

2014-2015



NATURE CONSERVATION SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ANNUAL REPORT

ACHIEVEMENTS THIS YEAR:

- Ongoing collaboration in significant biodiversity monitoring projects including Mt Lofty Ranges Woodland Birds and our Bush Condition Monitoring program
- Farewelled our previous Conservation Programs Manager, Dr Stuart Collard, and welcomed Dr Jeff Foulkes into the role.
- Advocacy for protection of our state's biodiversity and reserve system, including part funding a Policy Officer for the National Parks Australia Council.
- Continued support for conservation based research through our Conservation Biology Grant. This year we provided funding for three student projects.
- Secured new and improved office accommodation for the Society for a period of at least five years.
- Sponsored another art exhibition by Jorji Gardener and Andrea Wyatt ~ *Flora and Fauna* ~ at the Heysen Gallery.

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 over 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



NCSSA PEOPLE

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

President: Laurie Haegi

Vice-President: Michael Stead

Secretary: Robert Lawrence

Assistant Secretary: Ali Ben Kahn

Treasurer: Anna-Lucia Draper

General Committee: Paul Finos, Blair Grace, Kelly Henderson, Erin Sautter, Helen Vonow

STAFF

Administrative Manager: Amanda Stewart

Conservation Programs Manager: Stuart Collard, Jeff Foulkes

Conservation Ecologist: Nicki de Preu

Threatened Plant Action Group Program Coordinator: Tim Jury

Bushland Condition Monitoring Project Officer: Peter Mahoney

Woodland Bird Survey Coordinator: Erin Sautter

Database & Website Project Officer: Lesley Parton

Other project staff and consultants: Bob Bates, Ali Ben Kahn, Alice Blackwood, Tom Bradley, Louise Brumfield, Sonia Croft, Jeff Edwards, Tom Hands, Ben McCallum, Mel McCallum, Bill New, Gareth Oerman, Penny Paton and Meg Robertson

REGULAR VOLUNTEERS

Keith Lloyd (General office support and library)

Max Possingham, Brian Knill (Woodlands Birds database)

and all of the MLR Woodland Bird surveyors

and many others who generously contributed their time throughout the year to various conservation projects and activities

FUNDING 2014-15

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

Funding bodies for the 2014-15 financial year included:

Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (including the Native Vegetation Council; NRM Regions of: Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges, Eyre Peninsula, Northern & Yorke Agricultural Districts, SA Murray Darling Basin, and the South East; and the State NRM Community Grants); CJT Resources; Greening Australia; SA Water; Trees for Life.

ADVOCACY

Key areas where we provide input and advice include conservation of wildlife and natural habitats, protected area management and sustainable natural resource management.

In the last year we have made the following contributions:
Wildlife and Natural Habitats

Submission to the SA Environment Resources Development Committee Biodiversity Inquiry and appeared at one of the public hearings.

Provided advice, comments and/or scientific data for the following:

- Draft Native Vegetation Guidelines for changes to livestock species and applications to farm or pasture camels as part of a commercial enterprise on a pastoral lease
- Draft Standard for Asset Protection Zones being reviewed by the DEWNR's Fire Ecological & Technical Reference Group
- Draft recovery plan for the Orange-bellied Parrot and Migratory Shorebird Plan to Federal Government
- Ongoing input to the review of the Native Vegetation Regulations under the Native Vegetation Act 1991
- EPBC listing and conservation actions for the Plains-wanderer
- EPBC Referral for the closure of the Dry Creek Saltfields
- Proposed delisting of Southern Brown Bandicoots from threatened species list under the EPBC Act
- Draft Threat Abatement Plan for Feral Cats
- Review of National Parks & Wildlife Regulations
- Comments on the 20 Million Trees Programme to Federal Government.

Continued dialogue with DEWNR Fire Management staff regarding their Prescribed Burning Program and Strategic Assessment under the EPBC Act.

Ongoing engagement in the process for implementation of Bilateral Agreements between the Federal and State Governments under the EPBC Act that will delegate assessment and approval powers to the Minister for State Development.

These submissions were made to Senate Standing Committee Inquiries:

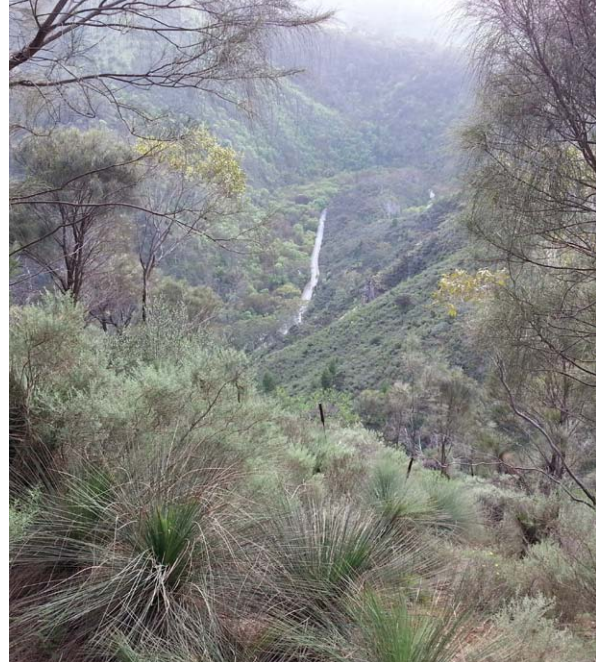
- Senate Inquiry into Environmental Biosecurity including the adequacy of arrangements to prevent the entry and establishment of invasive species likely to harm Australia's natural environment.
- Senate References Committee Inquiry into the history, effectiveness, performance and future of the National Landcare Program (participation in public hearing).
- Senate Inquiry into Register of Environmental Groups.

Met with the Threatened Species Commissioner and other environmental NGO's to discuss current programs and priorities for threatened species management in South Australia.

Attended a Public Forum about the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary and Ecology Summit to guide future management of the sanctuary.

Regular meetings were held with Minister Hunter to discuss NCSSA projects and priority conservation issues for SA. Some of the issues discussed included DEWNR's mid-term review of the No Species Loss Strategy and Bilateral Agreements with the Federal Government to give the State Government responsibility for assessment and approval of major developments under the EPBC Act.

"Advocacy for a wide range of nature conservation issues continues to be a key part of the Society's work that is through our Conservation Ecologist, Nicki de Preu."



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 our meetings in partnership with the Biology Society of South Australia (BSSA).

Thanks to Ali Ben Kahn and the team from BSSA for organising these meetings.

Talk topics over 2014-15 were:

Erin Sautter, NCSSA Woodland Birds Project Co-ordinator "Trends in woodland birds from long-term monitoring in the Mt Lofty Ranges".

Katherine Moseby "Reintroduction of quolls in the southern Flinders Ranges as part of the Arid Recovery Program."

Presentations by 2014 BSSA and NCSSA Grant Recipients:

Giulia Ghedini "Preserving sub-tidal forests: the ecological value of intact kelp forests."; Steffi Graff "Conservation genetics of the Little Penguin: does the potential exist for translocation?"; Sara-Lena Reinhold "The impact of New Zealand Fur Seal predation on Little Penguin colonies" and Nikki Zanardo "The ecology and social structure of the bottlenose dolphin in Adelaide's metropolitan waters."

Heidi Alleway "Recovering the loss of shellfish reefs from coastal ecosystems and human memory".

ADVOCACY cont.

Protected Area Management

The Society provided comments on a range of DEWNR Park Management Plans including;

- Gawler Ranges National Park Draft Management Plan.
- Flinders Ranges National Park Draft Management Plan.
- Draft management Plan for The Kanku-Breakaways Conservation Park near Coober Pedy.
- Arkaroola Protected Area Draft Management Plan.
- Discussion Paper for management of Innamincka Regional Reserve.

Involvement in DEWNR's Nature-based Tourism and People and Parks initiatives and meetings to discuss proposal for Adelaide to be developed as an international mountain biking destination.

Literature review on the impact of nature-based tourism in protected areas.

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.

Financial contribution towards publication of 'Nature Safety's Net', a report by the World Wildlife Fund (Australia) highlighting importance of protected areas for biodiversity conservation.

Attended Places You Love workshop held in Adelaide and Native Vegetation Council Regional Forum at Gawler.

Ongoing involvement in the Conservation Council of South Australia Biodiversity Subcommittee.

Sustainable Natural Resource Management

Ongoing involvement with Wild Eyre program, Southern Yorke Peninsula and Mid North Agricultural Districts Conservation Action Planning (CAP) processes being co-ordinated by Greening Australia that aim to provide a collaborative, landscape-scale planning approach to biodiversity conservation in these areas.

Comments on revised report by PIRSA 'Ecological Assessment of Beachcast Seagrass and Marine Algae Fishery' under the EPBC Act. Fishery has potential to impact shorebirds including migratory waders.

Comments on draft SA Community Landcare Plan.

Comments on draft Mount Lofty Ranges Forest Management Plan and draft Forestry SA Green Triangle Management Plan

Provided comment on Northern & Yorke NRM Region Climate Change Adaptation Pathways Report

Reviewed Draft Northern Flinders Ranges Fire Management Plan.

Provided comment on Northern & Yorke NRM Region and Eyre Peninsula NRM Region Business Plans for 2015-2018 and input to priorities for South Australian Arid Lands NRM Regional Plan.

Provided comments on SAMDB Water Allocation Plan including allocation of water during dry times and environmental flows.

Reviewed and commented on the SA Wild Dog Strategic Plan.

Comments on Draft Concept Plan for amendment of Northern & Yorke NRM Plan.

Ongoing involvement in the NRM Alliance that involves a formal agreement and commitment to work collaboratively between eleven environmental NGO's and the NRM Boards in South Australia. The NRM Alliance works in partnership to contribute to a number of key NRM initiatives at both state and national level.

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.

The BCM program again this year has interacted with a number of Government and other organisations concerned with monitoring ecosystem health, in attending workshops and meetings, and in making contributions to NCSSA submissions on changes to the Native Vegetation Regulations, and the State Government Biodiversity Review.

The year was very busy with BCM activities, and significant achievements were:

BCM Sites

113 BCM assessments were carried out across the State by NCSSA staff and contractors over the last year, comprising 54 new sites and 59 re-assessments of existing sites. These were done in collaboration with eight organisations across 10 projects. An additional 15 sites were assessed by regional staff in projects coordinated by NCSSA.

Database, Data Entry and Data Management

The data from these sites plus and additional 58 sites done by other organisations was entered onto the South Australian Biodiversity Assessment Tool database (SABAT) by Ali Ben Kahn, from which site reports were generated and distributed to the collaborating organisations and landholders. Significant improvements were made by Ali to the data entry tracking system and filing of field data sheets for the 1875 official BCM field assessments currently lodged with the NCSSA. Target areas for this aspect of the program includes retrieving unlogged data sheets from the range of organisations using BCM across the State, and developing a robust platform for the management of photopoints and other site photos.

Long term volunteer Brian Knill has been assisting with the development of SABAT, including adding a number of new fields to capture important metadata relating to monitoring purpose, site selection methods, site representivity and many others.

The last year has seen significant progress in collaboration with DEWNR for the integration of BCM with the Biological Database of South Australia. Work has been ongoing towards the publication of BCM data on NatureMaps website, and in building a capability for data entry by remote users across the internet. An important step has also been the building of a relationship in the area of ongoing assistance from DEWNR with programming and database maintenance for SABAT

Other Projects

Sonia Croft undertook a project to match the 20 main vegetation types used in the BCM methodology for the NAY NRM region with the corresponding 292 vegetation types recognised for the region under the National Vegetation Information System (NVIS). The result of this project is a mapping layer indicating the spatial extent of BCM communities in the region, and the coverage of BCM sites within each of these. This will make it much simpler to think strategically about monitoring and conservation works in the future, and represents a major advance for the BCM program.



Diamond Lakes site visit. Photo: P Mahoney

In collaboration with Felicity Smith and Roman Urban of DEWNR, similar projects will be undertaken for the other NRM regions. An equivalent data set for Eyre Peninsula has been produced and is ready to be converted to a mapping layer.

Training

5 BCM training workshops have been carried out in 3 NRM regions, AMLR, N&Y, and EP, training a total of 29 volunteers, consultants and government staff.

New Website

A new website for BCM has been trialled in the last 6 months with significant success.



Wild Eyre survey team: Peter Mahoney & Sonia Croft (BCM) and Gareth Oerman (Birds) Photo: P Mahoney

THREATENED PLANT ACTION GROUP

Leafy Greenhood (*Pterostylis cucullata*) Photo: T Jury

During 2014-15 the Threatened Plant Action Group (TPAG) continue to make a real and tangible contribution toward improving the *in-situ* conservation prospects for some of South Australia's most threatened flora through considerable on-ground work and contributions to threatened species information and policies.

Our working bees and field days produce good results from the actions implemented to regenerate and restore threatened flora. Over 2000 hours of on ground work by more than 40 volunteers contributed to recovering populations of around 50 threatened plant species and improving the condition of critical habitat at around 40 sites.

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

We continue to develop effective working partnerships with landholders, environment agencies and other community groups.

TPAG have and are assisting DEWNR with regional and state Threatened Species Assessments for South Australia.

The TPAG Program is funded through NCSSA by the AMLR NRM region and small grants. Our thanks go to Tim Jury for his work in this role and to all of the volunteers willing to get their hands dirty on the front line.

Thanks also to our valued partners and supporters including DEWNR and regional NRM Boards, Trees for Life, Friends of Parks, Native Orchid Society of SA, Australian Plant Society, Forestry SA, SA Water, District Councils and numerous private landholders.



TPAG members installing guards to protect Marsh gum *Eucalyptus paludicola* seedlings on the Fleurieu Peninsula Photo: T Jury

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 (MLR). The project was initiated by Professor Hugh Possingham from the University of Queensland (UQ) and has been running since 1999.

We manage and coordinate the annual survey through funding received from the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges (AMLR) Natural Resources Management (NRM) Board. Survey data is gathered annually from September to December. Each monitoring site is independently surveyed by expert volunteers and ornithologists three times per year using the Bird Atlas' 2ha/20 min methodology.

During the spring and summer of 2014, all 166 bird monitoring sites from Gawler to Victor Harbor were re-surveyed. This year, Society staff and volunteer surveyors also undertook the surveying of a further 40 sites across the region in vegetation communities where survey effort is currently under-represented, including riparian areas, heathlands and low rainfall woodlands. Results of trend analyses by UQ using monitoring data collected between 2000 and 2012 were published in a new program pamphlet that is currently available through the Society website.

Community and government commitment for this project remains high. A special thanks to all the surveyors who have helped gather data for the project again this past year; the landowners for permission to gain access to their properties; the AMLR NRM Board, UQ and Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources for their ongoing contributions and support to the program; Brian Knill and Max Possingham for their assistance in maintaining and updating the database; the project steering committee (Hugh Possingham, Patrick O'Connor, Tim Milne and Stuart Collard); and to Erin Sautter, Megan Barnes and Ali Ben Khan for survey coordination, data management administration.



Spotted Pardalote Photo: Jeff Groves

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:

John McDonald, PhD Candidate, The University of Adelaide "Genetic divergence of endangered southern Australian chenopods"

Jack Tatler, PhD Candidate, The University of Adelaide "The influence of poison baiting history on ecosystem functioning: Does baiting for dingoes cause a loss in biodiversity?"

Tamara Burt, PhD Candidate, Flinders University "Identifying the impact(s) of blood parasites in declining Little Penguin *Eudyptula minor* populations of South Australia"

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**THE NATURE CONSERVATION
SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INCORPORATED**

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