

News Release

16 January 2007

Local threatened plants on show at Tunarama

Nine of Eyre Peninsula's threatened plants will be featured in a small photographic exhibition as part of Port Lincoln's Tunarama Festival.

The photographs will be on display in the foyer of the Port Lincoln Civic Hall on Tasman Terrace from Thursday 25th to Sunday 28th January 2007.

Ms Katrina Pobke, Threatened Flora Officer with the Department for Environment and Heritage, is encouraging everyone to visit the display and learn more about the region's threatened plants.

'We have 25 nationally threatened plant species on Eyre Peninsula and many of them are quite unique,' said Ms Pobke.

'Some of our threatened plants, including the endangered Whibley's Wattle, are found nowhere else in the world but on Eyre Peninsula,' she said.

Everyone who visits the display at Tunarama is encouraged to vote for his or her favourite threatened plant and go into the draw to win a prize.

Children have the chance to win the opportunity to become a Park Ranger for a day assisting a local National Parks and Wildlife Ranger. Other prizes include wildlife books and environmental toys.

Adults can win two nights accommodation at Donington Cottage in Lincoln National Park, an annual parks pass or a set of local plant field guides, kindly donated by the authors.

Threatened plants are in danger of extinction due to threats like habitat clearance, competition with weeds, and changes in fire and water patterns.

'We rely on volunteers to assist us with activities like revegetation and monitoring to help overcome these threats,' said Ms Pobke.

If you are interested in volunteering for threatened plant recovery activities, please contact Ms Katrina Pobke, Threatened Flora Officer on (08) 8688 3111.

Photos of Eyre Peninsula threatened plants are available on request.

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News Release

21 March 2007

Black-Cockatoos struggle to breed in drought

The future of Eyre Peninsula's population of critically endangered Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos is looking grim after one of the species' worst breeding seasons in almost a decade.

Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) Threatened Fauna Officer Ms Sarah Way has estimated that only 10 to 14 Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos remain on Eyre Peninsula.

"The drought has worsened the plight of these birds, which were already under considerable pressure following the 2005 Black Tuesday bushfire that burnt through the cockatoo's core breeding area," said Ms Way.

"Food resources for the cockatoos are scarce, with Hakea plants regenerating after the fire yet to produce edible cones for the birds.

"Threatened species are already struggling to survive day-to-day. The additional impacts of a major fire and drought can significantly affect the survival of an already vulnerable population."

But according to Ms Way there is still hope for recovery.

"The wild population of cockatoos has previously recovered from low numbers in the 1980s," she said.

"Landholders and community members can play a vital role in the recovery of the cockatoos, so we are encouraging them to get involved."

You can help by:

- reporting observations of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos on Eyre Peninsula to DEH on 8688 3111
- protecting Sugar Gum Woodland remnants and fencing off areas for revegetation with financial assistance from the Eyre Peninsula Natural Resources Management Board and DEH fencing incentive schemes
- revegetating with Sugar Gums and other native plants that provide food for cockatoos including Wrinkled Hakea, Elm-seed Hakea and Yaccas

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- retaining Aleppo Pines for cockatoo food in areas where cockatoos are found and where the pines pose a low risk of infestation, e.g. around farmyard buildings and shelterbelts in grazed/cropped paddocks.

Only ten individual cockatoos were recorded in the Koppio Hills breeding area on lower Eyre Peninsula this summer.

“As far as we know, no new chicks survived to fledging this breeding season, despite three new nests being located,” said Ms Way.

One nest was abandoned, while a predator destroyed two eggs in another. One chick, almost ready to leave the nest, died after extreme temperatures in late February. Autopsy results indicated a kidney parasite and dehydration as possible causes of death.

Some good news for the recovery project is that two Eyre Peninsula cockatoo pairs at the Gorge Wildlife Park in Adelaide have begun to breed. DEH and the Gorge Wildlife Park are working with Zoos SA to establish studbook records and long-term planning for the captive breeding program.

“With wild numbers so low, the captive breeding program, along with the support of the local community, is critical to Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo survival on Eyre Peninsula,” said Ms Way.

The Eyre Peninsula Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo recovery project is supported by DEH and the Australian Government’s Natural Heritage Trust through the Eyre Peninsula Natural Resources Management Board.

Photos are available on request from Sarah Way.

News Release

7 December 2007

Volunteers the key to helping shorebirds

The Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) says volunteers are playing a key role in shorebird conservation projects around the state.

"Coastcare Week, which runs from 3 to 9 December this year, is the perfect time to thank our volunteers for their amazing contribution to conserving South Australia's shorebirds," said Louisa Halliday, Manager of DEH's Biodiversity Programs in the West Region.

"In the West Region, we have a flock of committed bird enthusiasts who walk along the same beach every three months to monitor numbers of shorebird species such as Hooded and Red-Capped Plovers, and Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers.

"The monitoring is part of the 'Scoping the Shoreline' project, a collaborative project between DEH, Birds Australia, the Eyre Peninsula Natural Resources Management Board, the Southern Eyre Birds Group and several friends of parks groups.

"The project aims to document where shorebirds occur on the Eyre Peninsula and how they are affected by predators, weeds and recreational beach users," Louisa said.

"It has largely been driven by local volunteer Jane Cooper, who was recently recognised for her valuable contribution to shorebird research over the last 28 years with the 2007 Premier's Natural Resources Management Award for Exceptional Volunteer Contribution to Research.

"The data collected by the volunteers is contributing to Birds Australia's national bird sightings database and DEH's state biological databases, resulting in a dataset that can guide future research, decision making and planning at a regional level."

Ross Anderson, DEH's District Ranger for the Lower South East, said volunteers have also made valuable contributions to shorebird conservation in the South East.

"With help from DEH, the Friends of Shorebirds have roped-off Little Tern nests to protect them from vehicles, and monitored the nests over a period of three years," Ross said.

"Last summer, three Tern chicks successfully fledged – a great result.

"Recently DEH and the Friends of Shorebirds undertook a project, supported by the World Wildlife Fund Australia, which identified critical sites for shorebirds and the impacts of human disturbance to shorebirds in the Lower South East.

"The project is a major step forward, giving us a really good basis from which to make better decisions about how to conserve shorebirds and their habitat," Ross said.

Other important shorebird sites in South Australia include the Coorong and Lower Lakes, Kangaroo Island and the Spencer Gulf.

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News Release

17 December 2007

Search for Black-Cockatoos breeding over summer

With only 11 Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos confirmed on Eyre Peninsula, the Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) is asking the lower Eyre Peninsula community to be on the look-out for the critically endangered birds.

Michelle Le Duff, DEH's Threatened Fauna Project Officer, is keeping watch for nesting cockatoos across the birds' summer breeding habitat in the Koppio Hills.

"With so few cockatoos remaining, I will be working closely with volunteers and landholders to monitor the species' breeding success over the coming few months," Ms Le Duff said.

"Although three pairs of birds bred last season, no chicks were successfully raised, so it is critical that there is some natural recruitment into the population this year.

"If the current rate of decline is not slowed or reversed, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos could become extinct on Eyre Peninsula within five years," Ms Le Duff said.

"We are searching the breeding area in the Koppio Hills to find active cockatoo nests, which may be in natural nesting hollows in Sugar Gum trees or in artificial nest boxes donated by Rotary after the bushfire."

Once a nest is identified, detailed observations are made of the birds' behaviour.

Summer nest monitoring is just one small part of the cockatoo recovery effort.

"The main focus of recovery efforts is to re-establish the cockatoos' natural habitat, including food resources, which remain scarce following the fire," Ms Le Duff said.

"Through fencing, weed control and revegetation we are not only protecting Sugar Gum Woodlands, a vegetation community so important for the cockatoos, but also helping many other threatened species including the Common Brushtail Possum, Diamond Firetail and Silver Daisy Bush."

Landholders and community members are encouraged to get involved in the re-establishment of Sugar Gum Woodlands and the recovery of the cockatoos.

Community members can help by:

- reporting observations of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos on Eyre Peninsula to DEH on 8688 3111
- protecting Sugar Gum Woodland remnants from domestic stock and fencing off areas for revegetation
- revegetating with Sugar Gums, and native plants such as Wrinkled Hakea, Elm-seed Hakea and Yaccas that provide food for cockatoos
- working to keep Sugar Gum Woodland remnants free from weeds and introduced predators such as foxes.

The cockatoo recovery project is a partnership between DEH, the Eyre Peninsula Natural Resources Management Board, the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust, Nature Foundation SA, Gorge Wildlife Park and Eyre Peninsula landholders.

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17 December 2007

Biological surveys in the Black Tuesday fire area

Scientists and volunteers have recently surveyed plants and animals on lower Eyre Peninsula to record changes in wildlife populations since the Black Tuesday bushfire.

Louisa Halliday, Conservation Programs Manager for the West Region, Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH), said the surveys were an opportunity to look closely at the region's plants and animals, and learn more about how they have been affected by the fire.

"Fauna surveys conducted this week involved a combination of trapping and actively searching for animals, and identifying calls, tracks and scats," Ms Halliday said.

"We revisited permanently marked biological surveys sites on lower Eyre Peninsula – sites that we surveyed just one month before they were burnt in the 2005 Black Tuesday bushfire."

Survey coordinator Rob Brandle, from DEH's Biological Survey and Monitoring section, said the survey detected about two-thirds of the reptile species that were recorded before the fire.

"Unfortunately, there were few signs of small native mammals, such as the Bush Rat, which was relatively common at sites before the fire," Mr Brandle said.

Flora surveys were undertaken in September when many plants were flowering and easy to identify. Sites are now more diverse, with approximately one-third of the plant species being new at each site.

"We now have a better idea of changes to vegetation and fauna following the fire almost three years ago," Mr Brandle said.

"Once again, we've been impressed with the number of volunteers who have generously given their time, and put up with very early starts."

"Landholder cooperation has also been fantastic, and a big thank you goes out to them," Mr Brandle said.

These Eyre Peninsula surveys are part of the Biological Survey of South Australia, a series of systematic surveys of the State's flora and fauna that have been conducted since 1971.

The surveys aim to determine the distribution and condition of wildlife across the State, establish baseline data for future monitoring, and help improve land management and conservation decisions.

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News Showcase

BIODIVERSITY MONTH 2007

1 September 2007

Conserving biodiversity in SA's wild and wonderful west

September is national Biodiversity Month – a time to celebrate Australia's rich diversity of life.

It's also a call to action to protect our native plants and animals by restoring healthy numbers of species and ecological communities in the wild, so that our ecosystems are not diminished by the decline of individual species and South Australia's rich biodiversity is conserved.

South Australia's west region is a biodiversity hot spot. It comprises vast wilderness areas with precious habitat for endangered species and waters teeming with marine diversity, including the Great Australian Bight Marine Park – an important breeding and calving ground for the endangered Southern Right whale. Other west region locals relying on healthy habitats include playful Bottlenose dolphins, Australian Sea-lions and White-bellied Sea-eagles.

The Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) is actively working on many conservation initiatives throughout the west region. Here is a snapshot:

Animal Track Survey for the Maralinga Tjarutja Lands (Kuka Tjina Kantamilani Maralinga Tjarutja)

This exciting partnership is gathering valuable scientific data on the distribution of threatened species and feral animals across the Far West, using a sand-plot survey technique. DEH is working with the region's Traditional Owners, employing Anangu from the Maralinga Tjarutja lands who have an excellent knowledge of tracking. The technique involves searching a 2-hectare area for 30 minutes for fresh tracks, scats, and other animal traces.

Two field trips were recently conducted to survey 300 sites across the Maralinga Tjarutja lands, including the Mamungari and Tallaringa Conservation Parks. The most exciting find was fresh Malleefowl (Ngaṅamara) tracks, recorded at six sites. This means Malleefowl, a vulnerable species, are still persisting in the region, and the find has prompted a series of dedicated Malleefowl surveys. These surveys uncovered both old and new Malleefowl mounds, which will continue to be monitored by Anangu into the future.

The Department for Environment and Heritage hopes to conduct animal track surveys for the Maralinga Tjarutja lands every two years to compare baseline data. The project is jointly funded by DEH and the Alinytjara Wilurara Natural Resources Management Board.

For more information contact DEH's Matthew Ward, Regional Ecologist - Aboriginal Lands
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Lower Eyre Peninsula Bushfire Re-establishment Program

After the devastating January 2005 bushfires, which burnt more than 80,000 hectares of the region's agricultural land and three Conservation Parks, the Department for Environment and Heritage has been working to help local fauna and flora to recover.

In partnership with the Department of Primary Industries and Resources SA, the Nature Foundation and other government and community groups, DEH is coordinating the biodiversity recovery component under the Lower Eyre Peninsula Bushfire Re-Establishment Program. Although a timeframe can't be put on environmental recovery, results to date have been encouraging. Threatened plants and animals, including woodland birds, the endangered fat-leaved wattle, spider orchids, the metallic sun-orchid sugar gum woodlands and the silver-leaf daisy have been monitored and helped through revegetation and weed control.

One of Eyre Peninsula's most threatened plants, the Ironstone Mulla Mulla, bounced back with a successful flowering season. Spotlight possum surveys, conducted with support from landholders, showed Common Brush-tailed Possums are surviving in the Lower Eyre Peninsula hills where habitat is recovering. Although numbers have been reduced, 29 possums were recorded at 16 of 53 sites they were shown to inhabit before the fire. DEH will continue to monitor species and restore habitat in the fire-affected area.

**For more information contact DEH's Louisa Halliday, Manager Conservation Programs, West Region
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Joint management of Mamungari Conservation Park

Mamungari Conservation Park, a 2.1 million hectare reserve of vast arid wilderness, is being managed with the best of contemporary and traditional knowledge, thanks to a Co-management agreement between the traditional Anangu owners (Aboriginal people of the Western Desert) and the South Australian Government. Signed in 2004, the co-management agreement sees the park managed by an eight-member Board with majority traditional owner representation. It's the first statutory joint Management Board composed of Aboriginal owners and State representatives through the Department for Environment and Heritage.

Located in the far west of South Australia, taking in parts of the Great Victoria Desert along the Western Australian border and the Nullarbor Plain, north of the Transcontinental railway line, Mamungari Conservation Park is home to many species of native wildlife, including the hairy-footed dunnart, Malleefowl, and the scarlet and princess parrots. It's an inverted 'L' shaped park of varied terrain comprising stark limestone plains, ancient palaeo-channels of the Serpentine Lakes, shrub lands, grass plains and dune fields. Known previously as the 'Unnamed Conservation Park,' the name 'Mamungari,' meaning 'the place of harmful spirits,' was recently given to the park by its traditional owners. This Indigenous name captures the essence of the park's beautiful but harsh, arid landscape.

A Draft Management Plan for the park was recently prepared. This plan is important for the continued survival and evolution of the park's species as the effects of climate change unfold. It combines Anangu knowledge of landscape with western skills in natural resources management for the conservation area. The plan sets out strategies for managing habitat, species and visitors and consistently recognises the cultural significance of the park to the Anangu people. It is planned to translate the Draft Management Plan for Mamungari Conservation Park into Pitjantjatjara. Public submissions on the Draft Plan close on 28 September 2007. You can get your copy from:
http://www.parks.sa.gov.au/parks/management_plans/index.htm

For more information contact DEH's Ross Belcher, Regional Conservator, West Region T: 8688 3171.

Spare a thought for our native plants and animals during Biodiversity Month or even better – take action. You can access a copy of the state biodiversity strategy, No Species Loss – A Nature Conservation Strategy for South Australia from our website:

http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/biodiversity/bio_strategy.html