NATURE CONSERVATION SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA



Lake Newland, Eyre Peninsula Photo by S. Collard

Achievements this year:

- Celebrated our 50 years of active conservation since our founding in June 1962, with a gathering in October 2012, of current and former members, and friends
- The appointment of our Conservation Programs Manager Stuart Collard and new Conservation Ecologist Nicki de Preu
- Our ongoing collaboration in significant biodiversity monitoring projects, including: monitoring Mount Lofty Ranges woodland birds, with the addition of a restoration component to this survey; bird monitoring projects in Eyre Peninsula and the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin; and Bushland Condition Monitoring with many NRM Boards and others.
- Our advocacy for protection of our state's biodiversity, with a focus over the past year on our state's "protected" areas, wildlife, habitats and water
- Continued support for conservation based research through our Conservation Biology Grant. This year we provided funding for three student projects
- Well attended public *Walks with Nature* at Cox Scrub Conservation Park and Belair National Park
- Topical and interesting public meetings with presentations on vital conservation issues



Helen Vonow (Acting) President September 2013

012-13 ANNUAL REPORT

ABOUT THE NATURE CONSERVATION SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA



The Nature Conservation Society of South Australia is a not-for profit voluntary conservation organisation working to promote and protect South Australia's wildlife and natural habitats.

The NCSSA has a history of almost 50 years as a leader in advocacy for the environment and is a respected source of scientific information and informed comment on the biodiversity of South Australia.

One of the primary objectives of the NCSSA is to "foster the conservation of the State's wildlife and natural habitats", and the Society has taken action on many varied environmental issues since its formation in 1962.

Our activities include:

- promoting, protecting and managing native habitats
- researching and protecting threatened species and their habitats
- advancing the protection, management and strategic expansion of the state's reserve system, and
- educating the community and all tiers of government about environmental matters

A Walk with Nature Photo S. Collard

2012 - 2013 MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE, STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

Management Committee

President vacant Vice-President Helen Vonow Secretary Robert Lawrence Assistant Secretary Ali Ben Kahn Treasurer Anna-Lucia Draper

General committee

Andrew Allanson, Rick Davies, Laurie Haegi, Michael Stead Andrew Crompton, Blair Grace and Richard Winkler (co-opted)

Staff

Administrative Manager Amanda Stewart Database & Website Officer Lesley Parton Conservation Programs Manager Stuart Collard Conservation Ecologists Anthelia Bond & Georgina Mollison; Nicki de Preu (from Dec 2012) Threatened Plant Action Group Program Coordinator Tim Jury Mt Lofty Ranges Woodland Bird Survey Coordinator Tina Gillespie / Nerissa Haby Bushland Condition Monitoring Evaluation Officer Peter Mahoney Other project contractors Ali Ben Kahn, Alice Blackwood, Gabrielle Bond, Tom Bradley, Louise Brumfield, Jeff Edwards, Ben McCallum, Bill New, Simon Parker, Penny Paton and Meg Robertson

Volunteers

Regular: Keith Lloyd (general office support and library), Max Possingham and Brian Knill (database), all of the MLR Woodland Bird surveyors and many others who generously contributed their time throughout the year to various conservation projects and activities

2012 - 2013 FUNDING

NCSSA activities are funded by membership subscriptions, donations, book sales, investment interest, government grants and external funding agencies that fund many of our conservation projects.

Funding bodies for the 2012-13 financial year included:

Australian Government Grants to Voluntary Environment, Sustainability and Heritage Organisations (GVESHO) Program; Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (including the State NRM Community Grants; NRM Boards of Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges, Eyre Peninsula, SA Murray Darling Basin, Northern & Yorke Agricultural Districts, and South East; and the Native Vegetation Council); SA Water.

ADVOCATING.... ADVOCATING.... ADVOCATING.

The Society's part-time Conservation Ecologist position, previously shared by Georgina Mollison and Annie Bond and now undertaken by Nicki de Preu, focuses on our biodiversity advocacy role.

Key areas where NCSSA provides input and advice include conservation of wildlife and natural habitats, protected areas, and sustainable natural resources management.

Wildlife and Natural Habitats

- Made submissions to a number of Senate Standing Committee Inquiries including:
 The Effectiveness of Threatened Species Management in A u s t r a l i a ;
 Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012;
 Amendment to the EPBC Act to include a 'water trigger' action in relation to future coal seam gas and major coal developments.
- Provided comments on amendments to the Native Vegetation Act including Third Party Offsets.
- Attended workshop and provided feedback on SEB Offsets Policy being developed by the Native Vegetation Unit that will establish principles and guidelines for achieving a Significant Environmental Benefit under the Native Vegetation Act.
- Provided advice, comments and/or scientific data for: - Draft Interim Guidelines for Ecological Prescribed Burning; -the Regional Mining Infrastructure Project; - Nomination of a new threatened ecological community under the EPBC Act - River Murray and associated wetlands, floodplains and groundwater systems, from the junction with the Darling River to the sea (River Murray -Darling tо Sea); - Draft threat Abatement Plan for Phytophthera cinnamomi
- Provided comments on Alinytjara-Wilurura draft Fire Management Strategy – an important area for biodiversity conservation in the north-west of the state with high numbers of nationally and state listed species of conservation significance.

• Liaised with and supported members of the public and provided comments for Development Plan Amendment for Adelaide Hills City Council to rezone the old Magill Training Centre to allow for medium density residential developments. Significant trees and remnant vegetation in the area.

Sustainable natural resources management

- Provided feedback on Northern & Yorke, Eyre Peninsula and South Australian Arid Lands NRM Regions 3 Year Business Plans.
- Provided comments on: Draft Lower Limestone Coast Water Allocation Plan; Regional Management Plan for Forestry SA - Green Triangle in the south-east of the State: and the 2nd edition of CCSA's Blueprint for a Sustainable Future to guide their strategic directions on six key environmental areas: Biodiversity, Coast and Marine, Energy, Planning and Development, Waste and Water.
- Ongoing involvement with Mid North Agricultural Districts Conservation Action Planning (CAP) process that aims to provide a collaborative, landscape-scale planning approach to biodiversity conservation.
- Made submissions to the: Productivity Commission on Issues Paper regarding 'Major Project Assessment Processes' that claims unnecessary regulatory burdens are causing high costs to Australian business; Standing Council for Energy and

Resources on the draft 'Harmonised Regulatory Framework for Coal Seam Gas'

• Met with Ministers Caica and Hunter to discuss NCSSA projects and priority conservation issues for SA.

Protected Areas

- Made submissions on amendments to the National Parks & Wildlife Act 1972 that propose to amend the Objects of the Act, modernise the reserve category system and provide greater clarity on which reserve categories provide for mining access and other extractive resource uses.
- Provided comments on a range of DEWNR Park Management Plans including: -Yellabinna Reserves;
 Flinders Ranges National Park;
 South Para Parks (includes Para Wirra Recreation Park, Warren, Hale and Sandy Creek Conservation Parks ~ to be managed as a regional unit;
 Draft Amendment to the Mt Remarkable National Park Management Plan to allow for mountain bike access.
- Continued to provide advice on Adelaide Mount Lofty Ranges Region prescribed burning program including proposed burns for 2014-15.
- Ongoing input to the National Parks Australia Council that aims to bring together organisations like NCSSA in other states and territories and to provide coordinated advocacy at the national level.



MOUNT LOFTY RANGES WOODLAND BIRDS MONITORING PROGRAM

The Mount Lofty Ranges Woodland Bird Monitoring Program is a long-term project which aims to assess the evidence for declines in woodland birds through repeated surveys of sites throughout the Mount Lofty Ranges.

It was initiated in 1999 by Professor Hugh Possingham, University of Queensland.

We manage and coordinate the annual survey, and secure funding for the project.

Survey data is gathered annually from September to December. Each site is independently surveyed 3 times per year using the Bird Atlas' 2 hectare/20 minute methodology.

During the spring and summer of 2012, 160 sites were surveyed along the Mount Lofty Ranges from Gawler to Victor Harbor.

Researchers continue to use the data from the MLR woodland birds survey and recent publications are cited widely in the scientific literature. Vegetation condition data from Bush Condition Monitoring sites within each of the bird survey sites were analysed this year and compared with bird diversity and abundance measures.

Results are summarised in a report by Blackwood and Collard (2012) entitled Woodland birds and Bushland Condition Monitoring in the Mount Lofty Ranges.

Community and government commitment for this project remains high, and we have successfully negotiated increased funding for a further 3 years with the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Board. Restoration sites will be added to the existing longterm monitoring sites over the next three years.

Thanks to all the surveyors who contributed to data collection for the project this year, to Brian Knill and Max Possingham for assistance in maintaining and updating the database, and to Tina Gillespie and Nerissa Haby for survey coordination.



Male Crescent Honeyeater Photo by G. Dare

CONSERVATION BIOLOGY GRANT

Each year we offer honours and post-graduate students the opportunity to apply for grant funding of up to \$1000 to support their research into aspects of conservation biology.

Funds are available for research which is aimed at:

- improving understanding of the conservation status of species or ecological communities
- providing recommendations for improvement of some

aspect of biodiversity conservation

- understanding the ecology of species or communities
- understanding threats to biodiversity and management of those threats.

This year we funded the following research projects:

Amy Slender, PhD Candidate, Flinders University: Song fidelity, habitat boundaries and genetics of the threatened Thick-billed Grasswren

Nahid Shokri Bousjein, PhD Candidate, Flinders University: Assessing extinction risks of rare South Australian bees in the Adelaide Hills - Mount Lofty Ranges

Chris Brauer, PhD Candidate, Flinders University: Conservation Genomics of Reintroduced Pygmy Perch in the Lower Murray River

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Collaborations are an important part of the way the Society works, both in our advocacy and project roles.

Some of the highlights this year include:

Joint submissions with the Conservation Council of South Australia (CCSA)

After a few years away, NCSSA has re-joined as a member of CCSA, working closely on a number of submissions and NRM partnerships.

NGO NRM alliance

NCSSA is a signatory to a Moratorium of Understanding (MOU) between Environmental NGOs and the State's 8 regional NRM Boards. This agreement helps to build partnerships between the Boards and environmental community organisations. As a result of the MOU, NCSSA has developed an Action Plan with the Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Board which identifies opportunities for further collaboration on projects and more effective communication.

Southern Yorke Peninsula Conservation Action Planning

NCSSA has been involved with the Conservation Action Planning (CAP) process in the Southern Yorke Peninsula region for a number of years. The CAP process uses available qualitative and quantitative to determine priority conservation assets through a process of facilitated stakeholder engagement.

This year Bushland Condition Monitoring sites were established in 20 additional remnant bushland sites and this information is fed back into conservation planning for the region. We are also developing a monitoring plan for the region

WildEyre

This collaboration between NCSSA, Greening Australia, The Wildness Society, DEWNR and the Eyre Peninsula NRM Board continues to gain strength. Highlights for the year include landholder agreements to restore and revegetate over 1000 ha of land, a biodiversity monitoring plan, establishing a seed bank and an aboriginal works team for the project.

BUSHLAND CONDITION MONITORING

The Bushland Condition Monitoring (BCM) project provides training, manuals, and a database to allow community and professionals to score and monitor the health of the native vegetation of South Australia.

Field observations are made on ten condition indicators that are scored regularly. These indicators are measurable and dynamic attributes of bushland health, biodiversity and habitat value. They demonstrate current condition and the magnitude of and direction of changes.

Last year 70 new sites were established across the state in projects directly by NCSSA ~ these included 10 sites in Redgum woodlands of the Polda Basin, as part of the Wild Eyre project; 20 in the eastern Mount Lofty Ranges; 20 on southern Yorke Peninsula; and 20 in the Peppermint Box woodlands of the Waterloo and Tothill Ranges. At least the same number of sites was established independently by the State's NRM Boards, private consultants and other bodies.

30 coastal BCM sites, established in 2011 under the AMLR Seascapes program, were revisited for the first time. These are strategically located in long term restoration sites to measure the effectiveness of conservation actions by the AMLR NRM Board.

DEWNR and NRM Boards across the state continue to use and train in BCM as the standard methodology for their vegetation monitoring in

restoration projects and to inform conservation strategic planning (CAP).

During the year we provided training workshops to 60 people in the Adelaide Mount Lofty Ranges, South East, Kangaroo Island and Murray Darling Basin NRM Regions. Participants included environment officers from local and regional councils, private environmental consultancies, NRM Board and DEWNR staff.

BCM Project officer Peter Mahoney went to the National LandCare Conference in Sydney in September 2012 where he delivered a presentation entitled "Informed Communities are Adaptive Communities", which prompted a number of enquiries about NCSSA's unique model of community-based vegetation monitoring.



Jeff Edwards at a BCM site Photo P. Mahoney

THREATENED PLANT ACTION GROUP (TPAG)

VOLUNTEERING... VOLUNTEERING... VOLUNTEERING.

During 2012-13 TPAG continued with threatened flora recovery and stewardship work throughout fragmented habitat in South Australia's agricultural regions. We assisted around 60 threatened plant species and six threatened ecological communities.

Over 2000 hours of on ground work by more than 40 volunteers contributed to r e c o v e r i n g s p e c i e s populations and improving the condition of their critical habitat at around 40 sites.

Our working bees and field days produce results from the actions undertaken to regenerate and restore threatened flora.

We continue to develop effective working partnerships with landholders,

environment agencies and other community groups.

TPAG continue to make a real and tangible toward contribution improving the in-situ conservation prospects for some South Australia's most threatened flora.

Implemented recovery A a ctions included: abatement of serious weed threats; fencing to protect habitat; pest control; revegetation; plant population monitoring; flora surveys; stakeholder liaison; and public education.

Our thanks go to Tim Jury for his great work as Program Coordinator, and to all of the volunteers willing to get their hands dirty.



A threatened plant of the Mount Lofty Ranges ~ Southern Spurge *Phyllanthus striaticaulis* Photo by T. Jury

> Thanks to our partners and supporters including DEWNR and regional NRM Boards, the Australian Plant Society, Friends of Parks, NCSSA, District Councils, Forestry SA, SA Water, and numerous private landholders.

OUR 50TH BIRTHDAY

On the 26th October, 2012 the Nature Conservation Society of South Australia celebrated its 50th year with a function at the Adelaide Zoo, launched by Tim Goodes from the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources.

Past and present members from across SA and interstate

gathered to celebrate this significant milestone for the organisation.

Particular highlights were the speeches from founding members Anne and Professor Peter Reeves who spoke with great fondness and passion about the history of our Society and its conservation successes during the early



Past-President Professor Hugh Possingham went on to talk about the unique role that NCSSA plays in sciencebased decisionmaking in SA and the importance of Evidence, Partnerships and passion, Bravery and Commitment Action (EPBC)!

The event provided a wonderful opportunity for members to catch up and celebrate the substantial contribution that NCSSA has made to conservation in South Australia, much by volunteers over these many years.

Special thanks to the guest speakers and to our MC, Dr Patrick O'Connor, and all of the NCSSA staff and volunteers who helped make this event such a great success.

We subsequently produced a 50th Anniversary edition of *Xanthopus*.

WALKS WITH NATURE

Walks with Nature offers an interactive and educational experience, where volunteers from the Society act as guides taking groups of walkers on a journey of discovery.

In conjunction with our birthday celebration, on Sunday 28 October 2012, we held a walk at Coxs Scrub Conservation Park. The organisation of this Walk was assisted with funding from the SA Murray Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board.

The first of the Walks with Nature in 2013 was held in Belair National Park on Sunday 2nd June, thanks to a grant from the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board.

The Belair walk took in a range of natural bush from the drier communities of the hilltops to the reeds and rushes of Workanda Creek along the valley floor, and included views of the lower waterfall.

Many thanks to all of the volunteer walk leaders who contributed their time and expertise.



About to set out on the Belair NP Walk with Nature . Photo: A. Bond

PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETINGS

Our general meetings are held four times a year and are open to NCSSA members and the general public.

The meetings usually involve an update of current issues that we are working on, and any general business of the Society, followed by a talk from a guest speaker invited to discuss an environmental topic of current interest.

Over the past year we have run several of our meetings in partnership with the Biology Society of South Australia (BSSA).

These meetings have been well-attended and interesting. Thanks to Ali Ben Kahn and the team from BSSA for organising these meetings.

year were:

Buffel Grass was discussed at the AGM. The speakers were Rick Davies, and Tim Revnolds of Biosecurity SA. Dept. of Primary Industries (PIRSA). Annie Bond also gave a short presentation on the result of the survey of members and others of unusual ecological phenomena.

Dr Briony Horner, Conservation Project Coordinator, Zoos SA: 'Winding back the clock at Monarto' ~ the Monarto Restoration Project (MRP) ~ an opportunity to restore some of the habitats and species of the Murrav plains and Eastern Hills region.

Talk topics over the 2012-13 Previous recipients of the NCSSA Conservation Biology Grant ~ Sarah Pearson, Rebecca Dew; and of the BSSA Field Biology Grant ~ Simon Westergaard, spoke about their research.

> Professor Chris Daniels. Director. Barbara Hardv Institute and Presiding Member, Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges NRM Board. His topic: "Citizen Science: Bringing Science into your back yard'.

We would like to express our appreciation to all those who spoke at the above meetings.

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