

2015-2016



NATURE CONSERVATION SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ANNUAL REPORT

HIGHLIGHTS THIS YEAR:

- Developing and growing strategic partnerships with other NGOs
- Ongoing collaboration in significant biodiversity monitoring projects including the *Mount Lofty Woodland Bird Monitoring* and our *Bush Condition Monitoring* programs
- Conducting nocturnal walks as part of the *SA History Festival 2016*
- Making our financial investments work harder for us
- Part funding a Senior Policy Officer for the *National Parks Australia Council*
- Our increased emphasis on social media (e.g. Facebook) ~ we have trebled our reach in the last year
- Our Office Warming Party in February with members and friends
- Ongoing involvement in development of a conservation strategy for South Australia after 2017, to replace the *No Species Loss Strategy*.

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: Michael Stead

Vice-President: Vacant

Secretary: Robert Lawrence

Assistant Secretary: Ali Ben Kahn

Treasurer: Anna-Lucia Draper

General Committee: Janine Guy, Kelly Henderson, Erin Sautter, Erinne Stirling, Helen Vonow

STAFF

Administrative Manager: Amanda Stewart

Conservation Programs Manager: 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, Tom Bradley, Louise Brumfield, Sonia Croft, Tim Croft, Ben McCallum, Bill New, Penny Paton and Meg Robertson

REGULAR VOLUNTEERS

Keith Lloyd (General office support / library);

Brian Knill (MLR Woodland Birds database);

the MLR Woodland Bird surveyors ;

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

FUNDING 2015-16

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 2015-16 financial year included:

Birdlife Australia; Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (including the Native Vegetation Council; the NRM Regions of: Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges, Eyre Peninsula, Northern & Yorke, SA Murray Darling Basin; and the State NRM Community Grants); SA Water; The Friends of Black Hill and Morialta Inc; and Trees for Life Inc.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

What a pleasing year it has been for our Society. The Committee and staff have worked hard to re-energise and refresh the Society, particularly how we communicate and engage with our members and the broader South Australian community.

Some particular highlights for this year are listed on the front of this report. Many of these achievements stem from recommendations made by our Strategic Planning subcommittees. Strategic planning has been an important task for members of the Committee this past year.

Advocacy

We have made sure that our voice has been heard clearly in relation to a number of very important State Government policies (e.g. Native Vegetation Regulations, Nature Tourism Strategy). The demands on the Society for advocacy are increasing. So much so, that the plethora of issues and documents that the Society could provide submissions on is overwhelming. The Society will have to carefully prioritise how we pursue advocacy in the future. The demands over the last decade have conspired to shift the Society from a pro-active conservation organisation to one that is now largely reactive. We aim to regain the initiative!

Finances

Although we made a slightly bigger loss than initially budgeted, our financial performance was largely in line with expectations and, all things considered, a good result. We had a number of one-off expenses this year, most of which were associated with the move to our new offices. We also decided to part-fund the National Parks Australia Council policy officer. These expenses coincided with the investment in our new Conservation Programs Manager, Dr Jeff Foulkes. The addition of Jeff to the team has been very advantageous and should pay dividends for us. It is comforting to note that this result compares very favourably with our financial situation back in 2013/14 when we recruited our previous Conservation Programs Manager. We anticipate an improvement in our financial performance for 2016/17.

We are pleased to announce that a substantial proportion of our investments are now managed by *Australian Ethical Investments Ltd.* Members can rest assured that any donations or bequests received by the Society will be invested ethically and not to the detriment of our environment or community. Over the short- to medium-term, this change in investment focus should give us an appreciable uplift in returns. The additional income received will be used to further the Society's core aims and objectives, and will be available for it to draw upon in times of need.

Bequests

In recent years, the Society received very generous bequests from Madeline Boyce and Terrence Wollaston. These weren't finalised in time to include in our last Annual Report. Neither stipulated a specific use for their bequests, and we can only speculate as to what their wishes may have been. What is clear however is that the aims and values of the Society clearly resonated with their own. Their generosity is never far from the Committee's mind and when the appropriate opportunity arises we plan to make a lasting legacy out of their contributions.

Lastly, I would like to thank the staff and Committee for their patience and support as I have come to grips with the role. It has been a pleasure working with you all. A special mention must go to two outgoing Committee members for their efforts: Erin Sautter and Ali Ben Kahn. Particular thanks must go to Ali, who has served the Society in varied capacities over the years, including a period as Vice-President. The Society wouldn't be what it is today without committed individuals like her. I am pleased that both Erin and Ali will stay on with the Society in a professional capacity.

A vision for the year ahead

As I see it, the priorities for the next Committee will be:

- Completion of the Strategic Plan, including updating of the Constitution
- Investigation of opportunities identified by the Strategic Plan
- Improved financial performance
- Further collaboration with other eNGOs
- Website renewal
- Continued development of events and education activities

Michael Stead
President

Community Engagement & Events

Over the past year we have looked for opportunities to become involved in public events and so engage with our membership and the broader South Australian community.

In May, as part of the SA History Festival, we ran two nocturnal walks: 'Natural History of the Adelaide Parklands after Dark'. These were very popular and were booked out well in advance. Participants saw good numbers of brush- and ring-tailed possums, and flying foxes were constantly overhead. Many people were surprised to see just how abundant Adelaide's nocturnal fauna can be. For many these first, close encounters will provide long lasting memories.

Other highlights included:

- Provision of guides for the UniSA's Discovery Circle BioBlitz events
- Involvement in Morialta Centenary Picnic
- In-kind sponsorship of *Science in the Pub*

Public Meetings, held with the Biology Society of South Australia were:

Ian Falkenberg, DEWNR "Managing the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary".

Dr Philip Roetman, UniSA, "Citizen-science by Threes: Research, Education and Engagement about Koalas, Cats and Corellas".

2015 Conservation Biology Grant Recipient's presentations:

Jack Tatler, The University of Adelaide "Spying on dingoes in the desert: new insights into the behaviour, energetics and resource selection of free-ranging dingoes".

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





Yellow-footed rock wallaby Photo: J. van Weenan

ADVOCACY

As South Australia's primary nature conservation advocacy organisation, NCSSA has an active interest in the protection and conservation of South Australia's precious natural resources with particular attention being paid to nationally and state listed threatened plants, animals and ecological communities, management of protected areas and remnant native vegetation. Advocacy for a wide range of nature conservation issues continues to be a key part of the Society's work.

In the last year we have made the following important contributions:

Wildlife and Natural Habitats

- Ongoing involvement in the review of the *No Species Loss Strategy* and *Nature of SA* working group and workshops.
- Provided advice, comments and/or scientific data for the following:
 - Review of the Native Vegetation Regulations under the *Native Vegetation Act 1991*
 - Reforms to South Australia's Significant Environmental Benefit Policy
 - Listing and conservation actions for the Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby under the *Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*
 - EPBC nomination for the Copper Beard Orchid
 - Draft Threat Abatement Plan for Feral Cats under the EPBC Act
 - Draft Policy for Management of the European Red Fox under the *Natural Resources Management (NRM) Act 2004*
 - First 5-yearly review of Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2030.
 - Review of Declared Plants under the NRM Act
 - Independent review of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity
- Provided representatives on the Adelaide Mount Lofty, Flinders, Mid North and Yorke regional Bushfire Management Committees and ongoing input to Bushfire Management Area Planning (BMAP).
- Continued input in the Ecological and Technical Reference Group that provides technical and scientific advice on environmental matters to the State Bushfire Coordination Committee as part of the BMAP process.
- Held ongoing discussions with DEWNR Fire Management staff regarding their prescribed burning program and impact on environmental assets.
- Commented on the Public Environmental Report for a proposed 36-hole golf course and tourism development at Nora Creina that will result in extensive clearance of remnant native vegetation.
- Provided nominated representatives and conservation expertise to the Department of Environment & Natural Resources Reference Groups for Kangaroo Management and Duck and Quail Hunting.
- Liaised regarding the Clearance of native vegetation at the Taillem Bend Motor Sports Park.
- Commented on the draft Adelaide Park Lands Management Strategy 2015-2025.
- Had input to the Independent review of the EPBC 'Water Trigger', introduced in 2013 in response to ongoing widespread community concern about the long term health and viability of Australia's precious water resources and impact of Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mine industries on these resources.
- Made a submission to the Senate Inquiry on Unconventional Gas Mining with a specific focus on the impact of the industry on water-dependent ecosystems, extremely long lag-time to detect impacts and need for sound science to underpin future decisions for such activities.

Regular meetings were held with Minister Hunter over the past 12 months to discuss priority conservation issues for SA and NCSSA program activities. Some of the issues discussed included the ongoing review of the Native Vegetation Regulations, reforms to South Australia's SEB Policy and trail/infrastructure developments in the Tennyson Dunes Conservation Reserve.

CONSERVATION BIOLOGY GRANT

Each year since 2003 we have offered 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:

Ben Parslow, PhD candidate, Flinders University "Biodiversity, systematics and host associations of Australian *Gasterura*"

Hannah Bannister, PhD candidate, University of Adelaide "Factors influencing the population persistence of brushtail possums reintroduced to a semi-arid environment"

Marlee Crawford, Honours student, University of Adelaide "Combining genetics and bioclimatic modelling to inform the management of sandalwood"

ADVOCACY cont.

Protected Area Management

We provided comments on DEWNR Park Management Plans including:

- Draft amendments to metropolitan park management plans to allow for wider range of recreational uses including mountain bikes, camping, dog walking and horse riding. Parks covered by these amendments include Onkaparinga River Reserve; Morialta and Black Hill Conservation Parks; Hallett Cove and Marino Conservation Parks; Anstey Hill Recreation Park Management Plan; and O'Halloran Hill Recreation Park.
- Draft amendment to park management plans for Flinders Chase National Park, Kelly Hill Conservation Park, Ravine des Casoars and Cape Bouguer Wilderness Protection Area due to new trails and trail upgrades required for the Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail.
- Draft Wabma Kadarbu Mound Springs National Park Management Plan.
- We had ongoing input to the National Parks Australia Council (NPAC) that aims to bring together organisations like NCSSA in other states and territories, to provide coordinated advocacy at the national level and highlight the importance of protected areas for biodiversity conservation.
- We made a significant financial contribution towards the appointment of a Senior Policy Officer for the National Parks Australia Council to campaign for and progress the recommendations from NPAC's strategic policy 'The Jewel in the Crown - A National Park Legacy for All Australians'.
- We provided comments on the Tennyson Dunes Concept Report that outlines a proposal for a 'Discovery Trail' through the Conservation Reserve - an extremely important area for coastal biodiversity conservation in South Australia and the only remnant tertiary dune system along the Adelaide metropolitan coastline.
- We provided feedback to the Yorke Peninsula District Council on a proposed expansion of coastal bushcamping areas.
- We had ongoing involvement in the Conservation Council of South Australia's Biodiversity Environmental Standing Committee.

Sustainable Natural Resource Management

The Society had ongoing input to the sustainable management of the State's precious natural resources through a variety of forums including:

- Ongoing involvement with the Wild Eyre program, Southern Yorke Peninsula and Mid North Agricultural Districts Community Action Planning groups that aim to provide a collaborative, landscape-scale planning approach to conservation of soil, water and biodiversity assets in these areas.
- A submission on the proposed expansion of the 'Beachcast Seagrass and Marine Algae Fishery' along the south-east coast of South Australia under the EPBC Act. This fishery has potential to impact on shorebirds with national and international conservation significance including migratory waders.
- Provided comment on Northern & Yorke, Eyre Peninsula and South Australian Arid Lands NRM Regional Business Plans for 2016-2018.
- Had input to the South Australian Murray Darling Basin Regional Action Plans that identify priority areas for investment and support implementation of their Strategic Natural Resources Management Plan.
- Provided comments on draft South Australian Multiple Landuse Framework.
- We had ongoing involvement in the Natural Resources Management - Non-Government Organisation (NRM-NGO) Alliance that involves a formal agreement and commitment to work collaboratively between eleven environmental NGO's and the NRM Boards in South Australia. We provided significant input to an awareness raising document produced by the Conservation Council of SA that provides an overview of the Alliance member groups and their respective roles and functions across the state.

Nicki de Preu

Advocacy - continued to advocate for the protection of threatened and regionally rare species and ecological communities through our involvement in a range of workshops, working groups and more than 40 submissions over the past 12 months.

Sustainable NRM - input to planning for 6 of 8 NRM Regions

Protected Areas - influencing management of 99,292ha of South Australia's reserve system



Cassythia sp. (Snotty gobble) Photo: M Stead



Calochilus cupreus copper beard-orchid
Photo: R. Lawrence

Threatened Plant Action Group (TPAG)

The TPAG Program is funded through NCSSA by the AMLR NRM region and small grants. Our thanks go to Tim Jury for his work as coordinator and the admirable efforts of all the volunteers willing to get their hands dirty to help nature.

During 2015-16 TPAG continued to make a tangible contribution towards improving the in-situ conservation prospects for some of South Australia's most threatened flora through on-ground work, and contributions to threatened species information and policies.

TPAG working-bees and field days produced good results from the actions implemented to regenerate and restore threatened flora. Over 2200 hours of on ground work by 50 volunteers contributed to the recovery of around 50 threatened plant species and improving the condition of critical habitat at around 40 sites. Recovery actions included: abatement of weed competition; fencing to protect habitat; 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 also continue to assist DEWNR with Threatened Species Assessments for South Australia.

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

PROJECTS

There has been a lot happening this past year with our new Conservation Programs Manager Jeff Foulkes working on developing new projects and renewing/renegotiating the contracts for a number of projects which are finishing their three year contract cycle.

We are currently working on 12 separate projects across four Natural Resource Management regions in the state. Here is a summary of what has been happening is some of our project work:

Bushland Condition Monitoring (BCM)

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 a range of 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.

During the year we have been busy with BCM survey and reporting work primarily in Northern and Yorke and the Adelaide Mount Lofty Ranges NRM regions with over 70 new sites or re-visits being undertaken.

More recently we have been planning for a major resampling of almost 40 BCM sites on Eyre Peninsula as part of the WildEyre project (see following page).

These comprise sites linked to management as part of specific NRM projects; and baseline sites in under-sampled vegetation communities of a region.

It includes:

- AMLR Seascapes Coastal revisits,
- AMLR Samphire Coast Icon Project,
- AMLR Lower Light / Hamley Bridge sites
- N&Y Northern Rivers/Crystal Brook Creek environmental flows
- N&Y Burra to Kapunda
- N&Y BCM general revisits

In addition to BCM sites as part of the AMLR Samphire Coast project (in conjunction with *BirdLife Australia*), we were contracted to undertake a photopoint reassessment of a series of 33 sites along the coast.

Three BCM training courses were undertaken during the year with participants coming from Friends of Parks groups, DEWNR staff and environmental consultants. We have been revising the structure of training courses and intend running courses more frequently across the state.

NCSSA staff have been working closely with DEWNR staff (Science, Monitoring and Knowledge) to improve both the functionality and stability of SABAT (BCM database). Ultimately we hope that data from BCM assessments can be entered and accessed remotely if current trials and discussions come to fruition.



PROJECTS cont.

WildEyre

We are one of five partner organisations in a landscape-scale conservation project in central northwest Eyre Peninsula. The partnership was formed in 2007, based on a shared ecological vision for the landscape.

Members of the partnership include a range of individuals and local, regional and national environmental groups who are working together to restore, conserve and monitor the unique and diverse ecosystems of the region. Jeff Foulkes is our current representative on the WildEyre Working Group.

The aims of the project are to:

- Deliver improved nature conservation outcomes in central northwest Eyre Peninsula
- Increase opportunities for the community to be involved and supported in conservation actions
- Increase the resilience of natural systems to climate change, including maintenance of the ecosystem services and natural infrastructure that supports regional communities and natural resource industries
- Investigate options for sustainable land management across Eyre Peninsula
- Research economic diversification opportunities for landholders whose livelihoods may be affected by climate change
- Provide opportunities for greater participation by Aboriginal communities in decision-making

The group has worked together with the community to produce a 'Conservation Action Plan' which is designed to guide conservation activities in the region. This plan has set the basis for landscape conservation and restoration across the landscape and has recently helped to attract significant funding through the Commonwealth Government's Biodiversity Fund.

Currently we are involved in three monitoring projects in the WildEyre region:

WildEyre Bird Monitoring

Conducting bird surveys across the region at sites established in Spring 2012 across four priority vegetation communities: Red Gum Woodland; Native Pine / Mallee Box Woodland; Sheoak Grassy Woodlands; and Coastal Dunes and Cliffs. Jeff has been coordinating planning for re-monitoring sites in Spring 2016.

Bushland Condition Monitoring

The BCM method assesses a number of key attributes of vegetation condition, including tree health which will be useful for monitoring the health of these systems in the long term. Data from these condition assessments have been entered into the BCM database and Peter Mahoney is planning for re-visits of BCM sites in spring 2016.

Red Gum Exclosure Monitoring

Our staff undertook initial monitoring of herbivore exclosures in Red Gum Communities in the WildEyre Study area in Spring 2015. Exclosures were established to examine the impacts of all herbivores on regeneration and recruitment of vegetation. Different "treatments" exclude all herbivores, exclusion of rabbits only and no exclusion. It will take a number of years of repeated monitoring to determine the responses of native vegetation (and weeds) to different types of grazing pressures.



Chestnut-rumped Heathwren Photo: E. Steele-Collins

Mount Lofty Ranges Woodland Bird Monitoring Program

During the spring and summer of 2015/16, all 168 bird monitoring sites from Gawler to Victor Harbor were re-surveyed. All data collected for the project has now been entered into the Biological Database of South Australia and will be publicly available through the Atlas of Living Australia.

This year, a presentation on the program and trends in woodland birds of the Mount Lofty Ranges was given at the Australasian Ornithological Conference held by Birdlife Australia in November. Data collected from the project over the past 15 years has also been analysed to investigate the impact of fire on bird assemblages and a scientific paper on these findings will be published soon.

The Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources (AMLR NR) Management Board will continue to fund the project for another 12 months.

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; AMLR NR, University of Queensland, University of Adelaide and DEWNR for their contributions and support to the program; Brian Knill for assistance in maintaining and updating the database; the program steering committee (Hugh Possingham, Patrick O'Connor, Tim Milne, Jeff Foulkes and Erin Sautter); and to Erin Sautter and Ali Ben Kahn for survey coordination and data management administration.



2015-2016

ANNUAL REPORT

**THE NATURE CONSERVATION
SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INCORPORATED**
5 MILNER STREET
HINDMARSH 5007
PHONE: (08) 7127 4630
EMAIL: NCSSA@NCSSA.ASN.AU
WEBSITE: WWW.NCSSA.ASN.AU