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A Rocha Australia ENEWS

Summer, 2020-21

We are a Christian organisation engaging communities in nature conservation

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Chair's report...

Welcome to the summer 2021 issue of A Rocha Australia's ENews.

The year is promising to be very exciting for A Rocha Australia and, after a year beset by Covid and bushfires, I am very excited to invite you to prayerfully partner with us in Creation care in ways that you may not have done so previously.

Here are eight ways you could get involved:

1. Join a local A Rocha network. You can get involved in Creation care with others. Local networks exist or are being established in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Toowoomba and Newcastle. We seek leaders for some of these networks. Contact us through our website or Facebook page if you want to

get involved in bird surveys, weeding, planting trees, cleaning up rubbish, giving Creation care talks to your church family, or hosting Creation care events.

2. Nominate someone to become a member. Membership shows your support for A Rocha Australia's objectives. For a one-off membership fee your friend or family member can show their support for Creation care. Our goal is to have 100 members by June, and we currently have 93. We also have over 500 contacts receiving these ENews, and welcome more.

3. Help A Rocha Australia acquire land for conservation. After five years of investigation and planning we are now seeking funds and partners to buy land to support ecological protection and/or restoration as a tangible contribution to Creation care. Please pray that the board will know the Lord's will in this major new initiative. Thanks to a donation and other support we have



Restoration works at the Hart Rd Wetland, S.A.

Chair's report continued...

funds to allow us to be a junior partner with a suitable established private land conservation organisation in buying land. We are seeking people with relevant expertise to form a working group to lead this initiative. How can you help? Would you consider contributing funds, or even matching them? Or perhaps you own land with high conservation values that you would be happy to donate, or lease as a first step in a long-term partnership? Would you commit to pray for us every week?

4. Survey birds. We have several opportunities in 2021 for people to help regular surveying of birds, whether you are a lifelong ornithologist or just learning the difference between a kookaburra and a cormorant. These are undertaken with partner organisations across four states to help monitor these important taxa, and more broadly assess the ecological health of forests, grasslands and wetlands. This year we are partnering with A Rocha organisations globally for the **John Stott birding day on 8th May**, to commemorate the lifelong passion for birding by the renowned late evangelist, preacher and ornithologist.

5. Prayerfully consider nominating to join the Board. We are seeking to attract a person to become a director with expertise and skills in key areas to build our capacity for board governance, particularly accounting, fundraising and business administration. Is that you? Or can you recommend to us someone to consider?

6. Get involved in A Rocha Australia's regional conference at Aldinga, South Australia, on 16 October. If you live in South Australia you may be interested in participating in A Rocha Australia's first conference in South Australia. We are looking for people to help with organisation, running a workshop, giving a talk or perhaps even hosting a field trip. We hope the event also helps build a local network based around Adelaide, and help us deliver the Hard Road Wetlands project at Aldinga.

7. Join us for our Annual General Meeting on 11 March. This is an important opportunity to hear about what A Rocha Australia did in 2020, ask questions of directors, and hear about plans for 2021. The AGM will be held via Zoom at 7 pm AEDT (Sydney/Melbourne), please RSVP to secretary [Julia Jardine](#). The president's report and finance report are available, please email Julia. Please also note that only members may vote at the AGM. Non-members are welcome to observe.

8. Meet the family. The worldwide A Rocha Family will meet online from 5–11 June for our free virtual Forum Festival. People from the 20 A Rocha Organisations working around the globe will meet together online over several days to hear talks by experts on biodiversity, climate change, theology and conservation; share in devotions through reading the Bible and prayer; and watch short films from across the A Rocha family about what we are collectively doing. It will be a time to celebrate, lament, be encouraged and learn. You can also find out how we are implementing the new A Rocha Worldwide Covenant. Check the A Rocha Australia website for more details as they are released.

Can I challenge you to chose one (or more!) of these to do this year?

This year is an absolutely critical year for global action on biodiversity conservation and



Banksia killed by rising seas, Nambucca Heads

Chair's report continued...

climate action. UN conferences will be held by world leaders to agree strong (we hope) commitments and targets to reduce biodiversity decline and extinctions, and cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. A key UN oceans conference may also occur.

The year also marks the start of UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030). It is designed to highlight the need for greatly increased global cooperation to restore degraded and destroyed ecosystems, contributing to efforts to combat climate change and safeguard biodiversity, food security, and water supply.

As calls for strong action escalate, as politicians and businesses make promises (or don't), and as reports are released documenting the Creation groaning and in need for much greater global ambition on nature conservation and the climate, I encourage you seek the Lord in prayer, in reading the Bible and in meditating on God's promises. Instead of despair or despondence, let us commit our anxiety or anger to the Lord in prayer. Let us trust in God's promises made in his son Jesus Christ, and live in the hope God gives that these will be fulfilled in God's timing and according to His sovereign plan.

I hope you enjoy this ENews. As always, we encourage you to become a member, support us in prayer and financially, and to get involved in Creation care.

Dr Stuart Blanch

President, A Rocha Australia



5th Anniversary celebration grants



We'd like to thank all of you who watched our 5th anniversary [video](#), and for your kind encouragements to us to keep on going!

We were pleased to receive applications for our small grants program from Christian venues, and are in the process of working out the details and distributing the grants. We look forward to providing updates about how these grants are helping with conservation and Creation care education outcomes at these venues in upcoming ENews.

Katoomba Christian Convention Centre in the Blue Mountains, NSW is one recipient. We have assisted KCC in the past with bush regeneration activities. This grant will help control the proliferation of blackberry – a curse for many bush regenerators! It is growing in sections of nationally listed 'Temperate peat swamps on sandstone'.

By engaging a professional contractor to work on this tricky and prickly weed species, the site will be easier to access and hand weed by other volunteers.



Volunteers at our last KCC bush regen day

2020 bird surveys results: Hart Road Wetlands, S.A.

A progress report has been compiled for this A Rocha Australia project site on property owned by City of Onkaparinga at Aldinga Beach, South Australia. The full report is available on our [website](#); some highlights are below:



Red lines indicate site (plot) boundaries; each site covers 2.0 hectares.
Other coloured lines represent typical routes followed by observers during surveys.

- Six property visits: 36 standardised surveys and 2 incidental surveys
- Total number of bird records = 593
- Number of species recorded = 66 species (including 7 introduced species)
- Species of ornithological interest due to occurrence at margins of known range, unusual in this habitat, or secretive behaviour (not commonly detected) include Peregrine Falcon, Baillon's Crake, Spotless Crake and Crescent Honeyeater.

The authors of this report noted that the Wetlands support a diversity of bird species which is attractive to birdwatchers; there is an opportunity to develop visitor facilities such as bird hides and signage.

They also noted that the scarcity of drying bare mud and small size of open areas in 2020 likely prevented the occurrence of migratory shorebird species.



Eurasian Coots were one of 7 species breeding at the Wetlands in 2020

2020 bird surveys results: Nielsen Park, Toowoomba, QLD

A progress report has been compiled for the commencement of baseline bird surveying in 2020 at this escarpment park, owned by Toowoomba Regional Council. We hope over time to observe positive changes in the park's avifauna in response to bush regeneration efforts by the Friends of Escarpment Parks and A Rocha volunteers.

The full report is available on our [website](#); some highlights are below:



Satin Bowerbird and one of the bowers

- 14 property visits, 26 surveys, 6 incidental surveys.
- Total number of bird records = 261
- Number of species recorded = 35 (0 introduced species)
- Number of breeding species = 6
- Species of ornithological interest due to general rarity (small population and/or large area of territory), occurrence at margins of known range, unusual in this habitat, or secretive behaviour (not commonly detected): Square-tailed Kite, Barking Owl.

Some comments by the authors:

- The most frequently recorded and abundant species are dominated by noisy/aggressive species, notably Noisy Miner, Pied Currawong and Grey Butcherbird.
- It is therefore not surprising that only eight bird species of Noisy Miner size or smaller were recorded whereas local bushland of similar type at Duggan Park supports 32 such species.
- The record of Eastern Whipbird—a single bird, in immature plumage, calling weakly—in the northern plot on 16 January 2021 was of great interest because the species had not been noticed in the park for over two years.
- There has been an increase in occurrence and numbers (up to 3) of White-browed Scrubwren at a property backing on to the park over the past six months.
- These few records of small bush birds are encouraging and provide some evidence that the program of weeding in the park which has contributed to the proliferation of indigenous shrubs following removal of exotic species (e.g. lantana and privet), may be proving beneficial to wild birds. It is, however, difficult to draw robust conclusions at this stage given the variable climate.



Native shrubs are regrowing, including *Acacia*

February meeting at Hart Road Wetlands, S.A.

A group of A Rocha members and supporters in South Australia met at Hart Road Wetlands in February with a range of people connected with other local organisations.

The main activity for this meeting involved a indigenous demonstration of making baskets using *Cyperus vaginatus* (foundation); *Cyperus gymnaulos* (stitching); *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* and *Schoenoplectus pungens* (weaving). The demonstration was complemented with an ecological talk about these rushes and where they grow. There is a desire to have more rushes planted at Hart Road Wetlands.

The assembled group then brainstormed a great range of ideas to continue to increase the knowledge of Hart Rd Wetlands habitats and inhabitants, improve environmental values, acknowledge traditional use and Kaurna connection and develop facilities and activities to increase community visitation. A great time was had by all!



Birdwalks in Woodlands Historic Reserve, VIC

On 3 December last year a small group of A Rocha members and supporters visited [Woodlands Historic Reserve](#) for a birdwalk and to enjoy lunch together. It was a welcome respite from Victoria's long lock-down and an opportunity to enjoy being in God's Creation.

The reserve is home to a wide range of woodland species and we all observed Weebill, White-winged Chough (a rare bird in the reserve), Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Red-rumped Parrot, and Grey Shrike-Thrush amongst many others. We also completed a survey as part of BirdLife Aus-



tralia's [Birddata](#) monitoring program. A larger group returned to the Park on 20 February 2021, and enjoyed another birdwalk and picnic lunch together. It was so encouraging to be able to meet again, and thank you to all those who came along!



We are looking forward to being part of this upcoming first joint event and hope to see many A Rocha members and supporters there:

A hands-on day for all ages,
exploring God's creation and
reflecting on our part in caring for it.

WILD LIFE

SE **victoria**
COME TO LIFE

 **Interserve**

AUSTRALIA
A ROCHA
Conservation and Hope

**Faith, Creation,
Exploring, Caring.**

When: Sat 27th March

Where: Yea Wetlands

Cost: Free

For adventurers of all
ages (family friendly)

Info and registrations:
suvic.org.au/wildlife

Serving the Lord in Creation Care: Stuart's reflection

In late 2020, President of A Rocha Australia, Stuart Blanch was asked to write an article for a Christian organisation, [Manna Gum](#). The full article is linked on our [website](#) and is excellent reading; below is an extract:



I don't recall hearing sermons, or being part of Bible studies, during the first three decades of my life regarding God's love for His creation, nor our role in using it wisely and caring for it. The environment and my faith were on parallel tracks, rarely intersecting, and occasionally colliding.

I would listen to speakers from Christian missionary organisations talk about roles they supported in gospel ministry. 'Do you have roles for ecologists or conservationists?', I'd ask. 'No' was the answer, occasionally with a furrowed brow. If mission agencies supported nurses to heal sick people, agricultural extension officers to help poor farmers grow food and teachers to educate illiterate kids, then why not — so my thinking would go — also support ecologists and conservationists to educate farmers and kids about how to understand and care for the wildlife and ecosystems that provided the healthy food, clean water and natural medicines that these same people relied upon?

For many years I felt I wore three hats that didn't often sit well together: a disciple of Jesus, an ecologist and an environmental campaigner. I felt on the outer, often questioning whether it was right to love both the Lord and study and conserve wildlife.

Concern for the environment was often seen amongst believers as not particularly relevant, or a distraction, to faith. Scientists and conservationists thought Christian belief quaint, odd or to blame for deforestation and species extinction.

I sought out role models, people who took seriously God's Word and caring for His world. They were scarce, and there were few books on the topic to help me juggle my hats.

That changed in 1998 as I read the notices section of the newsletter of the Sydney church where my wife, Lianne, and I worshipped. Between notices for upcoming evangelistic events was a two-line advert by a mission agency for an ecologist to study freshwater insects. In Lebanon. *What?! I read it twice. What was this 'A Rocha'? And why did a Christian organisation want to research and restore degraded wetlands in a country until recently convulsed by civil war and religious conflict?*

That's where my journey with A Rocha began.

Soon I was reading the book *Under the Bright Wings* by A Rocha co-founders Peter and Miranda Harris about how these two British missionaries had set up a field studies centre in Portugal. It was a long way from Peter's role as a priest in the Church of England. They had done it to help people learn more about who God is through studying wildlife, experience life with Christians living in a cross-cultural community and read the Bible with a greater awareness of God's love for His creation and Christ's work of reconciling all things within it. As missionaries, they were supported by a mainstream missionary agency, working to show love for people and wildlife by doing research and conservation around an estuary.

Creation care, they called it. I no longer had to wear three hats, but just one...

Upcoming Events

Annual General Meeting

Our AGM is on 11 March via Zoom. Members have been notified by email. Only financial members of A Rocha Australia may participate and vote. Non-members are welcome as observers. If you would like to join in on the meeting, please email julia.jardine@arocha.org.

13 March – Bushcare whilst Fellowshiping at Wilkins Green, Sydney

A Rocha supporters in and around Sydney are invited to a morning of practically caring for God's Creation alongside fellow Christians, in the Inner West of Sydney. Come and learn some Bush Regeneration 101 skills and care for local plants. Kids welcome.



Photo : [Wilkins Green Facebook page](#)

When: 10am–noon, Saturday 13 March .

Morning Tea provided afterwards.

Where: Wilkins Green, part of Wilkins Primary School in Marrickville.

Wilkins Green: is a multi-purpose space that has chickens, edible gardens, bush tucker gardens, an Aboriginal learning area, composting toilet and bushcare area.

To RSVP and to receive more details please email Isabel.lyons@arocha.com by 11 March.

27 March – WildLife @ Yea Wetlands, VIC

8 May – John Stott memorial global birding day

5–11 June – worldwide A Rocha Family – free virtual Forum Festival

16 October – A Rocha Australia regional gathering, S.A.

For further details of these and other upcoming events, please connect with the contact person or keep an eye on our website and Facebook page.

We look forward to the time when we can meet again in large numbers!



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Send suggested content for the Autumn ENews by 15 May to australia.comms@arocha.org*

