A Rocha Australia ENEWS

December 2023

We are a Christian organisation engaging communities in nature conservation

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Chair's report

Welcome to this latest issue of A Rocha Australia's ENews, highlighting the last six months.

The Board met over three days in September at beautiful Mount Tamborine in the Gold Coast hinterland for its annual Retreat, our first time meeting together face-to-face in four years. It was such an encouraging and important time. We discussed and made decisions regarding new projects and partnerships, and agreed new policies for managing the organisations. During this time we held a workshop with some of the leaders of Mount Tamborine Convention Centre and others who have an association with the site. We discussed opportunities for Creation care to contribute to their plans to upgrade their accommodation and site. The site supports rainforest and eucalypt habitat, with potential for significant reforestation of habitat for threatened species. We share their heart to be a centre of excellence in Bible teaching and to provide a meeting place for Christians in the Brisbane area to gather to worship God in his beautiful creation.

Piccaneen palm grove *(Archontophoenix cunninghamiana)*, Tamborine National Park, QLD

Save The Date #1 An exciting opportunity has also arisen to jointly host a Creation care conference with Mount Tamborine Convention Centre at its beautiful site from 13 to 15 September 2024. Please do consider attending and letting people your friends and contacts know who live in southeast Queensland and northern NSW.

Chair's report continued...

In a very exciting announcement I am excited to advise that we are further developing our engagement at Mount Sandy, south of Meningie in South Australia, with Cassinia Environmental, Wilderlands and Ngarrindjeri Indigenous traditional owners in the Raukkan Community. Our support for Wilderland's Coorong Lakes project focuses upon supporting development of a basic field studies centre to help Ngarrindjeri, the wider community, conservationists and ecologists study remnant native vegetation – including amazing rare orchids! – and revegetate cleared lands to reconnect highly fragmented landscape. You can learn more about the Coorong Lakes project here.

As part of our investment in the partnership with Wilderlands we have purchased Biological Diversity Units to support on-ground research, land management and monitoring to assist protection of high conservation value native vegetation at their Coorong Lakes site. We want to grow the partnership, alongside our collaboration with Cassinia Environmental, through supporting development of biodiversity credit markets which could mature to become a major new innovative conservation financing mechanism to help to start turning around the nature crisis in Australia and globally.

Related to this new project, we have applied to be added to the Australian Government's Register of Environmental Organisations, which will involve establishing A Rocha Australia Environmental Projects as a subsidiary company with its own constitution. This will further demonstrate our commitment to environmental projects. It will allow us to seek grants and philanthropic gifts that are restricted to organisations listed on the Register, and offer...

Chair's report continued...

...individual donors a tax deductible receipt. We hope to hear good news that deductible gift recipient status has been granted by mid-2024. Our first proposed project is to fund the field studies centre at Coorong Lakes. I'd love to hear from you if you would like to donate towards the estimated build cost of $20,000.

This issue has a special focus on the inspiring, fun and important projects and partnerships occuring in South Australia. Director Sally Shaw is doing an amazing job and would love more support in coordinating A Rocha Australia's work in the state.

We are keenly seeking nominations for new Board directors to govern and grow A Rocha Australia. There is additional information in the letter that accompanies this ENews issue.

Save The Date #2 Our Annual General Meeting will be held in March 2024, likely the 28th. This is a great time to hear what your organisation has been doing, ask questions of directors about our new partnerships and projects, receive the Annual Report, and hear about plans for the following year. It is also a great time to nominate to be on the Board.

Please check out our new-look website in the New Year. I'd like to acknowledge the great efforts Jen Schabel, our communications officer, and Julia Jardine, our amazing executive officer, have expended in working with A Rocha International in this major revamp.

On the international front, the A Rocha Worldwide Family has agreed a new Strategic Direction. This will support our work in Australia and better coordinate A Rocha's work globally. The *four Strategic Priorities* are focused on the impact and direction of our external work: increase our conservation impact, strengthen our engagement with Christian communities, increase the participation of younger generations in our work, and expand the geographical reach of the Worldwide Family. The *five Strategic Enablers* are about the impact and direction of our internal work: implement a structure to build organizational capacity and resilience, nurture relationships through mutual support and mentoring, create a culture that fosters cross-pollination throughout the ARWF, develop funding plans aligned with the Strategic Priorities, and strengthen our internal communications.

We continue to govern the organisation diligently. We are in the process of developing a full suite of policies and procedures, and securing directors' and officers' liability insurance. This is to ensure we comply with relevant laws and standards, implement our duty of care for our volunteers, and demonstrate to prospective directors our commitment to managing the organisation professionally.

On behalf of the Board I say thank you to our members, supporters and partner organisations in 2023. We literally would not be able to keep growing A Rocha Australia without your support, donations and prayers.

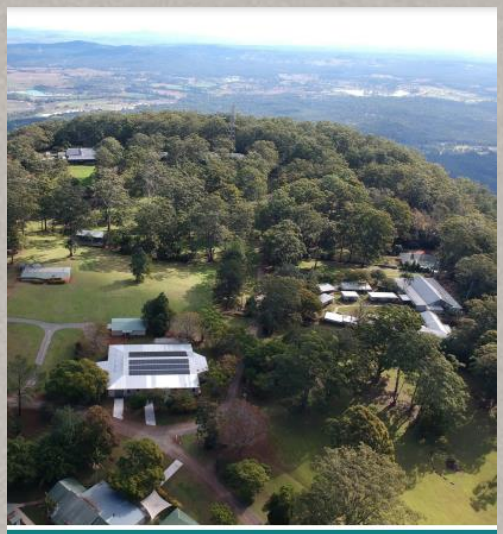
I hope you have a safe and restful time over Christmas, celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, and can take the time to recharge in God's Creation.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the ENews.

Dr Stuart Blanch
President (Chair, board of directors)

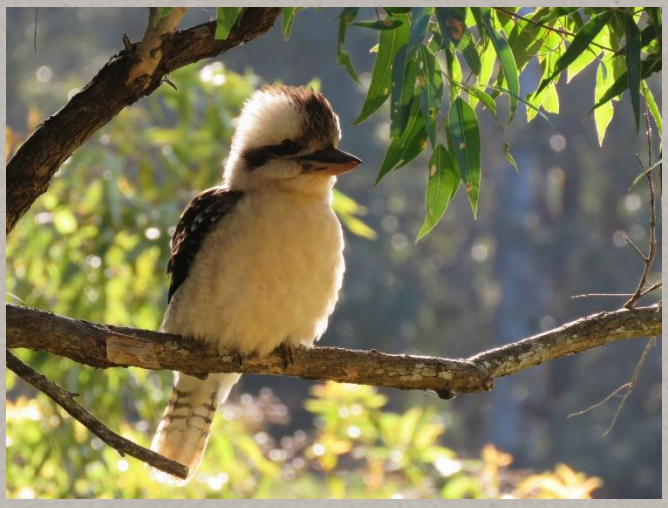
Our visit to Mount Tamborine Convention Centre, QLD

Here are some photos from our directors' Retreat and meetings at Mount Tamborine. To learn more about the history and ministry of the Centre, visit their website.



Our visit continued...

Volunteers have been controlling weeds in the Centre's rainforest gully including lantana



From the [Scenic Rim Regional Council Biodiversity Strategy 2015-2025]

"The Scenic Rim region is an international biodiversity hotspot consisting of World Heritage areas, National Parks and nationally significant biodiversity corridors."

"The Tamborine Mountain core contains many plant communities including areas of rainforest with distinctive piccabeen palm groves, wet eucalypt forest dominated by tall flooded gums, open forest with bracken fern understorey and woodland."

"The area is home to ten different types of forest including subtropical rainforest, wet eucalypt forest and open eucalypt forest. Incredibly, these forests contain more than 900 different species of plants."

Winter planting days at Mt Sandy in June, SA

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it - Psalm 24:1

A Rocha volunteers in South Australia were again invited by Clyde and Rose Rigney from the Raukkan community (Ngarrindjeri country) to help revegetate at Mount Sandy in the Coorong area of South Australia. This project is in partnership with Cassina Environmental and is next to Mt Sandy – see Spring plant identification story on page 8.

Over the weekend volunteers infilled areas we'd revegetated in 2022 with an additional 1500 healthy native shrubs propagated at the Raukkan nursery. We were very encouraged that over 90% of the 2022 plantings had survived – much more than the 70% they would usually expect.

We were blessed with sunshine on Saturday and the rain only arrived as we finished at 2pm on Sunday.

We also enjoyed great food and fellowship and left Mount Sandy feeling inspired, invigorated and grateful for the invitation to participate in this project.

Some great comments from volunteers:

"I was counting the days before the plantings because I love these unique occasions." a young participant

"It was so good to be with Ngarrindjeri people ... to see their enjoyment in welcoming people onto their land and to hear the rolling, bubbling language words communicated through Clyde's welcome to country. I would love to learn it. I feel greatly blessed by sharing in the celebration of planting trees on this land."

"Knowing that this revegetation work is bringing back to life the vegetation that used to exist in this area is so encouraging."

"The whole weekend was so unique. I left with many special memories and look forward to coming back."

"I loved the plantings and hope to encourage my school friends to come another time."

Sally Shaw– director, SA

Winter planting days continued...

Three weeks later we were back for a second planting weekend, again infilling areas we had revegetated in 2022, this time with an additional 855 healthy native shrubs propagated at the Raukkan nursery.

Delicious food and fellowship featured again over the weekend - we had a great time!

"We really enjoyed Saturday – both doing our bit to care for creation and the chance to connect with others. Thank you."

"That's where God's heart is, in the dirt and in the garden." Rose Rigney

Sally Shaw– director, SA

Spring plant identification at Mount Sandy, SA

Some A Rocha supporters in South Australia met with ecologists from Wilderlands to enjoy a Spring walk in the Mount Sandy conservation area belonging to Cassinia Environmental in partnership with the Ngarrindjeri people based at Raukkan.

The landscape is described as: "Rising above low-lying saline wetland communities of saltbush and paperbark shrublands are sandy dune systems of mallee and heathy woodlands, host to a rich diversity of native plants and animals, including the rare Cleland's Beard-heath (*Leucopogon clelandii*) and the rare and elusive Elegant Parrot (*Neophema elegans*)".

There were many amazing plants flowering at this time, including many of the 30 orchid species found in Mount Sandy. The Native Orchid Society of South Australia had also been invited to help identify orchids and calculate the population of rare Metallic Sun-orchids (*Thelymitra epipactoides*) in flower. Here are some of the Sun-orchids flowering during this visit:

Thelymitra ixioides (Spotted Sun-orchid) – an endangered species in SA

Thelymitra rubra (Salmon Pink Sun-orchid)

Sally Shaw– director, SA

Thelymitra epipactoides (Metallic Sun-orchid). Mt Sandy is thought to have the largest number of this rare orchid in SA

Spring working bee at Hart Road wetland, SA

A small group of A Rocha supporters in South Australia gathered on 29 October to weed and water the native plants we had planted in July 2023. It was great to see an 80% survival rate. A big thank you to Leanne Lawrence from Onkaparinga Council for organising the event, letter boxing the flyer to over 100 nearby houses, enthusing us with lots of great ideas and bringing a lovely afternoon tea.

Future plans are to advertise these events more to locals, and for signage on-site with a QR code to link to A Rocha Australia. The sign would include Onkaparinga Council information and details about the Willunga Basin Trail.

A great outcome recently for the local community is that, after considerable lobbying, Onkaparinga councillors have chosen not to sell the water assets to a private company. This would have seriously compromised the habitat values of Hart Road wetland and other local waterways in a dry landscape context, so we are very relieved about this outcome.

A zip-tie stopping the kangaroos from eating the plants

This new sign has been installed near the wetlands

Sally Shaw– director, SA

College students enjoy outdoor classroom, Aldinga SA

Year five students from Southern Vales Christian College, Aldinga visited the Hart Road Wetland on 4 December. 100 students spent time observing water bugs, birds, native plants and native bees.

The College is planning for a smaller group of students to regularly visit the wetland during 2024, where they will also learn about the work of A Rocha Australia and the importance of caring for God's creation.

How encouraging to know that these students will learn about Christian values while they have fun exploring their local wetland areas!

Photos credit: Southern Vales Christian College

Sally Shaw – director, SA

Wetland planting day with Cassinia, VIC

On 19 August some Victorian supporters joined Cassinia and The Caterpillar Foundation in planting on terraces around a wetland at Watchbox Wetland, Glenhope, Victoria.

It provided a great opportunity to connect with people while planting trees and to have conversations about why as Christians we care for the environment.

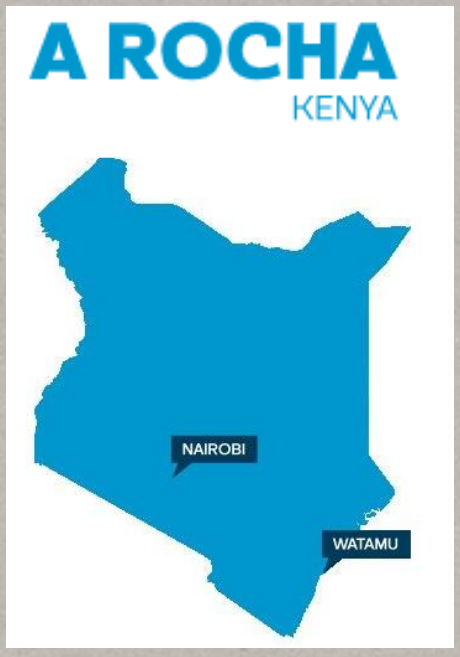
Julia Jardine – executive officer, VIC

Anna in Kenya!

Former A Rocha Australia national director Anna Radkovic is now over in Watamu on the coast of Kenya as a CMS missionary. She is spending time learning language and culture in Kenya while exploring long-term opportunities in discipleship ministry and conservation. Anna shares her story and love for God's creation in this ISCAST interview as well as this Eternity News article published recently.

From Anna's August prayer letter: "I've been jumping into as many of the A Rocha activities as I can to get to know everyone and understand how the organisation works. I have so far visited schools for ASSETS, a secondary school eco-bursary program, participated in shark surveys, attended meetings about revegetation projects and counted birds at Mida Creek.

I feel like I've only scratched the surface of what these guys do but I'm excited to be here for the long run and really get to know how they work. I've been so encouraged by the Christ-centeredness of these guys. The integrity of this team and their clear, practical love for Jesus humbles me and it is such an honour to work amongst them."



From Anna's November prayer letter:

"November has been SUCH a great month.

I started it with a week in Kijabe, a town on the escarpment of the Great Rift Valley. Four of us from A Rocha travelled up there for a course in "Farming God's Way," a regenerative farming program taught from Biblical foundations.

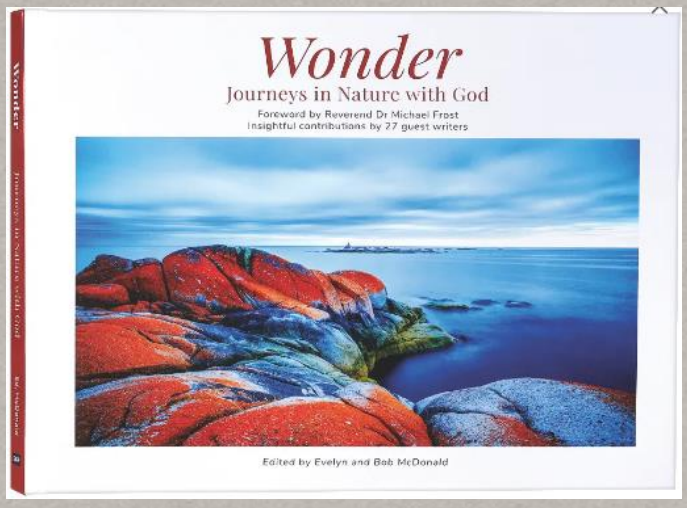
It was so much fun! It's probably the best teaching I've ever heard for integrating theology with practical action. Because the gospel has transformed us, we are a new creation, everything we do should be transformed by the gospel – even the way we grow good. Throughout the week we read the Bible, we considered the state of the environment in Kenya, we looked at our responsibility for the earth as God's people, we prayed lots, and we planted some crops.

The most powerful part was after preparing the field for planting, we all knelt down, held the soil in our hands and prayed over it. Repenting of any bloodshed or evil that may have happened on that land and entrusting that, from here on, while the land was in our care, as God's people, it would be managed and cared for in a way that brought God glory."

Anna in Kenya continued...

Below is a photo of the Our Farming God's Way cohort at the end of the course. Visit Anna's CMS page to receive prayer points about her work with A Rocha Kenya.

New Wonder book by Bob and Evelyn McDonald



Details from the Koorong page:

With a Foreword by Rev Dr Michael Frost, *Wonder: Journeys in Nature with God* is an edited book with contributions by 29 writers.

The six sections of the book take the reader on a story journey to see God, nature and our place and role in it via the thoughtful reflections, brief prayers and accompanying photographs of nature: truly a journey of wonder!

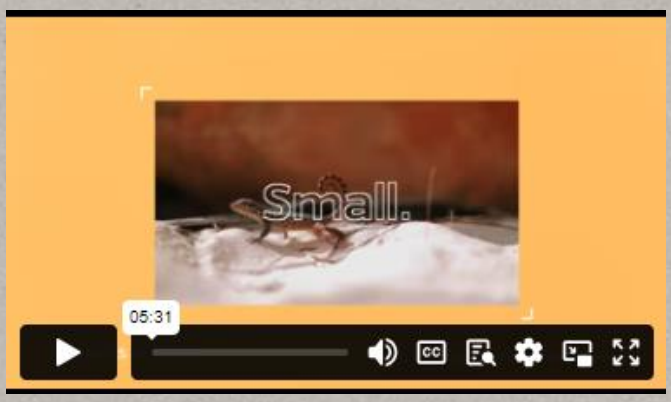
Of the 44 reflections, 15 are the personal stories of as many contributors, ranging in age from 23 to 93, who share their unique experiences of God speaking and ministering to them through the natural world.

Congratulations Bob and Evelyn, and people involved with A Rocha Australia who feature in this new book!

Elements of Hope video series celebrate A Rocha turning 40

All videos in the 5-part "Elements of Hope" series are now available to watch, some with a downloadable discussion guide. This series delves into the Christian perspective on big and small questions about our role in caring for God's creation and offers a powerful message of hope in the face of today's conservation challenges.

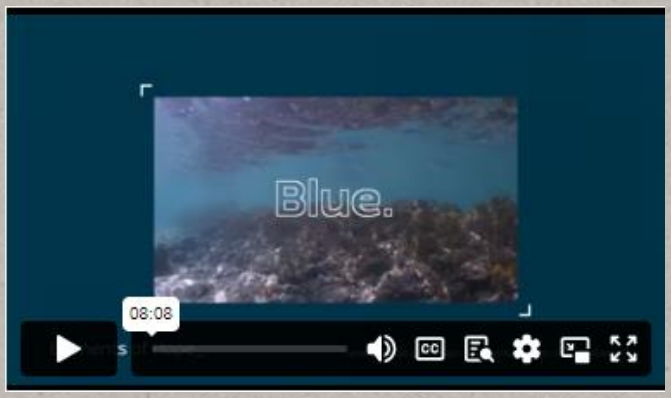
We all have a role to play in protecting and preserving our planet. Being a conservationist doesn't mean you have to be a scientist or work for a non-profit. It's about making small changes in our daily lives and using our unique talents and skills to make a difference.



From the small beginnings in conserving the threatened Dakatcha woodland in Kenya to being reminded of the beauty and creativity in every detail of God's creation, "Small" encourages us to have hope and not be discouracged by the smallness of who we are or what we can do.

"Take Root" shares A Rocha's approach to conservation over the long term through two specific stories including the protection of vulnerable habitats of the Alvor Estuary in Portugal, and living by example amidst a younger population in Uganda new to ideas such as creation care.

"Bounce Back" asks us to examine where we find our hope amidst environmental disasters, such as extreme wildfires or terrible floods. The film explores the idea of 'refugia', defined as an area in which a population of organisms can survive through a period of unfavourable conditions, especially glaciation and fire.



'Blue' delves into the relationship between mental health challenges and the positive effects of nature on our wellbeing. We investigate how immersing ourselves in nature can pull us out of our internal struggles and rekindle our connection to God and His call for us to be stewards of creation.

A reluctant tree-cutter – actively managing woodlands

From this article by Tony Rinaudo

Avid bird watcher, Gianni D'Ortenzio was thrilled to purchase a block of land with dense stands of naturally regenerating trees in Everton Upper, North East Victoria, in 2021. The property 'didn't have a tree on the block in 1973' according to the previous owner. Proving to be unprofitable for wine grapes, the vines were pulled out and sheep were grazed.

Over time, trees began recolonizing parts of the farm, however the high density of the trees resulted in severe competition for water and nutrients and the trees simply didn't produce much bird and insect attracting nectar. Steps needed to be taken to improve habitat for birds including the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot. It was a steep learning curve for Gianni.

Gianni notes "It took a while to get my head around cutting down trees but the whole notion is that trees need water and space to grow and you need big trees for nesting sites. The whole area where we have undertaken this ecological thinning looks so much better and I have been very pleased with the results." Gianni either shredded the trunks, creating a mulch layer which conserves moisture and provides a favourable environment for trapping and germinating seeds, or places them strategically on dam banks and bare soil. He calls the method "Farmer Managed Accelerated Maturation", an acknowledgement that people can play a positive role in enhancing and speeding up biodiversity outcomes.

A recently thinned stand of eucalypts in the foreground, with mulch (Tony Rinaudo)

Gianni is also actively protecting and planting rarer species. Box trees are favoured because of their strong flowering characteristic. Stringybarks, which tend to overrun the property are more heavily thinned. Young native Cypress trees get a heavy beating from browsing kangaroos, so they are protected with tree guards, and the parasitic Cherry Ballard which provides edible fruits for birds are protected wherever they occur. Various wattle species, five species of native peas and many native grasses have returned.

Visit the Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration page to read more from this article, including some significant lessons for revegetation and biodiversity in Australia.

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Send feedback and suggested events or articles to australia.comms@arocha.org