AUSTRALIA A ROCHA Conservation and Hope

A Rocha Australia ENEWS

March 2023-24

We are a Christian organisation engaging communities in nature conservation

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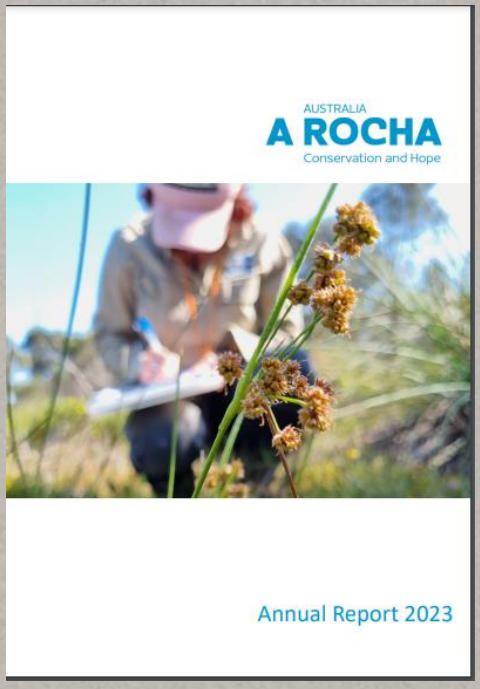
Chair's report

Welcome to this issue of A Rocha Australia's ENews.

A Rocha Australia will hold its Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 24 March 2024 via Zoom, commencing at 7:30pm AEDT. I really look forward to seeing our members each year during the AGM, including meeting new members. It's a great opportunity for directors to provide an update on what we did during 2023, and answer questions from members. I do hope to see you at the meeting.

The A Rocha Australia Annual Report for 2023 has been prepared by Julia our Executive Officer, and it provides a great snapshot of what we have achieved in the last year. I encourage you to take some time to read it.



Board succession planning has been a focus of directors for the past year. I am excited to advise that we hope to have two new directors appointed to the board, if approved by members at the AGM. In addition, we will continue to talk with other members about their interest and availability to serve in managing and growing A Rocha Australia.

Our capacity to undertake and fundraise for conservation projects has been enhanced through establishing A Rocha Australia Environmental Projects Ltd. The new company is wholly-owned company by A Rocha Australia. It demonstrates our commitment to...

Chair's report continued...

...protecting and restoring Australia's amazing ecosystems and wildlife.

Alongside this, A Rocha Australia has applied to the Australian Taxation Office for the new company to be added to the Register of Environmental Organisations. If successful, this would allow us to seek funds from grant-making bodies that only donate to organisations listed on the Register. It would also allow A Rocha Australia to issue tax deductible receipts to individuals who donate to support our environmental projects.

On this, we are seeking to raise $20,000 to support construction of a basic field studies centre at Mount Sandy, South Australia. In partnership with Wilderlands and the local Ngarrindjeri community, we aim to enable elders, ecologists and citizen scientists to visit this region to study and conserve important remnant vegetation in the Coorong Lakes region. Donations to this project would be eligible for tax deductibility, when approved by the Australian Tax Office. Interested in finding out more? Turn to page 5.

Mallee country, Alleena NSW

In this issue you can also read about the 56 species of woodland birds observed during surveys conducted at Dusky Woodswallow Conservation Reserve at Alleena, in the NSW Riverina (see pages 3 and 4). Two species are listed as threatened, the amazing Superb Parrot and Pink Cockatoo, in this ecologically important landscape of remnant woodland and mallee communities owned by our partner, Cassinia Environmental.

For those living in southeast Queensland or northeast NSW, I encourage you to join us on 13-15 September this year for the 'Wonder and Hope on the Mountain Top" conference at Mount Tamborine. The event is a collaboration between Mount Tamborine Conference Centre and A Rocha Australia, with guest speaker Tony Rinaudo from World Vision. You can read more about the event on page 7.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the ENews.

Dr Stuart Blanch
President (Chair, board of directors)

Winter 2023 bird surveys in the Riverina, NSW

In July 2023 a small A Rocha Australia team visited the Cassinia Environmental property in Alleena NSW (Wiradjuri country) for a bird surveying effort over a couple of wet days. These surveys give an interesting insight into what bird species are present during winter, to add to the understanding of the property's conservation values.

Property Background

Cassinia Environmental acquired 'Avoca' - a 1700ha property in the locality of Alleena, 17km south of West Wyalong for the purpose of conserving woodland birds, by creating a sanctuary to be known as Dusky Woodswallow Conservation Reserve.

Most of the property's 620ha of woodland and mallee communities adjoins the South West Woodland (Buddigower) Nature Reserve. The property's Mallee and Mallee-Broombush dominated woodland and shrubland is a Critically Endangered Ecological Community in NSW.

The restoration of previously cleared grazing and cropping land commenced in 2013 by Greenfleet with the direct seeding of almost 850ha with local tree and shrub species.

https://www.duskywoodswallow.com/about-us

During this visit, 20 of the 2ha-20min survey type were conducted, including 6 that were repeats of previous surveys at the same sites by A Rocha, and 8 that were new sites at Biodiversity Conservation Trust monitoring points. Nine of the two-hectare sites were in Mallee community, 6 in Box-Ironbark-Callitris, and 5 in Revegetation Areas. There were also 4 of the 500m radius surveys to document extra species detected, and 9 incidental surveys (mainly roadsides, some outside the Cassinia property).

A total of 56 bird species were sighted on the property, 34 of which were in the 2ha-20min plots. This included two species listed as nationally threatened: Superb Parrot (4 records at each end of the property, and three records of birds feeding in flowering ironbarks along roads immediately west, with a local area total of over 100 birds, allowing for repeat visits); and Pink Cockatoo (*aka* Major Mitchell's: 2 birds). A possible third threatened species is Brown Treecreeper (south-eastern subspecies), one bird was seen.

Superb Parrots

a Pink Cockatoo

Winter 2023 bird surveys continued...

Reporting rates from the 20 surveys in 2ha-20min plots shows the highest ranked species as:

1. White-eared Honeyeater (55%)
2. Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater (40%)
3. Noisy Miner (40%)
4. Painted Button-quail (25%)
5. Silvereye (25%).

Adding to the evidence from A Rocha bird surveys in April 2021, clearly the property is (at least seasonally) a significant habitat for Superb Parrot. Flowering of ironbarks seems important as a food resource but possibly the parrots occur more frequently, using other food resources as well. With Pink Cockatoo also seen on multiple visits, there is no doubt that this is an important area for biodiversity conservation.

It was also interesting to discover Painted Button-quail at 5 sites (18 birds seen) and numerous feeding scrapes (platelets) at several other sites. Whereas many of the sites where this species was seen or had been feeding were in remnant woodland, each of the revegetation areas with mature Acacias and no grass under those trees had evidence (hundreds if not thousands of feeding scrapes) of this species using that habitat. A large population could be present. As it is known that this bird eats seeds of Acacias and seeing abundant seed pods on these trees on the property, it seems they were likely feeding on fallen seeds.

Mallee specialist birds such as Mallee-fowl, Southern Scrub-robin and Shy Heathwren (all of them secretive) could have been overlooked in our brief surveys and there seems to be a decent amount of suitable habitat remaining. However, their absence from our data may also add to the view that these species have been isolated and pressured too long and may now have gone from this eastern outlier of their overall range of occurrence.

The cumulative total number of species from A Rocha surveys now stands at 88. Further visits in other seasons, especially spring, may reveal additional species including some that are migratory. These records have been exported from BirdLife Australia's Birdata system and are in the public domain.

Roger Jaensch, QLD

Developing a Field Studies Centre, Coorong Lakes, SA

A Rocha Australia is making progress on establishing an Environmental Fund to offer tax deductibility to financial supporters to environmental projects. The first initiative being planned once it goes live is to support the development of the Wilderlands' Coorong Lakes property south of Meningie in South Australia. This property is owned by Cassinia Environmental, a private conservation business, and managed as a conservation reserve in collaboration with the Ngarrindjeri people who are the Indigenous traditional owners of the region.

A Rocha members and supporters in South Australia have been helping at this property in recent years with tree planting and plant identification activities, and visitor facilities are very basic!

the existing Coorong shed

The purpose of the project is to refurbish an existing shed on the Coorong Lakes site into a basic field studies centre to support improved conservation of the flora and fauna of the site, enhance facilities for use by A Rocha Australia supporters and visiting ecologists, and enable more use by Ngarrindjeri traditional owners.

The upgrade proposal includes refurbishing the existing shed with some basic kitchen facilities, installing a water tank and composting toilet, creating an outdoor seating and BBQ area under a shade sail, having a secure storage cabinet and installing two solar batteries, amongst other items. The Business Plan for this initiative has been drafted and we will provide more details once the A Rocha Australia Environmental Fund is operational.

Creation care teaching in NSW schools

As a NSW government natural resource management practitioner and a part-time Christian Special Religious Education teacher in primary and high schools, it hasn't been often that there is an explicit link between the two areas, unfortunately. But this term there is! The GodSpace teaching material we use for infants and primary students uses a space explorer, Goober, to explore the Bible. This term in the videos he visits Earth and discovers that God made everything, but "people have not been looking after each other or the planet the way that God intended them to". He then discovers that "if the Bible is correct, God had a plan to fix everything by sending someone called Jesus". Students have been learning these biblical truths and have also been encouraged in the lessons to think about what they can do in their own lives to care for the world that God made and loves, too.

Image from intro GodSpace 2024 video

Jen Schabel
Director – NSW

A Rocha Australia's international board member: Sarah French

The board of A Rocha Australia has an international advisor and we'd like to acknowledge her great support: Sarah French, based in Geneva, Switzerland. Sarah has had a long involvement with A Rocha International, and has extensive working history spanning Latin America, Europe, Africa, Asia, North America.

Photo credit: A Rocha International

Currently serving as Director of Environmental Education and Conservation Policy, Sarah is responsible for the oversight, strategic management and growth of environmental education in the A Rocha Worldwide Family by strengthening and supporting A Rocha Organizations (AROs) to facilitate environmentally and culturally relevant environmental education programmes and strategies that encourage environmental sensitivity, ethical responsibilities, and sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods.

In Conservation Policy, Sarah is responsible for ensuring high-level representation in key international fora, such as IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC), the Conferences of the Parties of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and for overseeing and driving forwards the development of related conservation policies.

We'd like to thank Sarah for joining our board of directors on Zoom meetings, drawing on her vast experience in A Rocha and environmental programs internationally to help advise and encourage us in the Australian context.

International blogs and podcasts

Have a spare few minutes to be encouraged by the worldwide A Rocha family? Here are some recent A Rocha blogs you might like to look at:

https://blog.arocha.org/en/mental-health-and-a-beautiful-but-groaning-creation/
Jo Swinney reflects on the rise of eco-anxiety and suggests some ideas for engaging with the reality of the natural world in a way that benefits rather than undermines your mental health.

https://blog.arocha.org/en/gods-gardeners/
This excerpt from Naomi Bosch's creation care book describes a friend's experience of practicing regenerative agriculture in a Bruderhof community in north west NSW.

Have a spare half hour or so? There is a wealth of podcasts from around the world, e.g.:

Ep 35: Ed Walker – Meet A Rocha's new Executive Director

Ed Walker joined A Rocha International as Executive Director in September 2023. You can also read about his background here.

A ROCHA

MTCC

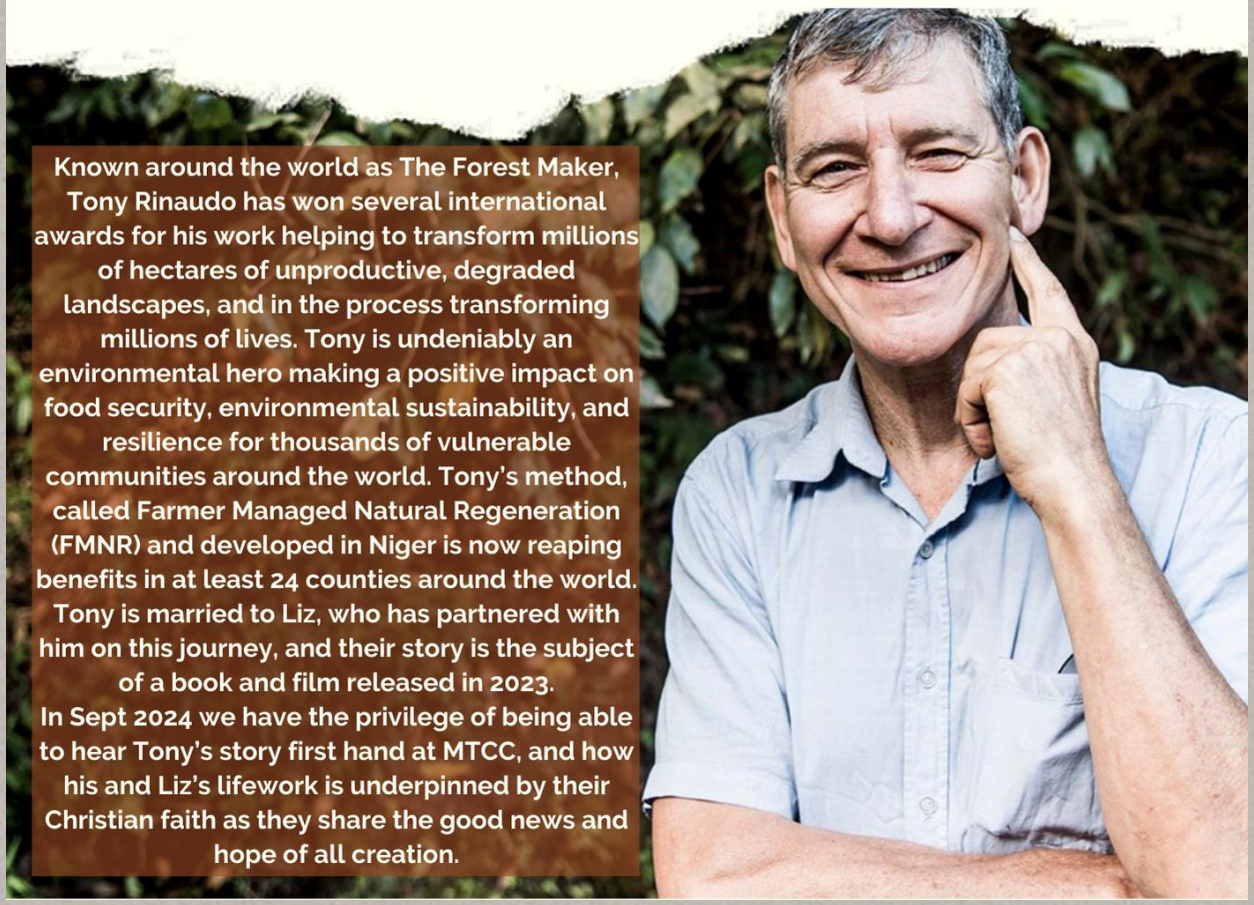
Wonder and Hope on the Mountain Top

13-15 September 2024

Gather Celebrate Care

With guest speaker Tony Rinaudo, World Vision and author of 'The Underground Forest – Hope for a Planet in Crisis'

We gather to celebrate and care for God's creation.



Known around the world as The Forest Maker, Tony Rinaudo has won several international awards for his work helping to transform millions of hectares of unproductive, degraded landscapes, and in the process transforming millions of lives. Tony is undeniably an environmental hero making a positive impact on food security, environmental sustainability, and resilience for thousands of vulnerable communities around the world. Tony's method, called Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) and developed in Niger is now reaping benefits in at least 24 counties around the world. Tony is married to Liz, who has partnered with him on this journey, and their story is the subject of a book and film released in 2023.

In Sept 2024 we have the privilege of being able to hear Tony's story first hand at MTCC, and how his and Liz's lifework is underpinned by their Christian faith as they share the good news and hope of all creation.

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