

2019-20



NATURE CONSERVATION SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ANNUAL REPORT

ACHIEVEMENTS THIS YEAR:

- **Lobbying for bushfire planning and response that specifically includes regard for nature conservation in the wake of the 2019/20 catastrophic bushfire season**
- **Donating \$10,000 to support the legal action led by Eco-Action KI against the approval for commercial 'eco-lodges' in Flinders Chase National Park**
- **Adapting to the global pandemic, working remotely but still advocating strongly for nature**
- **Ongoing collaboration in significant biodiversity monitoring projects: Mt Lofty Ranges Woodland Birds (MLRWB); new and repeat monitoring of Bushland Condition Monitoring (BCM) sites in Northern and Yorke region as part of the Board's *Marna Banggara Rewilding Project*.**

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: Arkaroola. Photo: G Mollison
Back page: Murray River. Photo: NCSSA

Golden Whistler, *Pachycephala pectoralis*
(m) Photo: Peter Day



NCSSA PEOPLE

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

President: Michael Stead

Vice-President: Rick Davies

Secretary: Natasha Brown

Assistant Secretary: Tim Draper

Treasurer: Anna-Lucia Draper

General Committee: Andrew Allanson, Doug Bickerton, Raphael Eisenhofer, James Tresize, Helen Vonow. **Co-opted:** Ann Prescott

STAFF

Administrative Manager: Amanda Stewart

Conservation Programs Manager: vacant

Nature Advocate: Julia Peacock

Conservation Ecologist: Nicki de Preu

Threatened Plant Action Group Program Coordinator: Tim Jury

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

Amongst it Program Coordinator: Jill Woodlands

Database & Website Project Officer: Lesley Parton

Other project staff: Bradley Bianco, Sheree Bowman, Sonia Croft, Ellen Krahnert, Lindy Scott, Elen Shute.

MLR Woodland Bird volunteer surveyors: Ali Ben Kahn, Zeta Bull, Stuart Collard, Peter Christy, Sonia Croft, Peter Day, Jody Gates, Sam Gordon, Chris James, Gareth Oerman, David Paton, Penny Paton and Elspeth Young.

REGULAR VOLUNTEERS

Keith Lloyd (general office support and library); Brian Knill (MLRWB database); and many others who generously contributed their time throughout the year to various conservation projects and activities.

FUNDING 2019-20

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 2019-20 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); Department of Industry; Friends of Aldinga Scrub; and Trees For Life.

PRESIDENTS REPORT

When I delivered last year's AGM report and outlined the goals and ambitions of the Society for 2019/20, no one would have predicted the series of local, national and international events that have followed.

If nothing else, the past year has proven that we are adaptable and resilient.

Member events were cancelled, and our annual Conservation Biology Grant was postponed; staff and volunteers worked and collaborated from home; and Management Committee meetings were via teleconference.

Despite these challenges, the work of the Society continued unabated.

Our advocacy staff wrote letters and submissions on important environmental issues, our project staff conducted biological surveys and undertook habitat management interventions, we encouraged the South Australian public to get *Amongst It*, and the Management Committee significantly advanced the redraft of a new Constitution, commenced the design and construction of new website, and re-examined how we engage with members and supporters.

I would like to thank the staff, committee members, and volunteers for their unwavering commitment to the cause.

This will be my last President's report. After six years in the role, I am stepping down to pursue other opportunities (within the organisation).

For staff and volunteers, past and present, it has been a pleasure to serve in this role and work with a group of people that all have the interests of nature conservation at their core.

Be brave and don't look back,

Michael Stead



CONSERVATION BIOLOGY GRANT

This grant is jointly sponsored by NCSSA and the Biology Society of South Australia (BSSA). Applicants can 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, due to the Covid-19 limitations on Universities and researchers, we have delayed the application period and awards of this grant into the 2020-21 financial year.

Likewise, two of the previous years recipients (Tessa Manning and Isabelle Onley) delivered online presentations in August rather than May (available via YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/gTfL5E3bQjU>).

We hope to be able to see presentations by Ellyse Bunney and Hayley Jose in 2021 ~ in whatever format works at the time.

ENGAGEMENT

As with many other organisations we have been thrust into different means of engaging with members and those interested in nature conservation.

General Meetings

In recent years our general meetings are held about four times during the year, many in conjunction with the Biology Society of South Australia (BSSA).

However in 2019-20 we last met at the AGM, before the Covid-19 outbreak lead to the cancellation of the March meeting and welcome BBQ. Likewise we were unable to have presentations from the Conservation Biology grant recipients in May.

We hope to be able to resume in the next year, but we will also need to utilise other means to keep engaged.

Advocacy sub-committee

This group supports the advocacy role of the Society and aims to engage members in this important work.

Thanks to Rick Davies, Andrew Allanson, Michael Stead, Julia Peacock, Nicki de Preu. Special thanks to Jim Allen and Ann Prescott. Volunteers welcome!

Engagement sub-committee

This group is focused on updating the organisation's methods of engagement with members and the wider public. The focus in the first instance was an Advocacy e-Newsletter, with assistance from that sub-committee.

This format provides scope to use for other foci (eg Project updates, Creature Feature, even a mini-Xanthopus).

The current work-in-progress is development of a new, up-to-date and secure website.

Thanks to Raph Eisenhofer, Ann Prescott, Katie Dashwood, Lesley Parton and Helen Vonow.

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



ADVOCACY

Legislative Reform

During 2019-20 NCSSA continued to make a strong contribution to influencing the legislative reform being undertaken in South Australia and nationally, where it will impact on our environment.

Review of federal environment law

The NCSSA was one of over 30,000 individuals and organisations that made a submission to the 10-yearly review of the key federal environment law, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

We called for laws that truly protect and restore our natural environment, strengthen our democracy and support community involvement, amplifying the messages of *Places You Love Alliance* www.placesyoulove.org

We highlighted the need to expand the Matters of National Environmental Significance to include the National Reserve System, to ensure proper protection of these unique and special places.

We called for adequate resourcing to implement the Act, including for threatened species recovery.

Advocacy is ongoing with the Final Report for the Review expected in October 2020.

Biodiversity as part of the new Landscapes SA Act 2019

Together with other environmental groups, we successfully lobbied to ensure that biodiversity was explicitly included in the *Landscapes SA Act 2019*, which replaced the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004* on 1 July 2019.

Thanks to these efforts, conserving biodiversity is specifically included as an object of the Act, as a general statutory duty and as a function of the Landscape Boards, and 'biodiversity sensitive urban design' is a priority of the Green Adelaide Board.

Landscape Boards are also required to advance the objects of the *Native Vegetation Act 1991* and the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* in their activities.

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 2019-20, 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 a series of position papers on conservation issues of strategic interest to the Society and assisted with submissions.

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

Fire

In the wake of the catastrophic bushfire season:

- NCSSA made submissions to the state Review of the 2019/20 fire season as well as the federal Royal Commission into natural disaster management and the federal Parliamentary Inquiry into lessons from the bushfires. In each, we emphasised the importance of nature conservation in bushfire planning and response. Particularly, we highlighted that prescribed burning, whilst an important tool, was not a panacea for all issues relating to bushfire risk. Our submissions also emphasized the importance of effective and efficient bushfire governance and the need to finalise the State Bushfire Management Plan, points that featured as a high priority amongst recommendations arising from the State review.
- We commented on the Outback Bushfire Area Management Plan and continued to represent the Conservation Council SA on the Adelaide Mount Lofty and Flinders, Mid North & Yorke regional Bushfire Management Committees.

Wildlife and Natural Habitats

- Commented on proposed changes to the schedules of threatened species maintained under the *South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*. NCSSA's comments contributed to the re-assessment of two species that are now to be retained on the schedules rather than removed (Slender-billed Thornbill (western) and Plain-lip Spider Orchid).
- Made a submission to the review of the *Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act 1989*, highlighting the importance of this vast and ecologically important region of South Australia for nature conservation.
- Supported the listing of 'Karst Springs and Associated Alkaline Fens of the Naracoorte Coastal Plain Bioregion' as a threatened ecological community under the *Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.
- Provided nominated representatives and conservation expertise to the Department for the Environment and Water (DEW) Reference Groups for Kangaroo Management and Duck and Quail Hunting.

Pest and overabundant species

- Commented on the revised Wild Dog Management policy, calling for evidence-based management, ongoing monitoring and the judicious use of baits to avoid off-target impacts.
- A submission on the revised draft 'South Australian Commercial Kangaroo Management Plan', highlighting our concern that high numbers of kangaroos are impacting on native vegetation and the habitat it provides for other species.
- Supported the Invasive Species Council's submission on the revised National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement.
- A submission to the development of the Little Corella Management Strategy, supporting a co-ordinated and collaborative, evidence-based, state-wide approach to Little Corella management in South Australia.

Native vegetation

The protection and proper management of remnant native vegetation is an ongoing key issue of concern for our Society.

We contributed to native vegetation protection by:

- Supported the introduction of a 'Native Vegetation Overlay' as part of reforms to South Australia's land-use planning system, as this will improve the co-ordination between land-use and native vegetation protection regimes. However, a range of other improvements to the new planning system are still required (see '*Planning reform*' for more information).
- Donated \$10,000 to the legal action being led by Eco-Action KI against the state government's approval to build commercial 'eco-lodges' in Flinders Chase National Park. Court hearings were delayed due to the bushfire which ravaged the Park and destroyed existing Wilderness Trail infrastructure. Despite the clear, inherent risk to any infrastructure in this fire-prone environment, the NCSSA understands the Australian Walking Company still intends to build these 'eco-lodges' and so court hearings are now scheduled for 2020/21.
- Provided comment on numerous proposals to clear native vegetation, including plans to expand the cemetery at Stirling (which was subsequently refused) and arguing against extensive clearance for a new electricity transmission line on Eyre Peninsula, particularly in biodiverse woodlands as well as by avoiding sensitive areas like Heritage Agreements and Conservation Parks.
- A submission to the review of the Regulations that govern the removal of vegetation near powerlines, strongly disagreeing that SA Power Network's position that they be allowed to remove native vegetation from under powerlines without 'offsetting' this loss.
- Supporting a campaign being coordinated by the Conservation Council of SA to protect urban green canopy, particularly where these trees are remnant native vegetation (see www.conservation.sa.org.au/trees).

National Parks Australia Council

NCSSA continues 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 2019-20, this included:

- Attending the NPAC Annual General Meeting in Canberra in October 2019. Issues of common concern were discussed, including the management of pest species, especially 'iconic' species like brumbies in the Alps (and koalas on Kangaroo Island) as well as the impact of renewable energy infrastructure on the natural environment (such as Snowy 2.0 in NSW and clearance for solar farms in SA).
- A joint submission was made to the review of federal environment law, particularly calling for the protection of the national reserve system by including it as a 'trigger' for the law (see *opp. pg* for further information).

South Australia Nature Alliance

NCSSA continues to work collaboratively with other conservation organisations, including through the South Australia Nature Alliance (SANA).

A key action for SANA in 2019/20 was launching a website that includes our Vision for Nature (naturealliance.org.au). We seek "a restoration economy that places nature at the heart of decision making and supports jobs, regions and wellbeing by investing in our essential natural ecosystems".

The website also contains information on each of the Alliance members.

Planning Reform

We continued to engage on the Planning and Design Codes (the new "rulebooks") for land-use planning in South Australia throughout 2019-20, including making a very detailed submission in November 2019 on the Planning and Design Code for the regional and rural areas.

A very special **thankyou** to Jim Allen, NCSSA member and former professional planner, for his help in interpreting the Code and drafting of the submission!

We supported the introduction of a 'Native Vegetation Overlay' as this will improve the co-ordination between land-use and native vegetation protection regimes.

However, we called for a number of improvements, including for tourism infrastructure to be 'restricted' in conservation areas, for the complete and correct identification of all reserve areas to be included in the Conservation Zone and for the creation of an overlay that identifies the critical habitat of threatened species and ecological communities.



National Parks Australia Council field trip Oct 2019 ~ wildflowers at Namadgi. Photo: J Peacock

AMONGST IT

This year NCSSA administered the second **Amongst it** grant program. The focus was on exploring new ways to provide transformative experiences of connection and to really understand how we could be activating people's latent love and sense of responsibility for the natural world.

- **Spotlighting the Suburbs:** *Goolwa to Wellington LAP* drew together the 'accidental community' of new residents of Newenham housing subdivision at Mt Barker to help them connect with their nearby nature.
- **Amongst it at the Beach:** *Surfing SA* created a mobile workshop and learning caravan that was unveiled at the 2019 Onkaparinga Christmas Pageant, engaging young people who exchanged bags of beach litter for a small recycled hand plane.
- **Tree Stories:** the *City of Burnside* promoted connection with trees with special stories from local residents highlighted in a bus shelter promotion.
- **The Nature Strip:** *Council on The Aging* via ZESTFEST produced a 2020 calendar that showcased unexpected images of nude older people in their special nature places. The proceeds supported the work of NCSSA / COTA.
- **Naturehood, Nuturehood:** *Cyprea Sustainability* brought together local community with a series of nature micro-adventures and foraging to strengthen suburban resilience, stimulate environmental awareness and action.
- **Migrants in Marine Parks:** *Experiencing Marine Sanctuaries* focus is on welcoming recent arrivals, refugees and international students to our beautiful beaches and marine parks. To be rolled out summer 20/21.
- **Youth Unearthed:** *Youth Inc.* designed 3-day experiential learning adventure in nature to see how young people, during a time of vulnerability, might be inspired by a stronger sense of responsibility for and interdependence with the natural world. Due to COVID, April 2021 delivery.

Planning started in February to run an inaugural **Nature Festival** September 25-October 4 2020 to celebrate our SA nature.

Support partners are **Trees For Life, Conservation SA, Department of Environment & Water, Adelaide & Mt Lofty Ranges NRM and Hinterland Strategy and Innovation.**

PROJECTS

MOUNT LOFTY RANGES WOODLAND BIRDS MONITORING PROGRAM

The 2019-20 survey took place between September 2019 and early January 2020. All 166 active survey sites were visited three times which meant that 498 site visits were carried out resulting in 6319 individual bird records.

The surveys were undertaken by a group of approximately 12 surveyors. As always, we are very appreciative of the efforts of our surveyors without whom the project would not be possible.

Our sites are located across various tenures including private ownership, SA Water, Forestry SA, Parks and Reserves (DEW), Local Government and NGOs such as The Girl Guides Assoc., Field Naturalists and the National Trust. NCSSA appreciates the ongoing support of all of these landholders and managers and their enthusiasm for the program.

All the bird records were 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 through Nature Maps (Dept. Environment and Water) and the Atlas of Living Australia.

The Project Steering Committee was reformed during 2019 and is investigating opportunities to secure future funding for the project, potential research activities to effectively utilise the dataset and how to publicise the project to attract more community support and involvement.

In December, towards the end of the survey season, the Cudlee Creek bushfire completely burnt out 5 of our sites. These are located at Lobethal Bushland Park (2 sites), Porter Scrub CP (2 sites) and Charleston CP (1 site). Luckily we had completed the surveys before the fire went through and the accumulated data from more than 20 years of surveys will provide good benchmark information as the sites regenerate over the coming years.

Funding for the 2019-20 season came from the Adelaide Mt Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board with other support from DEW and The University of Adelaide.

Some records of interest in 2019-20:

- 5 Wedge-tailed Eagles (Mt Bold, Hindmarsh Falls and Para Wirra)
- 1 Beautiful Firetail (Cox Scrub)
- 2 Square-tailed Kites (Hale CP)
- 1 Hooded Robin (Para Wirra)
- Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo nest with chicks (Norris Hill)
- 1 Brown Goshawk (Charleston CP)
- 17 Varied Sittellas (Filsell Hill, Loftia CP, Tugwell Rd and Cleland)



New Holland honey eater Photo: Peter Day



Staff and volunteers from the *Marna Banggara Project* Photo: Tamara Potter

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.

The 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 ~1900 sites have been surveyed at least once, including ~600 which have been visited more than once.

During the 2019/2020 financial year, the following projects were undertaken:

Marna Banggara Rewilding Project:

In spring 2019, seven BCM sites were revisited on private properties on southern Yorke Peninsula as part of the Northern and Yorke Landscape Board's *Marna Banggara Rewilding Project*.

Over the next three years, the Landscape Board will reintroduce two regionally extinct small mammal species (brush-tailed bettong and southern brown bandicoot) into the project area. The intent is re-establish the lost ecosystem services that these small digging mammals provide and, as a consequence, arrest the gradual decline in vegetation condition on the peninsula.

The baseline vegetation monitoring undertaken by the Society will inform the success of this management intervention over the medium- to long-term.

BCM database:

A further 40 sites surveyed by Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board staff and contractors were uploaded by our staff into the new BCM (SABAT) database.

Over the past twelve-months, we have worked closely with Department for Environment and Water staff (Information, Science and Technology Branch) to complete the transfer of our entire BCM database (>1,900 sites) onto this new platform, which will be jointly curated.

This has involved many hours of testing and documentation by Ali Ben Kahn and Elen Shute. We now have a new database with improved stability. This coming year we hope to add greater functionality and accessibility to database for our clients and government staff.

Funding this year was provided by the Eyre Peninsula, and Northern and Yorke NRM regions.

THREATENED PLANT ACTION GROUP (TPAG)

TPAG makes 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 produce good results from the actions implemented to regenerate and restore threatened flora habitats. Implemented recovery actions include: abatement of weed competition; fencing to protect habitat; revegetation; plant population monitoring; flora surveys; stakeholder liaison; and public education. This is possible due to effective working partnerships with landholders, environmental agencies and other community groups.

The TPAG program (through NCSSA) has been funded for many years by small grants and by the AMLR NRM region. Unfortunately, with the transition to the Landscape Boards, this regular funding from the region will not be continued into future years. The TPAG steering group and coordinator are engaged in applying for other sources of funding.

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.



White Beauty Spider-orchid *Caladenia argocalla* near Clare Photo: Nicki de Preu



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