

# 2018-19



NATURE CONSERVATION SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

## ANNUAL REPORT

### ACHIEVEMENTS THIS YEAR:

- **Lobbying for improvements to a range of state environmental legislation, including the Bill replacing the Natural Resources Management Act 2004**
- **Continuing to call for stronger protection for our remnant native vegetation, especially where it is protected in National Parks (such as in Flinders Chase National Park) and where clearance could be avoided through better land-use planning (such as for solar farms).**
- ***Amongst it* small grant program attracted 54 quality applications with 7 varied and surprising projects selected.**
- **Continued support for conservation-based research through our Conservation Biology Grant, in conjunction with the Biology Society of SA.**
- **Ongoing collaboration in significant biodiversity monitoring projects: Mt Lofty Ranges Woodland Birds (MLRWB); repeat monitoring of older Bushland Condition Monitoring sites (10 in Northern and Yorke region, and 30 sites associated with the MLRWB program in the Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges region).**
- **Donated funds to support Nature Glenelg Trust to add 66 ha to Mount Burr Swamp.**
- **Conducted successful nocturnal walks in the Adelaide Parklands as History Festival events.**

# 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



Front page: Arkaba Red Range View.  
Back page: Yandinga Gorge, Gawler Ranges National Park.  
Photos: Nicki de Preu



Keith Lloyd, and the new sign!  
At a celebratory morning tea with staff and committee. Photo: NCSSA

## NCSSA PEOPLE

### MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

**President:** Michael Stead

**Vice-President:** *vacant*

**Secretary:** Erinne Stirling

**Assistant Secretary:** *vacant*

**Treasurer:** Anna-Lucia Draper

**General Committee:** Natasha Brown, Janine Guy, Robert Lawrence and Helen Vonow

### STAFF

**Administrative Manager:** Amanda Stewart

**Conservation Programs Manager:** Jeff Foulkes (*to April 2019*)

**Nature Advocate:** Julia Peacock

**Conservation Ecologist:** Nicki de Preu

**Threatened Plant Action Group Program Coordinator:** Tim Jury

**Bushland Condition Monitoring Project Officer:** Sonia Croft

**MLR Woodland Bird Survey & BCM Data Coordinator:** Ali Ben Kahn

**Database & Website Project Officer:** Lesley Parton

**Other project staff:** Tom Bradley, Chris Butcher, Penny Paton, Elen Shute, Jill Woodlands

**MLR Woodland Bird volunteer surveyors:** Ali Ben Kahn, Zeta Bull, Stuart Collard, Peter Day, Jody Gates, Sam Gordon, Alice Grieve, Grace Hodder, Thomas Hunt, Chris James, Gareth Oerman, David Paton, Penny Paton, and Elspeth Young.

### REGULAR VOLUNTEERS

Keith Lloyd (General office support and library); Katie Dashwood (Website and social media review); Brian Knill (BCM database); Ben Heyward (BCM manual review); and many others who generously contributed their time throughout the year to various conservation projects and activities.

## FUNDING 2018-19

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 2018-19 financial year included: Department for Environment and Water (including the NRM Regions of: Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges, Eyre Peninsula, Northern & Yorke Peninsula, and the State NRM Community Grants); SA Water; and Trees For Life.

# PRESIDENTS REPORT

## ***Proud of our past, confident of our future.***

Thank you for your ongoing support this year. We have achieved a lot together.

Our long-term projects continue to conserve, monitor and connect people with our State's precious biodiversity.

However, we are also trying a new approach and encouraging people to get **Amongst It**. This year seven projects will connect individuals to everyday nature and celebrate how important nature is to the identity of South Australia. <http://www.amongstsa.org.au/>

Also for the first-time this year we merged our Conservation Biology Grant with the Biology Society of South Australia's Biology Grant. A total of \$10,241 was distributed to support four early career researchers. Pooling our grant money certainly increased interest. A total of 24 applications were received. More than we have had for many years.

Another highlight was our donation of \$10,000 from the Madeleine Boyce Bequest to support a further 66 ha of land acquisition at Mount Burr Swamp by the Nature Glenelg Trust.

This year we made our voice heard on important conservation issues, including:

- influencing legislative reform being undertaken in South Australia where it will impact on our environment.
- commenting on the Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse
- the protection and proper management of remnant native vegetation

Importantly, we recognised one of our long-term volunteers by naming our library after him: the Keith Lloyd Library.

As always, thank you to the staff and the Management Committee.

Welcome to new and returning committee members. Farewell and best wishes to those departing: Erinne Stirling and Janine Guy.

*We need you more than ever. We need your voice. Join us.*

Love, protect and respect,

Michael Stead, President

***Nature Conservation Society of South Australia: Your voice for nature!***



Mount Burr Swamp addition. Photo: Nature Glenelg Trust



View over Mt Burr Swamp Photo: M Stead

## PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETINGS

Our general meetings are held during the 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.

As with past years we have run many of our meetings in partnership with the Biology Society of South Australia (BSSA).

Thanks to Michael Stead and the team from BSSA for organising these meetings.

Talk topics over the 2018-19 year were:

Dan Duval, Seed Conservation Centre, DEW – 'Ex-situ Conservation of Threatened Plants in SA'

Dr Andy Sharp, NR N&Y – 'Rewilding Yorke Peninsula: Great Southern Ark'

Presentations by 2018 BSSA / NCSSA Grant Recipients:

Thomas Clarke - Identifying spawning behaviour and movement patterns of yellowtail kingfish *Seriola lalandi* in South Australia.





Fleshy Bluebush *Maireana ericoides* Photo: M Stead

## CONSERVATION BIOLOGY GRANT

This year's grant was jointly sponsored by NCSSA and the Biology Society of South Australia (BSSA). Applicants could apply for up to \$3,300, for research 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:

Ellyse Bunney (PhD) - 'Securing the sustainability of sandalwood: a multi-isotope approach to provenancing'

Hayley Jose (PhD) - 'Understanding the ecological role and mutualistic interactions between an endangered marsupial, fungi and plants to conserve ecosystem function'

Tessa Manning (PhD) - 'Conservation genetics of reintroduced Western quolls *Dasyurus geoffroii* at Arid Recovery Reserve'

Isabelle Onley (PhD) - 'Conservation genomics and adaptations of translocated Greater stick-nest rats under climate change'

## ADVOCACY

As South Australia's primary nature conservation advocacy organisation, we call for the protection and conservation of South Australia's precious natural resources with a key focus on nationally and state listed threatened plants, animals and ecological communities, management of protected areas and remnant native vegetation.

Throughout 2018-19, Julia Peacock continued in our part-time position of **Nature Advocate**, working across a wide range of nature conservation issues.

Our **Conservation Ecologist**, Nicki de Preu, continued one day a week, working on position papers on conservation issues of strategic interest to the Society.

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

### Native vegetation

The protection and proper management of remnant native vegetation remains an issue of key concern for our Society. Activity related to native vegetation protection included commenting on:

- the Interim Guidelines for the Management of Roadside Vegetation, calling for a greater emphasis on the **retention** of remnant roadside vegetation rather than on providing local councils with the capacity for greater clearance
- changes to the Significant Environmental Benefit Policy, expressing deep concern that the changes could result in **significant reductions** to the payments required to 'offset' vegetation clearance, so much so that the funds collected may not be sufficient to pay for the works required to achieve a 'biodiversity benefit' elsewhere.
- proposals to clear over 1000 ha of vegetation for two solar farms. As clearance for solar farms is now the leading cause of remnant native vegetation loss, we wrote a letter to the Environment Minister on this issue. He responded that the clearance had been adequately 'offset'. We continue to pursue this issue through changes to the land-use planning system
- two controversial clearance applications on Kangaroo Island: the clearance of vegetation (including a threatened ecological community) for a pipeline to provide water to a proposed golf course; and adding our voice to the chorus of concerned voices about clearance in Flinders Chase National Park for private luxury accommodation.

We also attended a series of meetings and workshops with SA Power Networks (SAPN) regarding the review of Regulations that govern the removal of vegetation near powerlines. Whilst we support some of the changes SAPN are seeking through the review, e.g. being able to take a less prescriptive and more risk-based approach to trimming vegetation near powerlines, we strongly disagree with their proposal to be allowed to remove native vegetation from under powerlines **without 'offsetting' this loss**.

### Wildlife and Natural Habitats

- Attended the launch of *South Australia's State of the Environment* report for the community in February of 2019. We agree with the Report that there is an urgent need for targeted **large-scale habitat restoration** and rigorous, **long-term monitoring** of our State's biodiversity
- Making a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's faunal extinction crisis, calling for stronger legislative protection of our threatened species and a stable source of funding to support their recovery
- Commenting on the expansion of the beachwrack fishery (involving the collection of algae from beaches in the south-east) for international export, expressing concern regarding how the impact of the expanded fishery on threatened shorebirds over a coastline that extends for more than 100 Km would be monitored.
- Providing nominated representatives and conservation expertise to the Department for the Environment and Water (DEW) Reference Groups for Kangaroo Management and Duck and Quail Hunting

### Fire

- Continued to represent the Conservation Council SA on the Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges, Flinders, and Mid-North & Yorke Peninsula regional Bushfire Management Committees.

- Provided comment on the Dudley Peninsula Fire Management Plan, Kangaroo Island, supporting a landscape-scale approach to fire management but questioning the management zones identified
- Involvement in the Ecological Technical Reference Group that provides technical and scientific advice on environmental matters to the State Bushfire Coordination Committee as part of the BMAP process

### **Water**

In Sept. 2018, we commented on the Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse, highlighting our deep concern that the environmental water requirements of the South Australian portion of River Murray and its floodplains cannot be met at the current level of consumptive use.

### **Protected Area Management**

The management of protected areas to ensure their natural values are maintained continues to be an important priority for us. We provided comments to DEW on draft Management Plans for the following reserves:

- Lake Gairdner National Park Draft Management Plan, and
- Wara Wayingga-Tennyson Dunes Conservation Reserve Management Plan

Our comments sought the inclusion of accurate, detailed information on the conservation values of these areas, where it was lacking, and highlighted the importance of protecting biodiversity, particularly threatened species, in these areas.

### **Biosecurity**

The threat posed by introduced pest plants, animals and diseases to biodiversity has long been an issue of concern to NCSSA. Over the past 12 months we have contributed to a number of initiatives that aim to address environmental biosecurity risks, including:

- Making a submission to the South Australian Parliamentary Inquiry into Overabundant and Pest Species
- Making a submission to the federal Senate Inquiry into the impact of feral deer, pigs and goats in Australia and subsequently appearing before the Committee
- Commenting on revisions to South Australia's 'List of Declared Animals' and the 'new and emerging introduced species policy'
- Supporting the Invasive Species Council's submission on the draft National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement

### **National Parks Australia Council**

We continue to participate as an active member of the National Parks Australia Council (NPAC), the national body concerned with protecting and extending the national reserve system, including national parks.

Over 2018-19, this included:

- Attending the NPAC Annual General Meeting in Brisbane in October 2018, where issues of common concern were discussed, such as the push for increased nature-based tourism in our national parks across the country
- Supporting the drafting of letters to key candidates about NPAC's 'Nature for Life' policy platform for extending on and better managing our National Reserve System in the lead up to the 2019 federal election
- Post-election discussions regarding NPAC's policy platform in the context of the re-elected Morrison government

### **South Australia Nature Alliance**

NCSSA continues to work collaboratively with other conservation organisations, including through the South Australia Nature Alliance (SANA). SANA identified several priorities for 2019, including:

- Developing an eNGO-lead "Vision for nature" outlining our priorities for protection and restoration, and
- Optimising the outcome for nature conservation of reform to the Natural Resources Management Act 2004 by connecting with and supporting the new Boards (*see adj. box for more information on this reform*).

## **LEGISLATIVE REFORM**

NCSSA has made a strong contribution in 2018-19 to influencing the legislative reform being undertaken in South Australia where it will impact on our environment.

### **Reform to the Natural Resources Management Act 2004**

The Marshall Government pursued its election commitment to repeal and replace the Natural Resources Management Act 2004 throughout 2018-19. NCSSA participated in consultation sessions and made a submission on the Discussion Paper on the proposed Landscapes SA Act, highlighting the need for the new Act to explicitly address biodiversity conservation, in addition to the proposed focus on soils, water and pest plants and animals.

The Bill, as introduced, did not address biodiversity conservation as explicitly as we believe is necessary, so NCSSA participated in a series of meetings with various Parliamentarians to lobby for amendments. Pleasingly, these amendments were agreed in the Upper House, however at the time of writing the Bill is yet to be finalised.

### **Planning reform**

Reform to the State's land-use planning system continues, and NCSSA has been active in seeking better protection for our natural environment through making submissions on:

- the State Planning Policy for Biodiversity, supporting the intent but suggesting several improvements
- the Natural Resources and Environment Policy Discussion Paper, calling for better integration of the land-use planning and native vegetation protection regimes, as well as improvements to our knowledge of biodiversity so planners can make informed decisions

Planning reform is ongoing, so we expect to continue to engage throughout 2019-20, particular as the Planning and Design Codes (the new "rulebooks") are currently being drafted.

# PROJECTS

## BUSHLAND CONDITION MONITORING

The Bushland Condition Monitoring (BCM) project began in 2005 and continues to be a widely used for establishing the condition of vegetation in the agricultural regions of South Australia.

Data is collected in the field on various attributes that reflect vegetation condition, including native and exotic species present, habitat structure, weed threat, grazing impact and regeneration of woody trees and shrubs.

Because the assessment area is precisely marked out in the field, the same assessment site can be repeated to determine if there are changes in the attributes scored.

To date, approximately 1500 sites have been surveyed at least once.

During the 2018/2019 financial year, the emphasis of the BCM program was to re-visit sites that were assessed at approximately 10 years previously.

Funding was provided by the Northern and Yorke and the Adelaide Mount Lofty Ranges NRM regions.

The following projects were undertaken:

### Mid-North revisits:

Ten BCM sites in the mid-North, that were established in 2010, were re-surveyed in May 2019. The majority of these sites were grazing properties which had experienced prolonged before-average rainfall prior to the survey.

In general, the results showed slight declines in perennial species diversity and plant cover between 2010 and 2019.

Results from two survey sites in Black Rock Conservation Park showed an increase in total grazing pressure.

### Red Stringybark *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*:

Although widespread in eastern Australia, within South Australia Red Stringybark is largely confined to a small area centred on Spring Gully Conservation Park and adjoining properties. This is possibly a relict population, Red Stringybark having contracted to its current extent in South Australia as rainfall declined.

In May 2019, six BCM sites were established in Spring Gully CP and nearby properties.

Climate change appears to be a key threat to Red Stringybarks – the past few years of prolonged drought may have caused a decline in tree health.

Feral animal grazing, including deer was also preventing regeneration at some survey sites.

### Woodland Bird Monitoring Sites:

Thirty BCM sites that were first established in 2009/2010 in at Woodland Bird Monitoring sites in the Southern Mt Lofty Ranges, were re-surveyed in Spring 2018.

The vegetation condition and habitat structural data obtained from the BCM sites over time will be compared with bird species composition at the survey sites.

### BCM Training:

In September 2018, staff of Natural Resources Eyre Peninsula were trained in the BCM method, as part of the transition towards regional staff becoming more autonomous in carrying out vegetation condition monitoring.

### BCM database:

After several years of discussion, the Department for Environment and Water have re-developed and will host and maintain the BCM database.

This will enable greater access to the database by trained users of the method which will help inform land management actions and priorities.



*Wurmbea latifolia* Star lily  
Photo: Robert Lawrence

## THREATENED PLANT ACTION GROUP (TPAG)

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 flora information and policies.

TPAG working bees and field days produced good results from the actions implemented to regenerate and restore threatened flora habitats.

Implemented 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, environmental agencies and other community groups.

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 plants and nature.

The TPAG Program is funded through NCSSA by the AMLR NRM region and small grants.



## MOUNT LOFTY RANGES WOODLAND BIRDS MONITORING PROGRAM

The 2018-19 survey took place between September 2018 and January 2019. It went relatively smoothly with only minimal disruption from poor weather and fire bans, unlike some previous seasons. All 166 active survey sites were visited three times which meant that 498 site visits were carried out resulting in 6459 individual bird records.

The data was entered into the MLR Woodland Bird Survey Database maintained by NCSSA and then uploaded into the Biological Database of South Australia (BDBSA). Data from BDBSA is available to everyone through Nature Maps (Dept. Environment and Water) and the Atlas of Living Australia.

The surveys were undertaken by a group of approximately 12 surveyors, some of whom have been involved with the program since the early 2000s. We also attracted a few new surveyors and each year all surveyors undergo a comprehensive induction process. We are, of course, very grateful to all of our surveyors without whom the program would not be possible.

The process of creating electronic copies of maps for the surveyors continued as did updating various parts of the database. In particular, we managed to track down the owners of a few properties that had obviously changed hands and for whom we had no current contact details.

Our sites are located across various tenures including: private ownership, SA Water, Forestry SA, Parks and Reserves (DEW) and NGOs such as The Girl Guides Assoc., Field Naturalists and the National Trust. NCSSA greatly values the good relationships it has built up with all the site owners and managers and appreciates their ongoing support and enthusiasm for the program.

Ali Ben Kahn will again coordinate the program for the 2019 season.

Funding for the Program comes from the Adelaide Mt Lofty Ranges NRM Board with other support from DEW and The University of Adelaide.

### Some records of interest in 2018 - 19

- Budgies at Mt Gawler
- Square-tailed Kites at Para Wirra
- Bassian Thrush at Springs Rd Sanctuary (none recorded previous year)
- Owlet-nightjar nest with eggs in a tree stump at Wotton Scrub
- Southern Boobook at North Mt Magnificent
- Fan-tailed Cuckoo fledgling being fed by 2 Grey Fantails at Mt Gawler
- 10 Chestnut-rumped Heathwrens either seen or heard across several sites



Chestnut-rumped Heathwrens *Calamanthus pyrrhopygius parkeri*. Photo: Elizabeth Steele-Collins



## AMONGST IT

NCSSA began hosting the **Amongst it** project in April 2019, with the coordinator Jill Woodlands working 1 day per week.

*Amongst it* is an experimental project looking for better ways to connect people to nature in positive, everyday ways and to celebrate how important nature is to our identity and our common humanity. To use what we love about nature to engage and enchant people, and motivate them to take action for nature.

*Amongst it* was first initiated in mid-2017 as a project inspired by work on a new nature strategy for SA (Nature of SA), in which NCSSA is a critical partner. That work aimed to identify and test a number of shifts to our practice and response to many of the challenges associated with nature conservation in a changing climate.

As host, NCSSA administered a small grant round of \$20k with projects to be delivered by December 2019. We were overwhelmed with the interest and quality of the applications, as well as the commitment to our interview-based evaluation so we could better understand ways to activate people's latent love and sense of responsibility for the natural world.

### Summary

- 20 people participated in an intensive pre-grant workshop to hone their application
- 54 project applications
- \$177k requested.
- 7 projects selected providing varied and surprising experiences
- Evaluation workshop with all *Amongst it* applicants late November 2019
- Amongst it projects and a nature practitioners page showcased on the *Amongst it* website <http://www.amongstsa.org.au/>
- Support partners: DEW, Trees For Life, ConservationSA, Hinterland Strategy and Innovation.



2018-19

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

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