

News Showcase

BIODIVERSITY MONTH 2007

17 September 2007

Conserving biodiversity in the Murraylands and South East

September is National Biodiversity Month – a time to celebrate Australia's rich diversity of life, and a call to action to protect our threatened native plants and animals.

The Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) is actively working on many conservation initiatives in the Murraylands and South East regions. Here is a snapshot:

Riverland launch of *No Species Loss* strategy

DEH staff from the Murraylands Conservation Program Unit will talk to the local community about *No Species Loss: A Nature Conservation Strategy for South Australia 2007–2017* at the Riverland Field Day at Barmera on 19–20 September.

Over many decades, through land clearing, inappropriate development and release of contaminants, South Australia's natural environment has been degraded. The results have been loss of species, the loss of natural habitats for both animals and plants, erosion of valuable agricultural land and pollution of our marine environment.

The aim of the *No Species Loss* strategy is to protect and conserve South Australia's native plants and animals as well as the land, fresh-water and marine habitats they occupy.

For more information about the Riverland Field Day contact Sonia Dominelli on (08) 8595 2171.

Protecting the threatened species of Bookmark Biosphere with fire planning and management

DEH is updating the Draft Fire Management Plan for the Bookmark Mallee region following large bushfires in the area in December last year.

The Bookmark fires burned large areas of old-growth mallee that provide habitat for many threatened bird species including the critically endangered Black-eared Miner, the nationally vulnerable Malleefowl and Major Mitchell's Cockatoo.

DEH aims to prevent further large fires in the Bookmark Mallee by creating fire breaks throughout the region, primarily along existing tracks to minimise the impact on vegetation.

The first phase of the plan's implementation has been completed on Gluepot Reserve with the creation of more than 20 kilometres of fire breaks. Dennis Matthews, a former ranger from the Northern Territory and a Gluepot Reserve volunteer, provided much of the expertise and drive for the fire breaks, dedicating many hours to the task.

Further fire breaks are scheduled to be completed in 2008 on Gluepot and Calperum Stations.

For more information contact Jody Gates on (08) 8595 2204.

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"Pearls" of the South East – Mosquito Creek's drought refuges

During last summer and autumn, native fish in the Mosquito Creek catchment came close to peril as the drought continued and permanent pools dwindled, dissolved oxygen levels depleted and salinity increased day by day. Sections of what is normally permanent flow in the vicinity of Langkoop stopped flowing for the first time in many landholders' memories.

The Mosquito Creek catchment is the regional stronghold for many native fish species, including the nationally threatened Yarra Pygmy Perch, Dwarf Galaxias and the state-threatened Mountain Galaxias. Losing these populations may lead to both local and regional extinctions.

A collaborative approach is needed to protect these "pearls" for the future.

Working with a Koppamurra landholder, DEH trialled a groundwater pumping exercise to maintain pools in a 1.2 kilometre stretch of creek. A small portion of the landholder's irrigation licence was varied for environmental use to enable the trial to occur.

A dozen representative pools in Mosquito Creek have been monitored since last summer. An emergency response plan for native fish management in the catchment is being drafted in readiness for the approaching dry season. Seasonal fish monitoring will also continue to increase our understanding of the distribution, life cycles, behaviour, habitat and flow requirements of these species and their response to prolonged drought.

For more information contact Randall Johnson on 8735 1122.

Conserving the Regent Parrot

The Regent Parrot is returning to the Riverland to breed and DEH is asking the public to help track its movements. These birds are listed as vulnerable, both in South Australia and nationally.

Regent Parrots have declined since the early 1900s and now there are less than 500 breeding pairs in SA. DEH is keen to hear from anyone who observes the Regent Parrot, particularly when it is feeding. Whether in the mallee or on a fruit block, all sightings are valuable, as they will help to develop a better picture of what kind of habitats are important for the Regent Parrot and of the threats this bird may be facing and how it can be protected.

To breed successfully, Regent Parrots require three essential habitat elements: nest trees, foraging areas and treed flight corridors. The flight corridors connect nesting sites with foraging sites, such as large blocks of Mallee, as these birds prefer not to fly over open ground. DEH has a good idea of where they nest but needs to know more about where they go to feed and how they get there.

The Regent Parrot is a medium-sized parrot weighing 160 to 190 grams. Males may be slightly larger than the females. The male is brightly coloured with a golden-yellow head, neck and shoulders. Females and juveniles are similar but are greener, particularly around the head and neck.

For more information and to report sightings contact Mark Schultz on (08) 8595 2181.

Monarto Mintbush at Mount Monster

Monarto Mintbush (*Prostanthera eurybioides*) is endemic to South Australia and is listed as nationally endangered under Commonwealth legislation, as less than 1500 plants remain. The species is restricted to two populations at Monarto and Mount Monster Conservation Park (near Keith).

Around Mount Monster the plant has a patchy distribution preferring to grow on rocky granite outcrops. During 2006-07 a survey was conducted to ascertain the size of the population –1242 plants were recorded (1023 naturally occurring and 219 planted individuals) spread across 10 granite outcrops.

Last February, extensive on-ground works were implemented to map and fumigate rabbit warrens across Mount Monster Conservation Park. Rabbit herbivory poses a significant threat to the Mintbush population because young seedlings are destroyed or prevented from maturing into adult plants.

Efforts are underway to include an important unconserved population of Monarto Mintbush into Mount Monster Conservation Park and studies will be done to help determine the impact of both native and introduced herbivores on the survival of juvenile plants of *P. eurybioides*.

Highlights of the project so far have been encouragingly high numbers of plants at certain population sites, the enthusiasm and commitment of the Friends of USE Parks, and the collection of good quantities of seed from one of the most attractive, not to mention most aromatic, plants in the region.

For more information contact Randall Johnson on 8735 1122.

Spare a thought for our native plants and animals during Biodiversity Month, or even better – take action. You can access a copy of No Species Loss – A Nature Conservation Strategy for South Australia online at www.environment.sa.gov.au/biodiversity/bio_strategy.html.