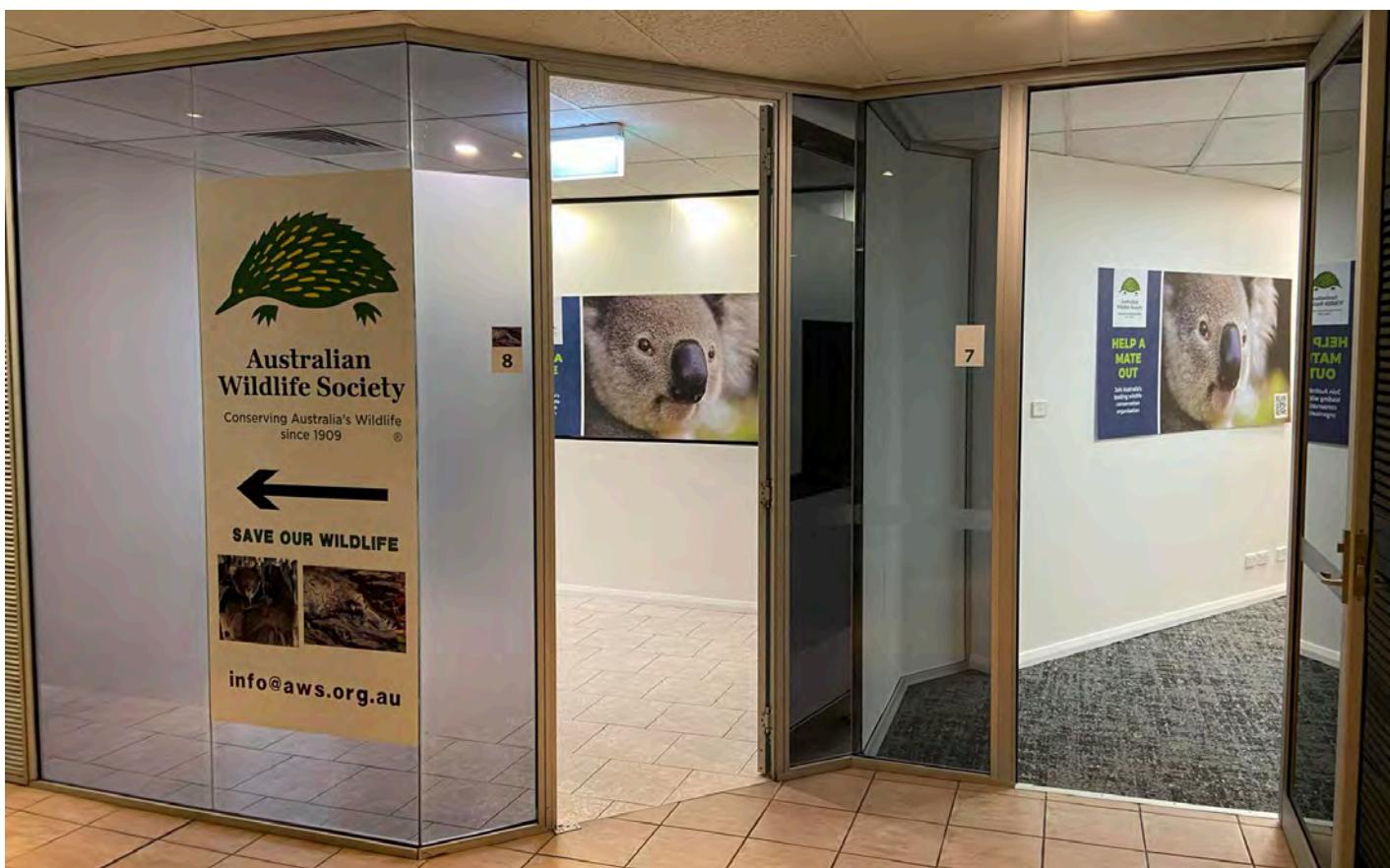
officially closed the event. Stephen said he was pleased that the new office was in the Macarthur region of Western Sydney, as it is a dynamic and growing area of influence for today's generation of conservation-minded people.

"We want to engage with all like-minded wildlife conservation groups to form new alliances to save our native wildlife for the next generation of young Australians", he said.

We believe that everyone can play a role in conserving Australia's wildlife, and this belief is reflected in the Society's magazine, newsletters, and membership structure. He encouraged everyone interested in wildlife conservation to join the Society to help save Australia's unique and precious flora and fauna.

The guests were then invited to stay for a light lunch to network and continue celebrating the milestones and achievements of the Society. Guests were also taken on a guided tour of the New National Office and Education Centre.

The Australian Wildlife Society, founded in 1909, is a national not-for-profit wildlife conservation organisation. We are dedicated to conserving Australian wildlife (flora and fauna) through national environmental education, advocacy, and community involvement.



The entrance to the Society's National Office and Education Centre. Image: Megan Fabian.



# Reconnect Our Rivers: Voices from the Basin I

**Melissa Gray, Water Campaigner,  
Nature Conservation Council of NSW**

We all know the Darling/Baaka River is in trouble. Right now, there is a critical opportunity for the New South Wales Government to update water rules and make sure there is a requirement for northern basin rivers to connect with the release of the Connectivity Expert Panel's final report.

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW brought some community river advocates from the Basin to Macquarie

Street to speak directly to the Water Minister and a range of Members of Parliament over two days of advocacy that culminated in our panel session, which featured Jacqui Mumford (Chief Executive Officer, Nature Conservation Council of NSW), Melissa Gray (Water Campaigner and Community Organiser, Nature Conservation Council NSW), The Hon. Rose Jackson MLC (New South Wales Minister for Water), Garry Hall (President,

Macquarie Marshes Environmental Landholders Association), Aunty Polly Cutmore (Gamilaraay Traditional Owner), and Kate McBride (a fifth generation farmer and rural advocate of Menindee). The event was co-hosted by The Hon. Stephen Lawrence MLC, Ms Cate Faehrmann MLC, and The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham MLC.

Why is it so crucial that rivers of the Northern Murray-Darling Basin connect? The law in New South Wales directs that the environmental needs of the rivers must be prioritised above everything else. Only in the most severe drought emergency does the law say that critical human needs can be prioritised over environmental needs, which makes sense. If the environment is looked after, it will be there to look after us.

So, if we have these strong laws, how can the Darling/Baaka be dying in front of our eyes? Unfortunately, the water rules are out of date, are not fit for purpose, and are not suitable under the law. They need a serious update. The Darling/Baaka gets over 90 percent of its water from its tributary



The allusive endangered Australian Painted Snipe (*Rostratula australis*) lays its eggs on the ground among tall grasses and reeds. Image: Leanne Hall.

**Above:** The Macquarie marshes are teaming with birdlife. Image: Leanne Hall.



L to R: Kate McBride, Melissa Gray, Aunty Polly Cutmore, Jacqui Mumford, Garry Hall. Image: Leanne Hall.



A pair of brolgas (*Grus rubicundus*) with their chick in Macquarie marsh habitat. Image: Leanne Hall.

rivers, which span from Paroo way out west, all the way around through central Queensland, New England, and down to Oberon, just over the hill. It is a huge, diverse, and incredible catchment. However, the biggest of these tributary catchments in New South Wales – Border Rivers, Gwydir, Namoi, and Wambuul/Macquarie are managed as if they were discrete disconnected systems.

In some parts of the Basin, the rivers can be pumped until they stop flowing, and no one checks how much water is being taken. Entitlement is enormous, and there might as well be no limits. That is why the Baaka is dying. A long list of inquiries, commissions, and reports have been telling us that. It is not a surprise.

The connectivity report provides a blueprint for getting the bare minimum volumes of water flowing out of these four main tributary river catchments at the right time so that the Darling/Baaka has enough water to survive.

All that is needed to take this first primary step is to leave enough water in the Border Rivers, the Gwydir, the Namoi, and the Wambuul/Macquarie so that the Baaka receives a base flow most of the time, a small flush once a year, and a larger flush every second year. It is imperative that the regular pulses – the heartbeat of the Baaka – are returned. All it would take is a 4 to 6 percent reduction in how much water is taken from the rivers across the north.



Magpie geese (*Anseranas semipalmata*) gather in large, noisy flocks of thousands to feed on healthy wetland vegetation. Image: Leanne Hall.

A lot of the changes needed are just about timing. If more water is left in the rivers to flow down the Baaka when there is some water around, the river will manage drought better, and it will not take so much water to get the river going again after a drought.

The connectivity report is impressive work. It unravels many tangled and layered complexities like so many jumbled Christmas lights. The rules in many parts of the rivers do not actually limit water extraction, and under the law, they must.

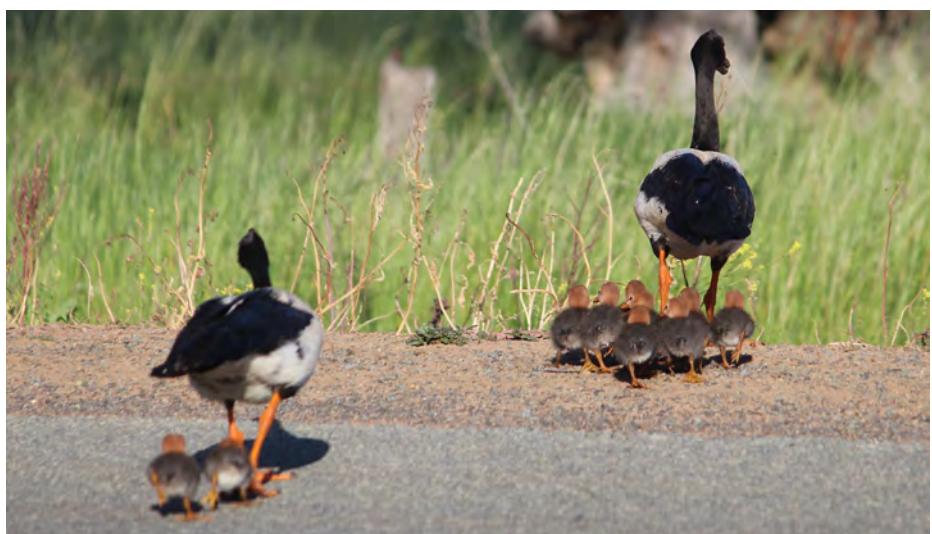
Those of us who fought against how floodplain harvesting was licenced argued that the licences must not be issued until the cumulative impact on the environment, culture, and diverse local economies downstream of diverting that floodplain water had been assessed. The former government did not listen and went ahead, knowing only half of the story.

Now the tables have turned. That missing half of the story – that missing modelling needed to assess the impact of floodplain harvesting on the rivers can no longer be used as an excuse to leave the levels of water extraction at such unsustainably high levels.

The Connectivity Report gives us the first steps – the very least that can be done to keep the Baaka alive. However, it also outlines how much more needs to be done for groundwater, floodplain, and wetland health. Until that work is done, we probably have not seen the end of the fish kills.



Regular small and medium flows are critical between big floods to keep wetland vegetation healthy for endangered species like the Australasian bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*). Image: Leanne Hall.



Magpie geese (*Anseranas semipalmata*) breeding in the Ramsar-listed Macquarie Marshes. Image Leanne Hall.



Healthy inland wetlands are critical feeding grounds for a wide range of birdlife. Image: Leanne Hall.

# 2024 University Research Grant Winners

The Australian Wildlife Society's University Research Grants are offered to honours or postgraduate students at Australian universities conducting research that contributes to the conservation of Australian wildlife (flora or fauna). Ten grants are awarded each year: one \$5,000 scholarship and nine \$3,000 grants.

The Dr Clive Williams OAM Memorial Wildlife Conservation Scholarship is awarded to the highest-ranked applicant of all our University Research Grants in honour of former Director Dr Clive Williams.

Grants may be used to purchase equipment and consumables, travel expenses related to field research, or attend a conference where the student presents their research.

## The Australian Wildlife Society is delighted to announce the winners for 2024:



### George Lester

(Dr Clive Williams OAM Memorial Wildlife Conservation Scholarship Recipient)

School of BioSciences,  
The University of Melbourne.

**Project Title:** Pollination Networks in East-Arnhem Land: Analysing Effects of Climate Change on Stingless Bees through DNA Metabarcoding of Foraged Pollen.



### Rose Lownds

School of Science,  
Western Sydney University.

**Project Title:** Determining the Distribution and Migratory Flyways of Bogong Moths (*Agrotis infusa*) Using Genetic and Stable Isotope Analyses.



### Alexandra Ikpe

School of Science, Technology  
and Engineering,  
The University of the Sunshine Coast.

**Project Title:** Tracking an Elusive Predator, Mature Male Tiger Sharks, Along Eastern Australia.



### Jasmine Towle

School of Biological Sciences,  
The University of Adelaide.

**Project Title:** Climate Change Impacts on Marine Invertebrates in Temperate Australia.



### Alice Howie

School of Natural Sciences,  
Macquarie University.

**Project Title:** Sound as an Emerging Technology to Monitor Biodiversity Across Seascapes.



### Matthew Rose

Institute for Marine and  
Antarctic Studies,  
University of Tasmania.

**Project Title:** Collapsed Habitat Threatens Australian Marine Wildlife.



### Emmeline Norris

Centre for Tropical Environmental  
and Sustainability Science,  
James Cook University.

**Project Title:** Utilising Drone-Based Thermal Imagery to Accurately Estimate the Abundance of the Endangered Spectacled Flying-Fox (*Pteropus conspicillatus*) and Model Population Trajectories.



### Natalie Grassi

School of Environmental and  
Conservation Sciences,  
Murdoch University.

**Project Title:** Does Fragmentation Alter Predator Diets?



### Luke Florence

Department of Environment  
and Genetics,  
La Trobe University.

**Project Title:** Mycorrhizal Diversity in Australian Temperate Forests in the Context of Drought and Nitrogen Deposition.



### Rebecca Quah

School of Science,  
Edith Cowan University.

**Project Title:** Is There Mosh-Room for Bettongs? Resource Use and Availability for Bettong Reintroductions to Dirk Hartog Island.



# From Pollen to Preservation:

Establishing baseline data for conservation of native bees in Northeast Arnhem Land

**George (Clancy) Lester**

School of Biosciences,  
University of Melbourne

Dr Clive Williams OAM Memorial Wildlife Conservation Scholarship Recipient

**Australia is home to around 1,650 species of native bees, but the actual number is likely closer to 2,000 as many species have yet to be described. Data on bee populations is extremely limited, particularly in remote regions like the Northern Territory, where only 200 species have been officially recorded. My research team and I were invited to support a collaborative investigation into the status of native bee populations in Barrkira, a small First Nation homeland of Northeast Arnhem Land.**

The pristine environment of Northeast Arnhem Land is dominated by a mosaic of Darwin stringybark (*Eucalyptus tetrodonta*) woodlands and open savannah tropical grasslands. It is

not as exposed to the threats that native bees typically face worldwide, such as land clearing, pesticide use, and intensification of agriculture and urbanisation. Yet, Yolju elders have reported changes in bee activity and flowering patterns in recent years, as well as less predictable and diminished honey harvests. We aimed to address these concerns by investigating native bee populations, the plants they forage on, and the flowering patterns of food plants at Barrkira.

## Investigating Bee Populations

Together with Yolju rangers, we conducted surveys of local bee and plant populations, focusing on areas known for Guku production. We used sweep nets to capture foraging bees from flowering shrubs and herbs. We surveyed three sites across Barrkira

each month for three months during the 2023 dry season when native bees were more likely to be observed. These surveys have continued into 2024 and are contributing to a long-term monitoring project.

The surveys resulted in collecting specimens from at least twenty-three different bee species from four of the five bee families in Australia. Bees from the family Megachilidae, particularly the genus *Megachile*, were the most common. Many captured species, such as the *Megachile remeata* and *Leioproctus sp.*, have never been reported this far north in Australia. Remarkably, not a single European honeybee was observed. We identified thirty-seven species of flowering plants, many of which are endemic to the Northern Territory.

## Unravelling the Web of Bee-Plant Interactions

In the lab, we collected pollen from each bee specimen and traced the DNA from pollens to the DNA of potential source plants growing in the region. This analysis, known as



A *Megachile remeata* specimen collected from Barrkira, Northern Territory, is currently only known to exist in New South Wales, Western Australia, and South Australia. Image: Clancy Lester.



Turkey bush (*Calytrix exstipulata*) is a common flowering plant species in the region. Image: Clancy Lester.



A potentially undescribed *Leioproctus* native bee species collected from Barrkira. Image: Clancy Lester.



Members of the Barrkira research team, from left to right: Josepha, Hamish (Yirralka Ranger), Clancy, and Sean. Image: Clancy Lester.



Dr Rachele Wilson and Dhimurru and Yirralka Rangers speaking to Learning on Country participants. Image: Clancy Lester.

DNA metabarcoding, uncovered a complex web of interactions between native bees and flowering plants. Our analysis identified seventy-eight different plant species from bee-collected pollen. Notably, *Jacksonia (Jacksonia dilatata)* from the Fabaceae family and both turkey bush (*Calytrix exstipulata*) and Darwin stringybark from the Myrtaceae family were the most frequently foraged plants, highlighting their importance as critical resources during the dry season.

As the season progressed, we observed shifts in bee pollen diets, with *Jacksonia* becoming more prevalent over time and turkey bush less so. These findings suggest that bee foraging behaviour can be dynamic in nature. There were several generalist bee species that foraged from upwards of fifteen different species of flowering plants. Several species demonstrated more specialised foraging patterns, only collecting pollen from a single family of flowering plants. We are currently looking at historical herbarium records of key flowering resources like the turkey bush, *Jacksonia*, and Darwin stringybark to find the data to support the claims of shifting flowering times observed by Yolŋu knowledge holders.

#### **Engaging the Next Generation: A Two-Way Learning Experience**

In the spirit of reciprocity, we volunteered to co-host a school camp at Barrkira through the Yirrkala School's Learning on Country Program alongside Dhimurru and Yirralka Rangers. Over one hundred participants across Arnhem Land attended the camp, which focused on learning 'two ways' – integrating Western scientific methods with Yolŋu traditional knowledge.

Students eagerly learned about pollination, plant reproduction, and the intricacies of collecting insects. The honey harvesting and insect-catching activities were particularly popular, with students quickly mastering using aspirators to catch bees. Elders, teachers, and rangers played a crucial role in translating and incorporating traditional knowledge into every aspect of the camp, ensuring that Yolŋu science, song, and dance associated with bees are passed on to the next generation. I invite you to follow my journey and ongoing research on Instagram @ beesandblossoms.aus.

**Funds provided by the Australian Wildlife Society will assist in sequencing the DNA of pollen foraged by native bees.**



# Tracking an Elusive Predator:

Mature Male Tiger Sharks, Along Eastern Australia

**Alexandra Ikpe**

School of Science, Technology and Engineering,  
The University of Sunshine Coast

## Sharks are Friends, Not Food

As apex predators, sharks affect ecosystems through direct predation and indirect influence on the behaviour of other animals, trickling down to affect plant life. The prolonged absence of sharks in any given environment can trigger longer-term changes to community assemblages, and given enough time, it can result in entirely new ecosystems. While natural absences of sharks exist in nature (i.e., seasonal distributions), unnatural and prolonged changes due to climate change or shrinking populations allow for the increase of other species, leading to larger, potentially irreversible shifts. Despite their importance and minimal evolution over

the last one hundred million years, many sharks remain scantily studied.

Current assessments find that 37 percent of shark (and ray) species are threatened with extinction, meaning the probability of shifting marine environments increases as shark populations dwindle. Not only do sharks face the threat of population decline, but climate change in the form of warming water temperatures has led to shifts in distributions geographically and temporally of both predator and prey species. While all sharks face similar issues, along the eastern coast of Australia, the large apex tiger shark (*Galeocerdo cuvier*) exerts significant influence on marine life and is thus the focus of my research.

## Tigers Down Under

Tiger sharks are commonly sought out in the adventure world of freediving and scuba diving but are also a source of fear with their linkage to human bites. However, the tiger shark is an essential keystone species in the warm reef and coastal waters of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans. This shark is remarkable for the long distances it swims throughout seasonal and multi-year migrations and the deep depths it dives during diel movements, linking distant and distinct coastal and oceanic marine ecosystems. While research between regions differs slightly, a strong link between water temperature and seasonal migration has been identified for the species. However, species-specific reasons for this link, or potential drivers behind their movement, have yet to be determined.

In Australia, tiger sharks occupy the west, north, and east coasts and surrounding seas. Genetics indicates one population occupies the entire Indo-Pacific region, highlighting the massive spatial distribution and tolerance of the species. In Western Australia, a few critical publications have focused on assessing the influence of tiger sharks on their environment and determined that this species plays a vital mediating role that helps maintain ecosystem stability and homeostasis.

In a highly dynamic ecosystem, it is imperative to identify and understand the movement behaviours of this keystone species. Most information on the distribution and dispersal patterns of tiger sharks along eastern Australia comes from recreational and commercial anglers and the Queensland and New South Wales shark control and management programs. While this information has aided in laying the foundation for species assessment, they fail to provide useful information surrounding residency, migration, and offshore movement and activity.



An example of double tag positioning of a tagged mature male tiger shark (*Galeocerdo cuvier*).  
Image: Alexandra Ikpe.



A 378 centimetre male tiger shark (*Galeocerdo cuvier*) was tagged in Coffs Harbor, New South Wales, on 13 December 2022. Image: Alexandra Ikpe.

### Advanced Technology

As technology has advanced and satellite tagging has cemented itself as a valuable and effective tool for tracking shark movement, researchers can better infer patterns, trends, activity, and migrations. Basic movement theory reasons that movement is the external response to the internal act of balancing energy acquisition and expenditure, which is influenced by environmental factors (e.g., habitat types), biological factors (e.g., age), and ocean conditions (e.g., water temperature). A comprehensive understanding of movement should enable the backward tracking process of determining the main drivers of energy acquisition and expenditure, deriving more robust representations of tiger shark ecology and biological processes.

### Think Like a Man

Current tracking data related to tiger shark movement in eastern Australia has mainly focused on coastal movements of juveniles and mature females. This data results from opportunistic sampling using readily available support, such as shark control programs and fisheries operating along the coastline. It may also be the result of a sex-biased movement.

In 2018, 4,750 records of tiger shark capture from Cairns, Queensland, to Wollongong, New South Wales, spanning sixty-five years, were

analysed, and the ensuing report indicated that 61 percent of the catch was female. The under-representation and lack of data on mature male tiger sharks may indicate sex-specific activity, movement, or segregation. As is seen across the animal kingdom, sex biases result from different biological needs and, consequently, result in different ecological uses. These differences in life requirements for males and females likely drive the differences in behaviour and habitat use across local and regional scales.

Several publications from other regions have already suggested that sex-specific patterns exist for tiger sharks, although these are highly variable between regions. Mature females exhibited extensive migrations in the Coral Sea and Chesterfield Island reefs, while mature males showed site fidelity. In the Gulf of Mexico, mature males showed higher levels of dispersal. With such variability across the species seemingly dependent on region, research focused on mature male movement in eastern Australia is necessary to ascertain any sex-biased movement for this ecologically important area and to understand its impact on regional marine ecosystems.

### Tracking an Elusive Predator

The lack of current data on male tiger sharks, combined with a concern about the shifting distributions of

marine species due to climate change-induced shifts in oceanic conditions, including evidence solidifying the shifting patterns of tiger sharks, forms the foundation of my research into the movement of tiger sharks along the east coast of Australia.

The project aims to quantify the movements of mature male tiger sharks using an assembly of satellite tags to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this species' movements. It will identify where male tiger sharks travel, what type of movement characterises migrations, and what may be driving or initiating dispersal. In comparing data from these tracked males with data acquired from mature females and juveniles, evidence of important habitats such as mating or birthing grounds, significant migratory corridors, residency, and refuge habitats may come to light. Determining these various areas of importance and identifying patterns and trends is critical for monitoring and managing the population, particularly when preparing for a future dramatically impacted by climate change.

Satellite tagging offers the ability to track marine animals through their environment, collecting and archiving data that reflects depth, speed, and location during swimming. Captured mature male tiger sharks will be fitted with satellite tags that remain active between 150 days and two years and transmit data through the satellite system, so no tag retrieval post-release is required.

Preliminary data has displayed incredible results, with satellite tags tracking from 34 to 630 days and resurfacing along the eastern coast and over one thousand miles away in New Caledonia in the South Pacific. The most challenging aspect of the research is finding mature male tiger sharks. Suspected sex-biased dispersal from the lack of mature males caught coastally means catching this sub-section of the population requires more targeted fishing efforts. Records from recreational fishing competitions and previous field studies have shown that mature male tiger sharks frequent waters around the continental shelf and in bays such as Hervey Bay and Moreton Bay in Queensland, narrowing the study range to specific areas to increase successful fishing.

**Funds provided by the Australian Wildlife Society will assist in financing transportation to field sites and hiring boats for days at sea.**



# Can we use Soundscapes to Monitor the Biodiversity of Marine Habitats?

**Alice Howie**

School of Natural Sciences,  
Macquarie University

We are presently witnessing an alarming decline in our marine and coastal ecosystems, primarily due to unsustainable land uses, coastal development, and a changing climate. Coral reefs, seagrass, mangroves, salt marsh, oyster reefs and kelp forests each play a crucial role in supporting healthy and productive seascapes – that, in turn, support communities and economies. Some ecosystems, such as oyster reefs, have already become functionally extinct globally. Conservation alone cannot solve this problem, and increasingly, scientists are looking towards ecological restoration to recover these ecosystems and the services that they provide.

In recent years, the rate and spatial scale of ecological restoration of marine ecosystems has increased, accelerated by the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, Ocean Science, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework – with a target to restore and conserve at least 30 percent of all ecosystems by 2030.

## What is 'Ecological Restoration'?

The United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration defines restoration as "the process of halting and reversing degradation, resulting

in improved ecosystem services and recovered biodiversity". Ecosystem restoration encompasses a vast continuum of practices depending on local conditions, threats, and societal choices.

## How is Restoration Progress Measured?

Traditional biodiversity monitoring of marine habitat restoration projects typically relies on visual census surveys (i.e., diver transects or underwater cameras) or coring (i.e., collecting a vertical profile of invertebrates hiding within the habitat). We can compare

the biodiversity present at an impact/ restoration site to a reference site (remnant, intact habitat) – and track how the biological community of the restoration site slowly evolves over time to resemble the community of the reference site.

However, these methods only capture a snapshot in time of ecological data, are labour intensive, expensive, logistically complex, limited by visibility (night and water clarity), destructive (coring) and often poor at monitoring cryptic organisms and ecological connectivity. Restoration and conservation programmes are generally also time, resource, and funding limited, making it challenging to report on their progress using traditional methods, particularly over extended time frames.

## Can Monitoring Soundscapes Help?

Parallel to the terrestrial realm of bird calls and cicada choruses, marine biophony (biological sounds) is



Hydromoths – underwater microphones will be deployed for one month across the seascapes to collect acoustic data. Image: Alice Howie.



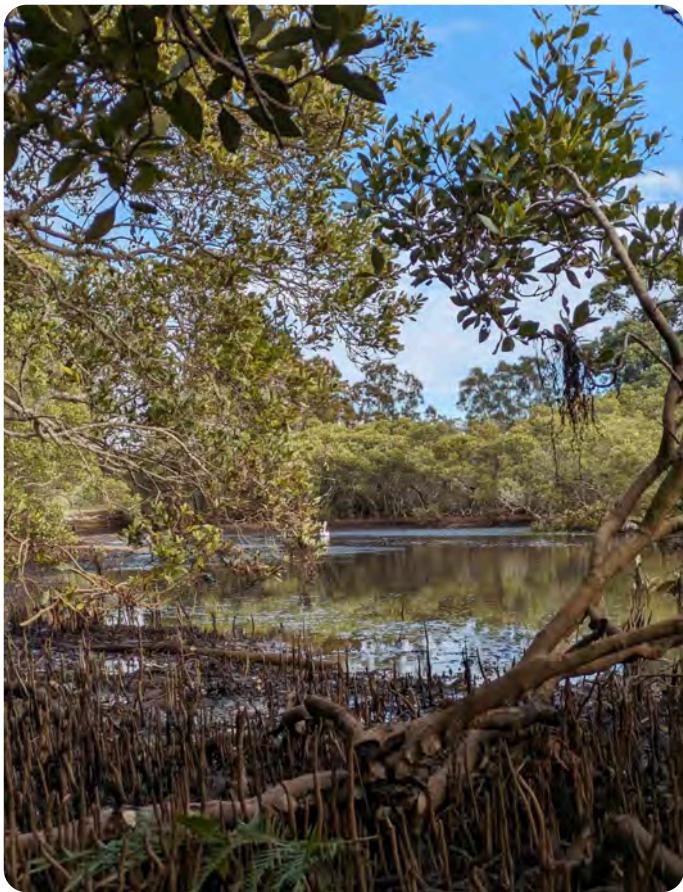
An example of ecological restoration in action. Planting ribbon weed (*Posidonia australis*), a seagrass, into old boat mooring scars in Port Stephens, New South Wales. Image: Grumpy Turtle Creative.



Project contractors are moving reef material for the intertidal Sydney Rock Oyster Reef Restoration project in Port Stephens, New South Wales. Image: M&J Marine.



Researchers collecting invertebrate samples from remnant oyster reefs in Port Stephens, New South Wales. Image: Vicky Cole.



Mangrove forests (top left), seagrass meadows (top right), and oyster reefs (bottom right). Images: Francisco Baena-Martinez and Alice Howie.

comprised mainly of soniferous fish and snapping shrimp – and can reflect a range of important biological processes, from spawning to feeding, competition, and courtship. The abundance and diversity of biophony measured across a landscape can reflect species richness and habitat and local environmental conditions. It can also be summarised with acoustic metrics. Whilst this is well established in monitoring terrestrial biodiversity, the application of acoustic monitoring to marine biodiversity assessments is still in its infancy. It is also largely limited in its applications outside of research. Yet, a growing body of evidence demonstrates relationships between the marine habitat soundscapes and traditional ecological metrics (i.e., benthic cover, habitat condition, fish communities, ecosystem functioning).

The prospect of passive acoustic monitoring complementing traditional biodiversity monitoring could reduce the cost of monitoring in the short term, potentially allowing longer-term monitoring periods. Long-term monitoring of restoration and conservation projects is important to document the trajectory of species/habitats after human intervention, inform adaptive management approaches, and orient future conservation actions.

#### The Research Project

Developing an acoustic monitoring program for seascapes requires understanding factors influencing sound attenuation across the seascapes and how soundscapes reflect the ecological community composition of habitat patches. Over the 2024–2025 summer, we will conduct field-based experiments across several intertidal/shallow subtidal habitats (seagrass meadows, mangrove forests and oyster reefs) to understand whether acoustic biodiversity indices will correlate to traditional biodiversity metrics.

**Funds provided by the Australian Wildlife Society**  
**will assist with travel expenses, fieldwork costs, and equipment to collect and store samples.**





# Thermal Drones as a Promising Tool for Monitoring Endangered Spectacled Flying-Foxes (*Pteropus conspicillatus*)

**Emmeline Norris**

Centre for Tropical Environmental and Sustainability Science,  
James Cook University

Wildlife population declines are accelerating globally due to anthropogenic climate change and habitat destruction. Tropical forest fauna is particularly susceptible to extinction due to the combined impacts of agricultural land clearing, hunting, edge effects, and lower thermal tolerances of many species to extreme heat events. Rigorous population assessments are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of management actions and direct limited conservation resources where they are most needed. Obtaining reliable population counts can be challenging, limiting the accuracy of population assessments. This is particularly true of tropical forests where dense vegetation and complex terrain hinder access and obscure animals. Fortunately, recent advances in thermal imaging and drone technology offer promising solutions for improving threatened species monitoring.

One species that could benefit from these innovations is the spectacled flying-fox (*Pteropus conspicillatus*), a fruit bat endemic to tropical forests in north-eastern regions of Queensland. As a keystone species involved in pollination and seed dispersal services, conserving the spectacled flying-fox is important for preserving Australia's ancient tropical forests. Over the

past two decades, this species has suffered a severe population decline, exacerbated by a heatwave in 2018 estimated to have killed roughly a third of the remaining population. Spectacled flying-foxes were subsequently up-listed as endangered under state, federal, and international conservation acts. With the recent ending of the National Flying-fox

Monitoring Program, there is an urgent need to reevaluate methods to monitor population recovery and inform policy decisions.

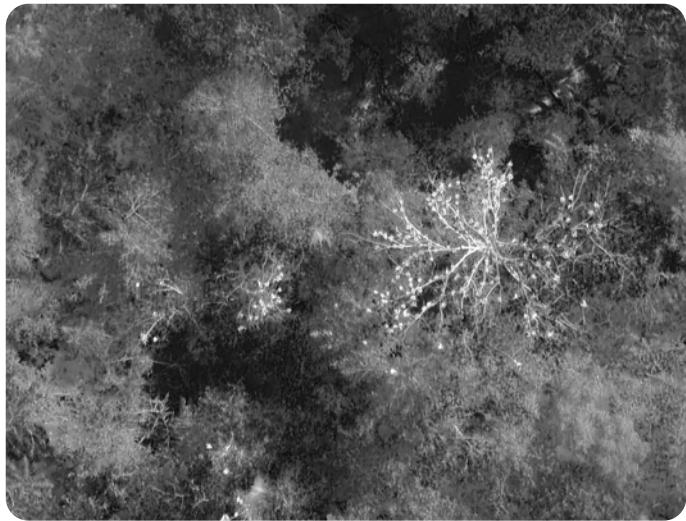
Accurate population estimates are essential for effectively conserving spectacled flying-foxes as they help determine whether the population trend is stabilising, improving, or deteriorating. Current abundance estimates generally rely on ground-based methods, such as counting fly-out streams at dusk or walking through colonies of flying-foxes roosting in trees, known as camps, to count individuals. However, these methods have significant limitations. Fly-out counts, which tally flying-foxes as they leave camps to forage, often over- or underestimate colony sizes, while walk-through counts are impractical in dense forests where flying-foxes are obscured by foliage and dangerous in



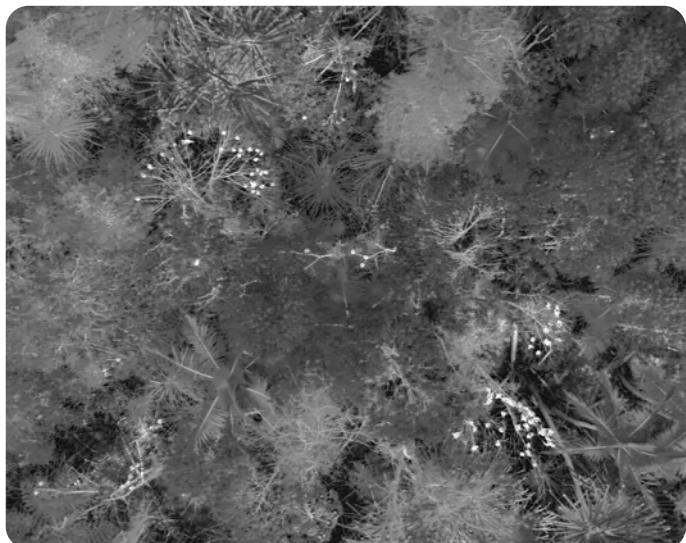
DJI Matrice 350 RTK drone equipped with a Zenmuse H30T thermal infrared payload used for capturing aerial thermal imagery of roosting spectacled flying-foxes (*Pteropus conspicillatus*). Image: Emmeline Norris.



Spectacled flying-foxes (*Pteropus conspicillatus*) roosting in a tree canopy in El Arish, North Queensland. Image: Emmeline Norris.



Drone-acquired thermal imagery showing spectacled flying-foxes (*Pteropus conspicillatus*) (bright spots) roosting in an open woodland dominated by *Corymbia* spp. at El Arish, North Queensland. Image: Emmeline Norris.



Drone-acquired thermal imagery showing spectacled flying-foxes (*Pteropus conspicillatus*) (bright spots) roosting in a Pandanus swamp at Feluga, North Queensland. Image: Emmeline Norris.



Emmeline uses a hand-held thermal camera to ground-truth spectacled flying-fox (*Pteropus conspicillatus*) thermal signatures in the drone-acquired thermal imagery. Image: Richard Hopkinson.

swamps and mangroves where crocodiles lurk. Moreover, counts from both methods are heavily influenced by observer bias. As a result, population estimates rely on incomplete and unreliable data, introducing substantial errors when forecasting population trends. Developing more reliable and repeatable methods to conduct a census of spectacled flying-foxes is thus an important step in detecting and preventing further declines.

Drone-based thermal imaging offers a promising alternative to ground counts by minimising observer error, reducing labour costs, and overcoming challenges posed by site inaccessibility and poor visibility in tropical forests. As spectacled flying-foxes roost in the tree canopy, they can theoretically be detected more efficiently by a thermal camera mounted to a drone than by a human observer looking up from below. Nonetheless, canopy foliage and high ambient temperatures could prevent individuals from being detected in drone imagery if their thermal signature cannot be distinguished from the background environment. It is currently unknown whether censuses using drone-mounted thermal cameras can provide accurate and precise population counts for this species since the technology has not yet been tested for spectacled flying-foxes or in the tropical forests of northern Australia.

This project, therefore, has two main objectives. First, it aims to determine the optimal technical parameters and environmental conditions for detecting spectacled flying-foxes in drone-acquired thermal imagery across the various forest ecosystems they inhabit. This will inform a drone-based monitoring protocol for censusing spectacled flying-foxes to be implemented by Terrain NRM, the natural resource management body for the Wet Tropics, in collaboration with the Rainforest Aboriginal People's Land and Sea Ranger groups and funded by the Australian Government. Population data obtained from two years of drone-based censuses will contribute to the second aim: establish a standardised and widely applicable method for assessing population trajectories in highly mobile species with spatially and temporally unpredictable population dynamics.

Preliminary results from surveys conducted in the Atherton Tablelands and Cassowary Coast of North Queensland have shown that spectacled flying-foxes can be readily detected in drone-acquired thermal imagery despite high ambient temperatures (27–30°C) and humidity (60–80 percent). Notably, spectacled flying-foxes have shown no disturbance response to drones flying 20 metres above the canopy. In contrast, they display visible signs of agitation when human observers walk beneath roost trees by vocalising, climbing higher, or flying away. These observations suggest that drone-based surveys may offer a less invasive alternative to ground-based monitoring methods.

The results of this study will have immediate and critical applications to threatened species conservation that align with current national priorities. This project is also expected to positively impact tropical conservation research by enhancing census techniques for difficult-to-monitor species, refining methods for modelling population trajectories and informing conservation listings. We aim to reach a global audience to support prioritising conservation resources through an improved understanding of population trends.

**Funds provided by the Australian Wildlife Society** will assist with purchasing equipment and consumables for drone surveys, software required for image processing, and fieldwork-related expenses, including car hire, fuel, and accommodation.



# Mycorrhizal Diversity in Australian Temperate Forests in the Context of Drought and Nitrogen Deposition

**Luke Florence**

Department of Environment and Genetics,  
La Trobe University

**The forests of eastern and south-eastern Australia are not just beautiful; they are living museums of biodiversity and evolutionary history, containing some of the world's most ancient plant lineages. However, these natural treasures face growing challenges. One major threat is the increasing drought-induced tree mortality, which is putting pressure on the biodiversity of these ecosystems. Another concern is that these forests are located in areas with the highest human population density in Australia, making them hotspots for nitrogen deposition – a global change factor driven by human activities such as burning fossil fuels and industrial agriculture.**

Mycorrhizal fungi form a vital partnership with tree roots, helping them access nutrients and water. In return, trees provide the fungi with carbon sourced from photosynthesis. There are two main types of mycorrhizal fungi: arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi and ectomycorrhizal fungi, each with its own strategies for acquiring nutrients and coping with drought. Arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi thrive in nitrogen-rich soils, while ectomycorrhizal fungi perform better in nitrogen-limited soils and are particularly adept at helping trees withstand drought.

While much is known about how nitrogen deposition and drought dynamics play out in the Northern Hemisphere – where research has shown that increased nitrogen can tip the competitive balance in favour of arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi, leading to significant changes in forest tree composition, often exacerbated by drought – the situation in Australia is less understood. Our biodiversity is distinct, and our soils are notoriously low in nutrients. Given these unique conditions, it is crucial to explore how increased nitrogen and drought are affecting our trees and the fungi they depend on.

This component of my PhD research aims to shed light on the impact of soil nitrogen and water limitation on mycorrhizal fungal communities in Australian forests by sequencing fungal DNA from the soil in over one hundred forest plots across eastern and south-eastern Australia. By identifying which mycorrhizal fungal species are most vulnerable to increased nitrogen and water limitation, I hope to provide insights that could help protect these vital ecosystems. Understanding how these ancient partnerships between trees and fungi change will be critical to developing strategies to help our forests survive and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

**Funds provided by the Australian Wildlife Society will contribute to soil DNA extraction and sequencing costs.**



*Cantharellus concinnus* is an ectomycorrhizal fungus that commonly grows in mixed forests of *Casuarina* and *Eucalyptus* across eastern and south-eastern Australia. Image: Steve Axford.



The subtropical rainforest surrounding Sheepstation Creek in northern New South Wales is home to some of the world's most ancient plant lineages. Understanding the challenges these rainforests face is crucial for protecting their future. Image: Steve Axford.



# Determining The Distribution and Migratory Flyways of Bogong Moths (*Agrotis infusa*) Using Genetic and Stable Isotope Analyses

**Rose Lownds**

School of Science,  
Western Sydney University

The iconic migratory Bogong moth (*Agrotis infusa*) has been slowly declining since the 1950s and dramatically crashed between 2017–2019 when the number of moths arriving at monitored alpine sites fell to less than 5 percent of the expected four billion moths. In 2021, Bogong moths were listed as Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species due to their declining alpine habitat quality. If Bogong moth numbers are to be stabilised and maintained in the face of global change, knowledge gaps surrounding their ecology must be studied further. The most significant knowledge gap is identifying their distribution and migratory flyways.

Bogong moths are known for their remarkable annual migration of up to one thousand kilometres from their breeding grounds across the lowlands of southern Australia to the Australian Alps. Over the hot summer months, they remain dormant in a hibernation-like state known as aestivation in cool caves and crevices. In autumn, the moths migrate to breeding grounds to produce the next generation before

dying. The same migratory process occurs during the next spring with new individuals.

Bogong moths are deeply culturally important to many First Nations Australians. They are essential in the ecosystem functioning of the Australian Alps, where they provide crucial transport of nutrients from the lowlands to the high-elevation areas of

the mountains and have critical roles in the local nitrogen and phosphorus nutrient cycles. The moths are also the primary food source for critically endangered mammals, including the mountain pygmy possum (*Burramys parvus*) and southern bent-wing bat (*Miniopterus orianae bassanii*).

Agricultural intensification and chemical pest control methods have likely driven the decline of Bogong moths since the 1950s. It is also thought that the drought experienced between 2017–2019 impacted the survivability of Bogong moth larvae by causing a lack of food plants and inhospitable soil moisture and temperature levels. Climate change, as a whole, has likely had a significant impact on the survival of bogong moths in all life stages in



Mount Buffalo, Victoria, at sunset. Mount Buffalo's granite terrain is home to many migratory Bogong moths during their aestivation period through the hot summer months. Image: Kate Umbers.

their winter breeding grounds, and their aestivation habitats are also becoming restricted to areas of higher elevation due to declining thermal quality.

Knowledge of where Bogong moths are at each time of the year is fundamental in designing and implementing effective conservation strategies, promoting citizen science recording schemes, and in the future study of the effects of global change on the moth's ecology and habitat quality. There is limited knowledge regarding the extent of the Bogong moth's breeding grounds, so it is difficult to know the migratory flyways used as the locations encompassing the beginning and end of the annual migration cycle are unknown. By creating accurate maps of their flyways and distribution, we can provide critical information to design effective monitoring and management schemes and establish the foundation for all future Bogong moth conservation actions.

This project will use a combination of cutting-edge molecular techniques to investigate the migratory movements of Bogong moths. Geographic assignment of the moth's place of birth (natal origin) using stable isotope analysis will be combined with population genomic analysis to estimate the geographic areas where the moths begin their migration. Pollen identification through metabarcoding analysis will inform us of areas where the insects may have fed along their migration routes.

Stable isotope analysis can determine an animal's natal origin by assigning an individual's isotopic signature to those in their distribution range. Determining the natal origins of collected Bogong moth specimens will develop our understanding of the migratory flyways used by the moths, and stable isotope analysis can also be performed in combination with pollen analysis to develop our knowledge of the nutritional ecology of Bogong moths. Analysis of pollen collected from moth specimens may also reveal specific migratory flyways if the identified plants are found to have local distributions. This information can also be used to design planting schemes for 'Bogong-friendly' plants along their migratory routes.

Additionally, estimates of features such as population size and structure from using genomic analysis can be useful

**Funds provided by the Australian Wildlife Society will assist with travel expenses and accommodation to field sites where Bogong moths will be collected for stable isotope and genomic analyses.**



A Bogong moth (*Agrotis infusa*) at Snowy River in Charlotte Pass, New South Wales. Bogong moths have an overall dark brown appearance with two light-coloured spots on each forewing and are 25–35 millimetres in body length. Image: Kate Umbers.

in inferring migratory routes and predicting a population's capacity for persistence and adaptation in response to environmental change. If distinct Bogong moth populations are found to occur, e.g. distinct populations in western versus eastern Australia, then moths of unknown origin may be able to be geographically assigned with the data contributing to the mapping of migratory flyways.

The primary project outcome is to map the main flyways used by the Bogong moths during migration and collect information on where they may refuel during their journey. Researchers and

policymakers will use this knowledge to inform future conservation actions. The mapping will also be integral to future state and national-level listing proposals for this species. Overall, this project will deliver conservation-focused research to support future management actions to protect the Bogong moth. Recorded observations of Bogong moths by the general public are instrumental in helping us to understand their migratory flyways – Bogong.org is a platform where you can find further information on how to record observations and provide data for essential conservation efforts for this endangered species.



Granite boulder fields near Dead Horse Gap in Kosciuszko National Park, New South Wales. Bogong moths prefer cool dark caves and crevices for their aestivation sites as the temperature and humidity levels tend to be more stable, reducing their water loss through the extended period of dormancy. Image: Kate Umbers.



# Perish or Persist?

## Marine Invertebrate Responses to Climate Change Impacts

**Jasmine Towle**

School of Biological Sciences,  
The University of Adelaide

**Temperate Australia is a global hotspot for marine biodiversity. However, unprecedented rates of environmental change, such as rising ocean temperatures, fluctuations in salinity, and wave exposure, threaten species survival. Species can either adapt in situ or shift their range to persist under climate change impacts. Marine species are particularly vulnerable due to the narrow latitudinal range of Australia's temperate coastline. As anthropogenic climate change pressures increase, it is critical to assess marine species' responses to climate change to understand the impact on temperate marine ecosystems.**

Intertidal marine invertebrates play a critical role in maintaining the structure, health, and functioning of intertidal habitats and provide essential ecosystem services to inshore subtidal habitats. Temperate intertidal ecosystems in Australia have a unique biodiversity, hosting more mollusc endemic species than anywhere globally due to historically stable geography, rocky shorelines, and unique oceanography, including divided east and west boundary currents. Climate change has modified the distribution and habitat availability of marine invertebrates in Australia. Coastal temperate Australian species are more at risk of climate change than species occurring in tropical or pelagic systems due to their reduced capacity to extend their range and move poleward.

Phylogeography allows us to discover historical and contemporary barriers to gene flow, such as past glacial events. There are many types of barriers to gene flow for marine coastal invertebrates, including physical and oceanographic. Physical barriers include land bridges arising during past glacial events and currents. Oceanographic barriers include changes in water temperature, salinity, and pH. Historical barriers such as glacial events have influenced species distributions through glacial refugia and postglacial dispersal events such as secondary contact of populations. Phylogeography allows us to see how populations have responded to past environmental change, which we can compare to current studies to understand how populations respond to contemporary climate change.

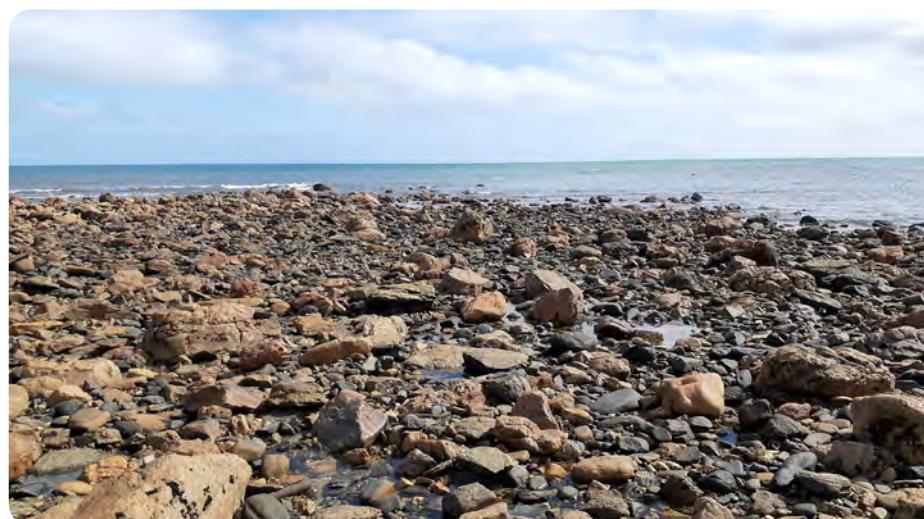
Marine invertebrates have a high degree of phenotypic plasticity, which can make species more adaptive to climate change. Therefore, by studying their behavioural and physiological responses to climate change impacts, scientists can examine different ecosystems most vulnerable for prioritised conservation efforts.

Scientists have also found that marine invertebrates, though they can be the most adaptive species, are also the more vulnerable; therefore, studying their life history traits is critical to species mitigation. Different morphological traits affect how species adapt to an increasing climate; for example, foot muscle size and shape in marine snails promote resistance to increased wave action. Key morphological differences of species, such as shape and size variation, can be studied in populations across environmental gradients to understand what climate change impacts affect species the most. Species may have altered adaptive responses across different environmental gradients, which, along with a species plastic ability, affect their overall fitness under climate change.

The research project will identify phylogeographic barriers and adaptive traits of intertidal marine invertebrates in temperate Australia. We will be able to explore climate change-induced environmental changes affecting biodiversity and predict if species will shift their range in the future.

The project will aim to answer the following research questions:

1. Has past (i.e. Pleistocene) climate change affected gene flow between marine invertebrate populations across temperate Australia, and are there currently barriers to gene flow?, and
2. Are there morphological differences in shape between replicate populations across existing environmental gradients that may allow us to predict how species will respond to future change?



An intertidal site on the Eyre Peninsula, South Australia. Image: Jasmine Towle.

Data will be collected from twenty-one sites across temperate Australia. The data collected will include genetic (tissue samples) and morphological (measurements) from six species. The species are waratah anemone (*Actinia tenebrosa*), tall-ribbed limpet (*Patelloida alticostata*), rough beaked mussel (*Brachidontes erosus*), little blue periwinkle (*Austrolittorina unifasciata*), purple four-plated barnacle (*Tetraclitella purpurascens*) and the black-fingered crab (*Ozius truncatus*). All species are endemic to Australia. The species are from three different phylum, Mollusca, Cnidaria, and Arthropoda and occupy different zonations within their intertidal habitat.

The genetic data will be used to identify phylogeographic variation between species across an environmental gradient. We will examine populations of each of the six species to evaluate if populations are currently connected by gene flow or if there are phylogenetically distinct sub-populations. This will tell us whether climate change has influenced the population structure of species across temperate Australia and whether the ranges of species are shifting.

The morphological data will be used to infer information about physiological traits to determine how they are adapting to increasing climate change. Each species has different environmental adaptations and/or significance for examining how climate change affects them. Morphologies of species control different functions that affect their fitness, so examining morphology across different species allows us to examine more variation across an environmental gradient. Since the species inhabit different zones within the intertidal zone, we can assess how and if environmental variables affect one zone more than the other.

Genetic, morphological, and ecological data will generate species distribution models. These models can be linked with environmental data to predict how species will respond to future climate change. Understanding which environmental variables contribute to species distributions allows us to predict future range shifts of species.



One of the intertidal sample sites near the coastal town of Port Rickaby, South Australia.  
Image: Jasmine Towle.



A rough beaked mussel (*Brachidontes erosus*) pictured in a mussel bed. Image: Jasmine Towle.

**Funds provided by the Australian Wildlife Society will** be used for travel costs and sampling consumables. Many of the sites are very remote and have not been studied before.



# Reef Collapse, Functions and Alternative Desirable States

**Matthew Rose**

Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies,  
University of Tasmania

## Habitats and Species in a Warming World

Reef habitats, species, and the functioning of ecosystems are intimately intertwined. Living habitat-formers, such as corals and macroalgae, produce food and shelter for associated fish and invertebrate communities. In turn, these communities alter habitat through consumption. The configuration of habitat and the composition of species resulting from these interactions can be considered broadly as reef 'state'.

Human cultures, societies, and economies have evolved around and come to fundamentally depend upon certain reef states and the resources they provision. Across Australia, warming waters have caused recurrent

mass bleaching of Great Barrier Reef corals, a one hundred kilometre range contraction of golden kelp (*Ecklonia radiata*) in Western Australia, and the loss of 95 percent of giant kelp (*Macrocystis pyrifera*) cover from Tasmanian reefs. If recovery does not occur, these represent significant shifts in reef state, from high spatial complexity that results in more species exposed to simplistic 'collapsed' states. Such collapses occur alongside community reshuffling as 'range-extending' species radiate poleward with warming waters. In combination, these collapses and novel communities are altering the historical functioning of reefs, calling into question the persistence of reef states that humans find desirable.

## Shifting Functions and Desirable States

Primary production by coral and macroalgae introduces energy into ecosystems as matter. Consumers feed on them, facilitating energy flow through food webs, culminating in the spectacular array of inhabitants found on tropical and temperate reefs. In essence, this flow of energy and matter is the 'functioning' of an ecosystem, primarily driven by species.

Ecosystem functioning can be divided into discrete 'functions', which, depending on the context, can carry polarising consequences for reef states. For example, algae removal by herbivores occurs across both tropical and temperate systems, yet high rates of algae removal can promote desirable or undesirable states in each system, respectively. Quantifying this flow, from production to every step of consumption, is a crucial goal of 'functional ecology' research. Such research is critical to understanding how functional processes are altered by the novel communities formed as species shift their ranges. Understanding these processes can best inform conservation and restoration efforts, ideally maintaining historical reef states and functioning. But, as species and functions shift, we face increasingly challenging management decisions and perhaps need to consider 'alternative desirable states' – defined as a degraded ecosystem state that, through time, retains functions deemed critical by cultural, social, and economic values.

## Alternative Desirable States

Cultural, social, and economic values dictate that ecosystems have desirable states. Such values have evolved around the resources provisioned by ecosystem functions. For example, the functional processes of primary productivity, herbivory, and predation all successively work to produce populations of abalone and rock



Remote underwater GoPro videos capture desirable and collapsed reef states in temperate (top) and tropical (bottom) systems. Socially desirable states are characterised by complex habitat cover (left), supporting more diverse wildlife; collapsed states contrast this (right). Image: Matthew Rose.

lobster species. These reef species have supported First Nations people for millennia, resulting in a deep cultural connection to Sea Country.

Since the British invasion, further economic values have been formed around these same resources in a very different context. Continued access to such target species is dependent on reef states that support their populations, so it is clear that there are ideal desirable states that best provide two contrasting value systems. However, continued habitat collapse threatens the persistence of such historical states and functional processes. If conservation and restoration efforts cannot halt this trajectory, we may need to consider 'alternative desirable states'. By quantifying reef functions, we increase our capacity to conserve historical states and form evidence towards identifying and preserving these 'critical functions'.

### The Research Project

Our team has employed standardised video and functional assay methods, measuring herbivory and carnivory and the relative contributions of each species. Using multiple methods, our team captures the different ways different species feed and their contrasting impacts on habitat. The research sites span from tropical Far North Queensland to the increasingly less frigid waters of south-east Tasmania. Importantly, by replicating methods across tropical and temperate locations, we quantify the functional roles of species within different ecological contexts. Understanding how much a given species consumes within its historical home range can better forecast impacts as they shift poleward.

The research project, supported by the Australian Wildlife Society, Australian Research Council, and Holsworth Wildlife Research Endowment Fund, will contribute to understanding the dynamic relationships between reef species, functional processes, and reef states. This understanding is critical for forming evidence-based solutions for the complex challenges faced in ecosystem management today. In understanding reef functions, we are best equipped to conserve and restore desirable historical reef states or collectively decide upon alternative desirable states.

**Funds provided by the Australian Wildlife Society** will support travel expenses and associated fieldwork costs, including food and SCUBA diving-related equipment for multiple sites at three key locations: Orpheus Island, New South Wales, and Tasmania.



A day octopus (*Octopus cyanea*) finding shelter in a crevice at Mermaid Cove, Lizard Island, Queensland. Image: Matthew Rose.



PhD colleagues, Paula Ruiz-Ruiz and Matthew Rose, rigging camera tripods at Wistari Reef, Heron Island, Queensland. Image: Matthew Rose.



A banded morwong (*Chirodactylus spectabilis*) swimming through crayweed (*Phyllospora comosa*) and golden kelp (*Ecklonia radiata*) at St Helens Island, Tasmania. Image: Matthew Rose.



# Does Fragmentation Alter Predator Diets?

**Natalie Grassi**

School of Environmental and Conservation Sciences,  
Murdoch University

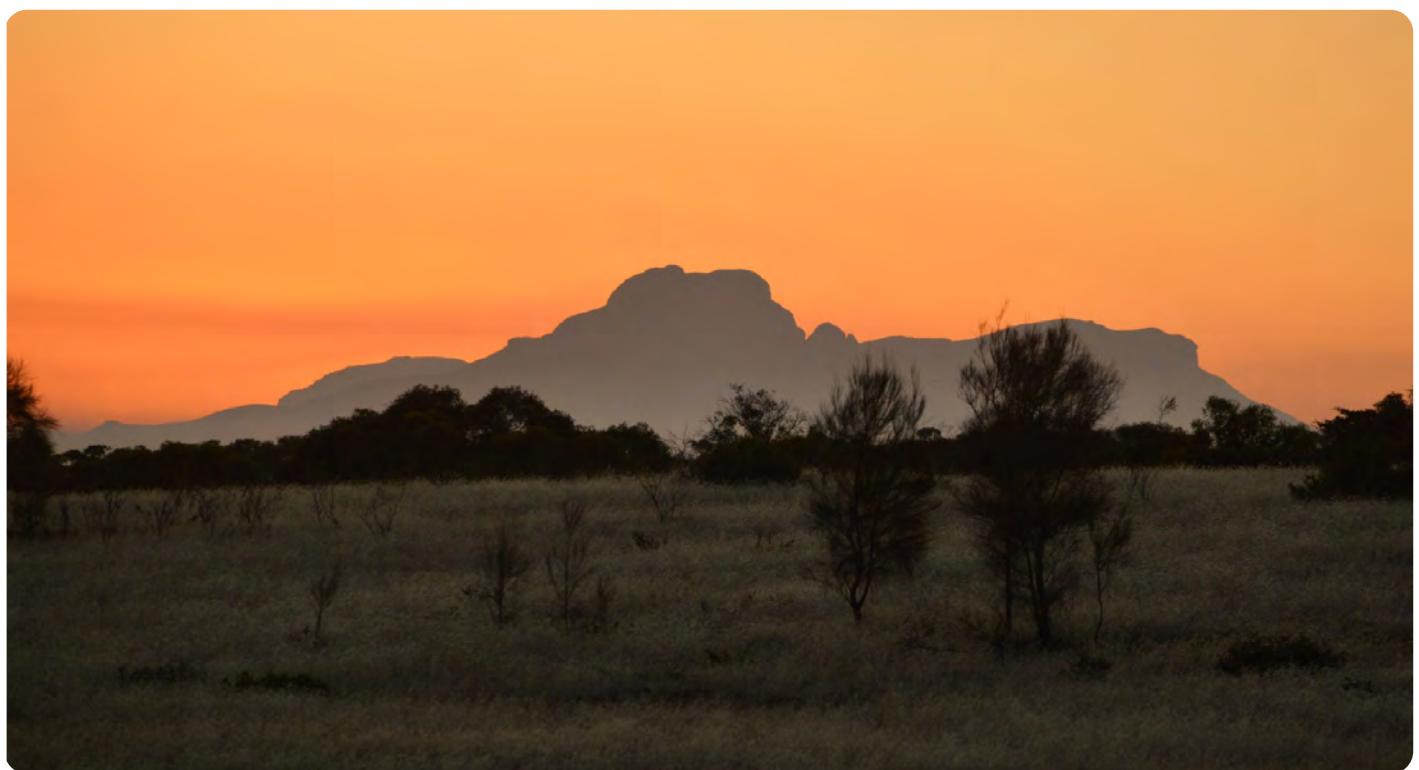
Red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) and feral cats (*Felis catus*) pose a significant threat to native Australian wildlife. Current estimates suggest that foxes kill 88 million reptiles, 103 million birds, and 108 million mammals annually within Australia, while cats (including pets, strays, and ferals) kill an average of 609 million reptiles, 399 million birds, and 1067 million mammals per year. The combined impact of these predators is believed to have caused at least twenty extinction events since their arrival in Australia, which is expected to rise without continued control efforts. Both predators exhibit flexible diets, adapting to the prey items that are most available and easiest to catch, a pattern that varies across landscapes and over time. Much of what we know about the threats these predators impose on wildlife comes from diet analyses and dissections of either scats or stomach contents. This analysis helps us identify at-risk native species, elucidate trophic interactions, and effectively prioritise conservation actions.

Unfortunately, introduced predators are not the only threat facing Australian wildlife. Habitat fragmentation is another significant threat, and it is the process in which large, continuous expanses of land are broken into smaller, more isolated

patches. One such landscape that has experienced severe fragmentation is the Fitz-Stirling macro-corridor (occupying a seventy kilometre stretch of the south-west Australian Floristic Region between the Stirling Range and Fitzgerald River National

Parks in Western Australia), which has experienced a loss of over 90 percent of its original vegetation cover and has since seen decades of extensive revegetation. This fragmentation works hand in hand with introduced predators to further exacerbate the extinction risk to native wildlife.

The process of habitat fragmentation removes natural shelters (such as logs or shrubs) from the landscape that native wildlife would have once used for escape or avoidance behaviours, and the isolation of patches means that wildlife must traverse large distances of cleared farmland when travelling between patches to seek new resources. The large amounts of cleared matrix from fragmentation form the preferred hunting grounds for introduced



The Fitz-Stirling is a highly fragmented landscape. Habitat patches have become smaller and more isolated. Wildlife in this landscape is particularly vulnerable to predation by introduced predators. Image: Natalie Grassi.

predators. Similarly, the mosaic of remnant habitat, revegetation, and cleared farmland creates ecotones, boundaries, or zones of gradience between two different habitat types, which are often relatively open and prone to edge effects, another preferred hunting ground for foxes and cats. Therefore, highly fragmented landscapes are particularly vulnerable and should be a focal point for predator diet analyses.

Using the Fitz-Stirling as a case study, the project aims to provide the first published diet analysis on foxes and cats within this landscape and compare dietary overlap between the two predators. Preliminary results of the study show that native mammals, birds, and invertebrates were the top three most frequently consumed items in a cat's diet. Native mammals found in cat stomachs were generally small-sized prey, including pygmy possums (*Cercartetus concinnus*), honey possums (*Tarsipes rostratus*), and ash-grey mice (*Pseudomys albocinereus*). The birds were mostly honeyeater species, including New Holland honeyeaters (*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*) and larger species, such as the ground-dwelling malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*). The invertebrates were mostly crickets and grasshoppers, consumed more by kittens than adult cats.

In contrast, invertebrates, introduced mammals, and native mammals were the top three diet items for foxes. In the fox diet, consumed invertebrates mainly included earwigs (*Dermoptera*), while consumed mammals were predominantly sheep (*Ovis aries*) and western grey kangaroo (*Macropus fuliginosus*). Preliminary results show that foxes consumed mammals more frequently than



Studying the diets of introduced predators, such as the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), helps quantify their threat to native wildlife. Image: Natalie Grassi.

cats. However, most of the sheep and kangaroo consumed by foxes were scavenged carcasses, so in this region, cats pose a greater predation risk to native wildlife.

The next aim of this study is to determine how fragmentation alters predator diets. To do this, we will compare how diet changes with the percentage of revegetation and remnant vegetation cover around the point of sample collection within a buffer zone the size of each predator's respective home range.

The results of this work will provide insight into which native species are most at risk of predation by cats and foxes and identify which habitat types our native wildlife are most at risk. The results of this work will be shared with Bush Heritage Australia and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation, and Attractions to motivate further predator control in the region.

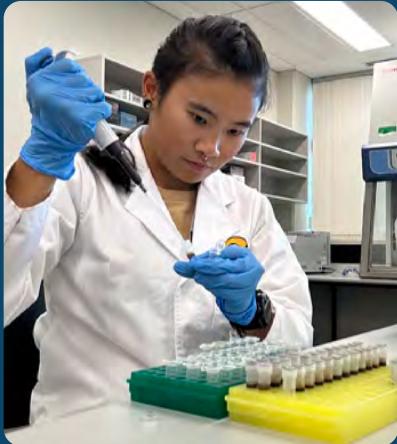
**Funds provided by the Australian Wildlife Society will support fieldwork to collect stomach samples and purchase ethanol and storage jars for sample preservation.**



Kangaroos were one of the most frequently consumed prey within the fox diet. However, these large kangaroo populations create ample carcasses which support fox populations in the area. Image: Natalie Grassi.



Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*) are a large, ground-dwelling bird and are highly vulnerable to fox and cat predation. Image: Natalie Grassi.



# Is There Mush-Room for Bettongs?

Resource Use and Availability for Bettong Reintroductions to Dirk Hartog Island

**Rebecca Quah**

School of Science,  
Edith Cowan University

**Mycophagous mammals (mammals that consume fungi) play an important role in ecosystems by dispersing fungi, which are essential for decomposing organic matter, recycling nutrients, and forming mutualistic relationships with plants. Many mycophagous mammals also serve as bioturbators, crucial for aerating soil, redistributing nutrients, and promoting seed germination while digging for truffle-like fungi underground. Unfortunately, European settlement profoundly impacted Australia's mammals due to the introduction of feral species, changing land use, and altered fire regimes. In particular, Australia has the highest percentage of threatened and extinct bioturbator mammals worldwide.**

Conservation translocations, which involve the movement of an organism from one location to another, offer a vital lifeline for threatened species and are a powerful tool for restoring ecosystems. However, inadequate planning and a lack of knowledge about target species have led to the

failure of many translocations in the past. Mycophagous species present a particularly complex challenge due to their unique dietary requirements. Fungal assemblages are seldom studied due to the vast number of undescribed species and the resource-intensive nature of conducting such research.

Two mycophagous mammals, the boodie (burrowing bettong; *Bettongia lesueur lesueur*) and the woylie (brush-tailed bettong; *Bettongia penicillata ogilbyi*), are listed respectively as Vulnerable and Endangered under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and have been identified for reintroduction to Dirk Hartog Island in Western Australia. They are among thirteen species planned for translocation to the 620 km<sup>2</sup> island as part of the 'Return to 1616' project in the Shark Bay World Heritage Area of Western

**Above:** Rebecca extracting DNA from scat samples in the lab. Image: Rebecca Quah.



Dirk Hartog Island is a large, remote island off the coast of Shark Bay, Western Australia. Image: Rebecca Quah.

Australia. The goal of this project is species conservation and ecological restoration.

In the late 19th century, Dirk Hartog Island was managed as a pastoral lease, grazed by sheep and goats. During this time, feral cats also became established on the island. Pastoral activity altered the island's landscape and, combined with cat predation, led to the loss of ten native mammals, including boodies and woylies. Today, Dirk Hartog Island is designated as a national park, and the initial threats posed by introduced predators and herbivores have been successfully eradicated; however, it is uncertain whether fungal resources required by the bettongs will remain.

Boodies and woylies can supplement their diets with plant matter, such as fungi – particularly truffles – which are known to make up a substantial component in the diet of both species. Despite this, our knowledge of the fungal assemblages that form their diet and occur in their habitats remains limited. Furthermore, there is a significant gap in our understanding of species' capacity to adapt to resources across various ecosystems, particularly in the context of translocations. This study seeks to better understand resource use and availability for boodies and woylies by asking: what fungi are these bettongs consuming in their extant environments?, what fungi are available and likely palatable for the bettongs on Dirk Hartog Island?, and will there be competition between the two species for limited resources?

Advances in technology, including applying environmental eDNA metabarcoding techniques to scat and soil samples, will allow us to understand the resource requirements of the bettongs and guide their reintroduction to Dirk Hartog Island. Scat samples will allow us to study the diet of the bettongs non-invasively, in contrast to the method of analysing gut contents. Soil samples will enable us to study fungal assemblages in the environment, offering a more efficient alternative to manual searches for fungal fruiting bodies, which are time-consuming, destructive to habitats, and labour-intensive. Next-generation DNA sequencing of these samples will help us overcome the limitations of taxonomic identification due to the high numbers of undescribed fungi by referencing fungal sequence libraries.

Over 120 scat and 100 soil samples have been collected from extant and potential source populations of boodies and woylies. These sites span temperate to arid environments to assess both species' capacity to adapt to resources in different landscapes. Additionally, 180 soil samples have been collected from various habitat types across Dirk Hartog Island over an



A boodie (*Bettongia lesueur lesueur*) was released after measurements and scat samples were taken. Image: Rebecca Quah.



Soil samples were collected at Mt Gibson Sanctuary, Western Australia. Image: Rebecca Quah.

autumn and spring season to represent the seasonal availability of fungi on the semi-arid island.

In the lab, samples will undergo DNA extraction, PCR amplification, library preparation, and sequencing. Raw fungal sequences will be clustered using bioinformatics software and identified using reference libraries. Statistical analysis will reveal species richness, diversity, relative abundance, and the overlap of fungi in scats and soils to answer the questions regarding resource use and availability. The results are anticipated to guide the

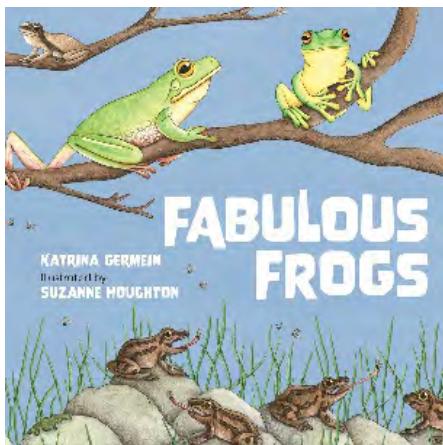
selection of release sites for boodies and woylies on Dirk Hartog Island and future conservation decisions for these species. If successful, this novel application of eDNA will help improve translocation success for mycophagous species, which is vital to maintaining and restoring ecosystem health.

**Funds provided by the Australian Wildlife Society will support the cost of consumables for lab work and sequencing.**



Rebecca undertaking soil sampling on Dirk Hartog Island, Western Australia. Image: West Matteeuussen.

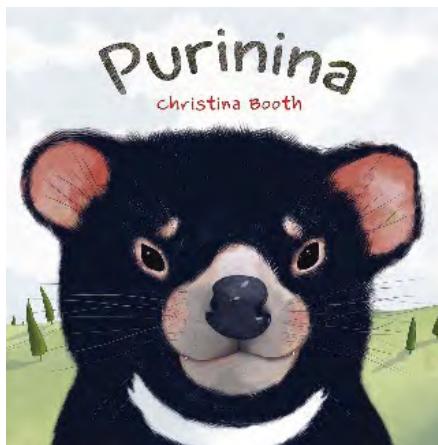
# Book Reviews



**Fabulous Frogs** – Katrina Germein and Suzanne Houghton

From colour-changing frogs, such as the great barred frog (*Macropus fasciolatus*), to frogs that can use their eyes to swallow food, like the white-lipped tree frog (*Litoria infrafrenata*), Australian frogs are full of surprises! Explore the incredible world of our native frogs that live in swamps, rainforests, deserts, and even your own backyard and what you can do to ensure they survive well into the future.

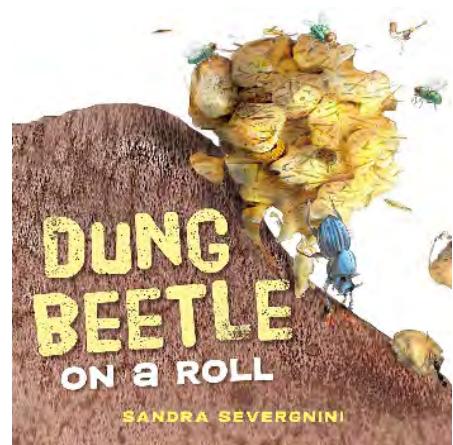
**Publisher:** CSIRO Publishing  
**RRP:** \$24.99



**Purinina** – Christina Booth

Join us on an adventure into the Tasmanian wilderness to follow the captivating story of the purinina, a brave, young Tasmanian devil (*Sarcophilus harrisii*) facing life without her mother. Can she overcome the challenges that lie ahead? Witness the struggles and triumphs of this iconic species as they navigate the harsh realities of their natural environment. Be inspired by the strength and spirit of the Tasmanian devil.

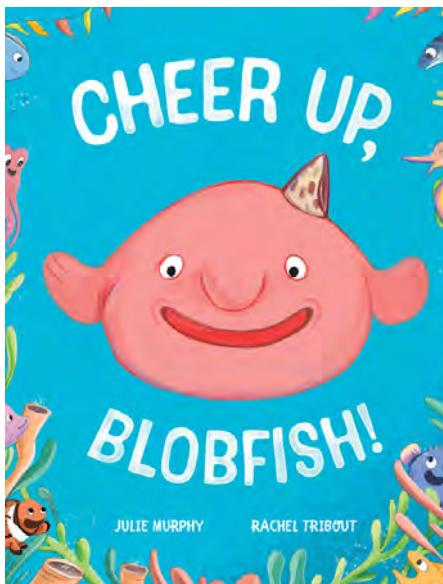
**Publisher:** CSIRO Publishing  
**RRP:** \$24.99



**Dung Beetle on a Roll** – Sandra Severgnini

Join the daring dung beetle on his thrilling adventure to roll the most magnificent dung ball! Size is not everything. Sometimes, the little animals make the biggest difference, even with dung! Discover the intriguing and vital role of these tiny beetles in our ecosystem. From maneuvering dung balls that outweigh them by fifty times to rejuvenating nutrients in our soil, these beetles are truly extraordinary!

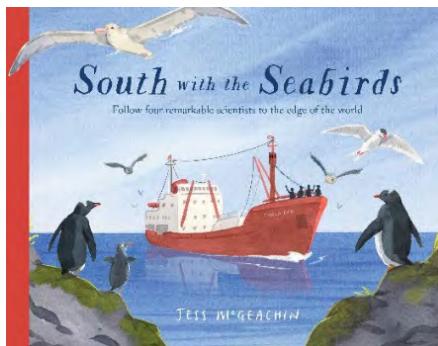
**Publisher:** CSIRO Publishing  
**RRP:** \$24.99



**Cheer Up, Blobfish!** – Julie Murphy and Rachel Tribout

Get ready to dive into the festival of fish – the ultimate celebration of the year! Laughter fills the air as everyone enjoys themselves, but one fish is not joining the fun – the blobfish (*Psychrolutes marcidus*). While the clownfish cracks jokes, the sawfish performs tricks, and the dolphin shows off its acrobatics, the blobfish remains unimpressed. Can anyone bring a smile to its droopy face?

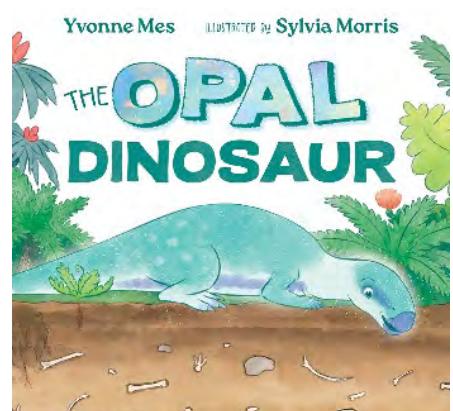
**Publisher:** Affirm Press  
**RRP:** \$19.00



**South With the Seabirds** – Tess McGeachin

*South With the Seabirds* is a captivating true story of four remarkable female scientists and their incredible journey to the sub-Antarctic, Macquarie Island. Their names were Hope Black, Mary Gillham, Susan Ingham, and Isobel Bennett, and they were the first female scientists to join an Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition. Step into a world of adventure and discovery and encounter magnificent wandering albatross (*Diomedea exulans*), subantarctic fur seals (*Arctocephalus tropicalis*), and gentoo penguins (*Pygoscelis papua*) along the way. Join their journey south and discover their incredible legacy. Immerse yourself in their remarkable story and be inspired by their legacy.

**Publisher:** Allen & Unwin  
**RRP:** \$29.99



**The Opal Dinosaur** – Yvonne Mes and Sylvia Morris

Come along on an adventure as we uncover the fascinating tale of a unique Australian dinosaur. Picture this: millions of years ago, a tiny dinosaur tumbled into the ground, leaving behind its bones to undergo a remarkable transformation. Fast forward to today, when a sharp-eyed miner catches a glint of vibrant blue and green colours amidst the earth. *The Opal Dinosaur* chronicles the incredible true story of unearthing these rare opalised bones and a new dinosaur species.

**Publisher:** CSIRO Publishing  
**RRP:** \$24.99

# Serventy Conservation Award

## Nomination Form



The Serventy Conservation Award is named in honour of Dr Vincent Serventy AM, his brother Dr Dominic Serventy, an international ornithologist, and his older sister Lucy Serventy. The award is intended to recognise and celebrate conservation work that has not been done as part of a professional career. It is awarded to those who labour in the conservation field for a love of nature and a determination that it should be conserved. Often, these have been non-scientists who have earned their conservation skills through sheer hard work. The Society will present an annual award of \$5,000 to the winning individual helping to save Australia's precious wildlife. A trophy and certificate will accompany the award.

Persons may nominate themselves or they may choose to nominate a third party who they believe should receive recognition. All nominations must be supported by a referee (see below).

**Name of nominator:**

**Address:**

**Telephone:**  **email:**

**Name of nominee:**

**Address:**

**Telephone:**  **email:**

### **Criteria:**

1. How long has the nominee been providing the service for which they are being nominated?

2. Describe the nominee's work for conservation, its outcome and impact.

3. Describe the nominee's contribution to educating the public on conservation issues.

4. Describe the nominee's contribution to a scientific understanding of conservation issues.

The Australian Wildlife Society will accept nominations for the Serventy Award via email to [info@aws.org.au](mailto:info@aws.org.au) or mail to 9/121 Queen Street, Campbelltown NSW 2560. Deadline for submission is 31 December.



# Australian Wildlife Society

# Community Wildlife Conservation Award

## Nomination Form

The Australian Wildlife Society Community Wildlife Conservation Award will be awarded to a community group that is making a significant contribution to wildlife preservation in Australia. The Society will present an award of \$5,000 to the winning community group helping to preserve Australia's precious wildlife. A trophy and certificate will accompany the award.

Persons may nominate their own organisation, or they may choose to nominate a third party who they believe should receive recognition. All nominations must be supported by a referee (see below).



**Name of nominator:**

**Address:**

**Telephone:**  **email:**

**Name of nominee:**

**Address:**

**Telephone:**  **email:**

### Criteria:

1. How long has the group been engaged in the activities for which it is being nominated?

2. Describe how the group has involved the community in its activities.

3. Describe the nominee's contribution to educating the public on conservation issues.

4. Describe the nominee's contribution to a scientific understanding of conservation issues.

5. Outline what you consider to be the major achievements and impact of the nominee group.

The Australian Wildlife Society will accept nominations for the Community Conservation Award via email to [info@aws.org.au](mailto:info@aws.org.au) or mail to 9/121 Queen Street, Campbelltown NSW 2560. Deadline for submission is 31 December.



# Australian Wildlife Society Wildlife Rehabilitation Award

## Nomination Form



The Australian Wildlife Society Wildlife Rehabilitation Award will be awarded to an individual or a conservation group that is contributing to the preservation of Australia's wildlife. The Society is aware that many organisations and thousands of volunteers are working tirelessly to save Australia's wildlife and the habitat in which they live. Many people find the experience of rehabilitating native wildlife rewarding; however, it is time-consuming and can be very expensive. The award is intended to acknowledge and commemorate, on behalf of the whole community, individuals or conservation groups working tirelessly to support, rehabilitate and conserve Australia's native wildlife. The Society will present an award of \$5,000 to the winning individual or small organisation that contributes to Australian wildlife conservation through rescue and rehabilitation. A trophy and certificate will accompany the award.

Persons may nominate their own organisation, or they may choose to nominate a third party who they believe should receive recognition. All nominations must be supported by a referee (see below).

**Name of nominator:**

**Address:**

**Telephone:**  **email:**

**Name of nominee:**

**Address:**

**Telephone:**  **email:**

### Criteria:

1. How long has the group been engaged in the activities for which it is being nominated?

2. Describe how the individual/group carries out its rescue and rehabilitation activities.

3. Describe the facilities the individual/group has established.

4. Outline what you consider to be the major achievements of the nominee.

The Australian Wildlife Society will accept nominations for the Rehabilitation Award via email to [info@aws.org.au](mailto:info@aws.org.au) or mail to 9/121 Queen Street, Campbelltown NSW 2560. Deadline for submission is 31 December.



# Australian Wildlife Society Individual Youth Conservation Award



## Nomination Form

Australian youth can play a vital role in the conservation of Australian wildlife (flora and fauna) and can significantly contribute to wildlife conservation through innovative projects and ideas. It is young people who can drive lasting and sustainable change, who will become the next ambassadors in wildlife conservation, and hopefully the successors to the Board of the Society. We aim to inspire young people to have a stake in wildlife conservation by rewarding and recognising their efforts.

The Society will present an award of \$500 to a young individual between the ages of 13 and 18 years, contributing to Australian wildlife conservation (flora and fauna). A trophy and certificate will accompany the award.

All nominations must be supported by a referee (see below).

**Name of nominator:**

**School/representative body (if applicable):**

**Address:**

**Telephone:**  **email:**

**Name of nominee:**

**Age of nominee:**

**Address:**

**Telephone:**  **email:**

**Criteria:**

1. How long has the nominee been providing the service for which they are being nominated?

2. Describe how the individual carries out conservation activities.

3. Describe the impact these conservation activities have on the 'real world'.

4. Outline what you consider to be the major achievements of the nominee.

The Australian Wildlife Society will accept nominations for the Individual Youth Conservation Award via email to [info@aws.org.au](mailto:info@aws.org.au) or mail to 9/121 Queen Street, Campbelltown NSW 2560. Deadline for submission is 31 December.



# Group Youth Conservation Award

## Nomination Form



Australian youth can play a vital role in the conservation of Australian wildlife (flora and fauna) and can significantly contribute to wildlife conservation through innovative projects and ideas. It is young people who can drive lasting and sustainable change, who will become the next ambassadors in wildlife conservation, and hopefully the successors to the Board of the Society. We aim to inspire young people to have a stake in wildlife conservation by rewarding and recognising their efforts.

The Society will present an award of \$500 to a small group between the ages of 13 and 18 years, contributing to Australian wildlife conservation (flora and fauna). A trophy and certificate will accompany the award.

All nominations must be supported by a referee (see below).

**Name of nominator:**

**School/representative body (if applicable):**

**Address:**

**Telephone:**  **email:**

**Name of nominee:**

**Age of nominee:**

**Address:**

**Telephone:**  **email:**

### **Criteria:**

1. How long has the group been providing the service for which they are being nominated?

2. Describe how the group carries out conservation activities.

3. Describe the impact these conservation activities have on the 'real world'.

4. Outline what you consider to be the major achievements of the group.

The Australian Wildlife Society will accept nominations for the Group Youth Conservation Award via email to [info@aws.org.au](mailto:info@aws.org.au) or mail to 9/121 Queen Street, Campbelltown NSW 2560. Deadline for submission is 31 December.



# Membership Form

## Membership

Become a member of the Australian Wildlife Society

Simply fill out this form

Name: .....

Address: .....

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

Email: ..... Phone: .....

### Membership category (please tick)

- Student (conditions apply): \$0
- Individual (hardcopy magazine): \$55
- Family (hardcopy magazine): \$70
- Concession (pensioner, student, and child): \$50
- E-mag (emailed as PDF, no hardcopy will be sent): \$30
- Associate (library, school, conservation groups): \$85
- Corporate: \$125
- Life: \$2,000

(Includes postage within Australia. Add \$40 for overseas postage)

### Three year membership (please tick)

- Individual (hardcopy magazine): \$150
- Family (hardcopy magazine): \$190
- Concession (pensioner, student, and child): \$135
- E-mag (emailed as PDF, no hardcopy will be sent): \$81
- Associate (library, school, conservation groups): \$230
- Corporate: \$340

(Includes postage within Australia. Add \$60 for overseas postage)

**Membership:** all prices include GST

### Payment details (please tick)

Direct Debit  Cheque  Money Order  Mastercard  Visa Card Security Code (CSC) \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

**Mail to the:** Australian Wildlife Society  
9/121 Queen Street,  
CAMPBELLTOWN NSW 2560  
**Email:** [accounts@aws.org.au](mailto:accounts@aws.org.au)  
**Website:** [www.aws.org.au](http://www.aws.org.au)

**Direct debit:** **BSB:** 062 235  
**Account No:** 1069 6157  
**Account Name:** Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia trading as the Australian Wildlife Society

**Membership Hotline:** Mob: 0424 287 297

**Note:** All cheques to be made out to the Australian Wildlife Society

## Membership Benefits

**Magazine:** Receive the quarterly issue of *Australian Wildlife* via email or post to keep up-to-date with the collective work promoted nationally.

**E-Newsletter:** Receive the monthly e-newsletter. Keep up-to-date with news from our members and on the work of the Society.

**AWS Portal:** Access the Members' Resource Centre – your destination for resources and materials on various wildlife-related topics.

**Social Media:** Contribute to our social media platforms: Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Website.

**Right to Vote:** You have the right to vote on important matters at Society general meetings (financial members only).

**Other Benefits:** Awards, Scholarships, Grants, and the opportunity to network with like-minded people.

## LEAVE A BEQUEST IN YOUR WILL

If you would like to find out how to leave a bequest to the Society or how your bequest can make an impact, please download our bequest information pack.



# Opening of the Society's New National Office and Education Centre



L to R: Anne Parnham, Stephen Grabowski, Gregory Warren MP, Patrick Medway AM, and Councillor Warren Morrison. Image: Megan Fabian.



L to R: Suzanne Medway AM, Sue Emmett, and Judy Wilson. Image: Megan Fabian.



Trevor Evans in front of the mountain pygmy-possum photo. The Society supported a breeding program for this species at Secret Creek Sanctuary to help save it from extinction. Image: Megan Fabian.



Tim Knapp and Patrick Medway AM. Image: Megan Fabian.



Gregory Warren MP and Patrick Medway AM. Image: Nicholas Tisdale.



Patrick Medway AM presenting to the attendees of the Society's Opening. Image: Megan Fabian.

