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A Rocha Australia ENEWS

Summer 2020

We are a Christian organisation engaging communities in nature conservation

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Chair's report...

Well, what a summer. Bushfires, drought, hail, scorching hot weather and floods. And now coronavirus. A Rocha Australia is very thankful for your support, involvement in projects and prayer.

It is at just these sorts of times we value God's gift of Creation, which reminds us of His power and blessings to us. I hope you have also known the peace of God in these past months of extreme weather, perhaps bushwalking or watching wildlife.

As you will see from this ENews, we have been steadily expanding our work and deepening our relationships and partnerships, from Cairns to Melbourne to Aldinga. I am always amazed at

how people are keen to work with A Rocha Australia, often commenting something like "I've often wanted to get involved with a Christian conservation organisation, and now I can".

We would love to see photos or short video clips of forests regrowing following the fires, or wetlands holding on during the drought, or wildlife coping with the hot weather. You can send them to us, or post them to our Facebook page.

Please do consider becoming a member, or donating to our work. If you pray, please ask for the Lord's wisdom in how we should respond to the many requests for help.

I hope you enjoy reading this ENews issue.

Dr Stuart Blanch
President (Chair, board of directors)



Stuart with regrowing Xanthorrhoea grass trees in a burnt forest near Newcastle, NSW.

The global A Rocha family has shown a huge level of concern and care during the bushfire crisis. A Rocha International asked for a local Christian perspective on the Australian bushfires. We contributed this [article](#), published on 1 February 2020:

Australia's bushfire emergency is unprecedented in scale, impact and length. More than 10 million hectares have burned over six months, 32 people are dead, more than 2500 buildings destroyed, and millions have been breathing hazardous smoke haze. Stuart Blanch, Chair of the board of A Rocha Australia, describes the team's experiences on the ground and how they have been responding:

'Directors and supporters of A Rocha Australia have faced the fear and uncertainty of fires bearing down on their community and homes. As we witness this ecological catastrophe, many have been involved in helping evacuees, providing comfort to the distraught and explaining the relevance of the Bible to the fires and Earth's climate emergency. We grieve and lament. For lives lost, people made homeless, wildlife killed, farms charred, forests scorched, businesses destroyed.

The fires have taken a terrible toll on ecosystems. Well over one billion animals have been killed or will die: lizards, koalas, kangaroos, goannas, kookaburras, cockatoos, owls, pythons, rosellas, potoroos, quolls, bats, frogs, butterflies, cod, eels and many more endemic Australian icons. Perhaps hundreds of millions of trees have been killed, releasing hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide to worsen climate heating.

Our most precious ecosystems have burnt: World Heritage sites, biodiverse National Parks, ancient rainforests, Indigenous protected areas, habitat for hundreds of threatened species, alpine forests, wildlife-rich islands, massive trees hundreds of years old, and remote valleys.

The fires have been mainly started by lightning, with very few caused by people. Temperatures have soared to more than 40 degrees Celsius. Some fires have been driven by pyro-cumulus weather systems created by the catastrophic fires themselves, which fan their own flames with terrible wind gusts.

Embers have rained down kilometres ahead of fire fronts, making containment by selfless volunteer firefighters and landholders near impossible. Some megafires have burned for months. Thousands of locals and holiday makers have gathered on beaches or community centres as flames drew near, with terrifying firestorms turning day to night. The Defence Force evacuated thousands by boat, truck and helicopter. Survivors use words such as 'war zone' and 'apocalypse'.

Climate heating, drought, deforestation and poor forest management have driven the catastrophe, but the ultimate cause is the break down in the relationship between people and their Creator, and the subsequent impacts on all relationships – including our relationship with the Creation itself.

Although we are sad and exhausted we continue in the hope we have in Christ, knowing that God is reconciling all things to Himself (Col 1:20), committed to using and caring for His Creation (Gen 2:15), and awaiting the renewal of His heavens and earth at Jesus' return.'



Koala in a eucalypt tree near Croppa Creek, NSW
(Stuart Blanch/WWF)

Hope in our God who sustains and restores

Perhaps there has been recent rain falling where you live in Australia and the parched land has been refreshed. With the return of soaking rain to parts of the eastern states, drought-affected woodland and forest has shown signs of amazing recovery. Many eucalypt and other trees that were leafless and seemed dead due to prolonged water deprivation, have sprouted new leaves along trunks and branches. This transformation



points to our wonderful God, who sustains and restores life, reminding us that we have great hope in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. "Conservation and Hope" is A Rocha's subtitle.

*New leaves on drought-affected trees,
Great Dividing Range*

In Northern QLD: Caring for God's Creation in Cairns

The Wet Tropics bioregion of far north Queensland has the oldest continuously surviving tropical rainforests on earth. The Wet Tropics has Australia's greatest diversity of animals and plants within an area of just 0.26% of the continent. It contains half of Australia's bird species, one third of the continent's mammals and about 3,000 plant species. Endemic species include the Southern Cassowary, the Mahogany Glider and the Lumholtz Tree Kangaroo. Due to its diversity and the unique warm and wet climatic conditions and altitudinal variation, it is anticipated that the Wet Tropics region will be a really important refuge for quite a number of species in a changing climate.

www.wettropicsplan.org.au / www.wettropics.gov.au

Northern Queensland A Rocha Australia member Rowan Shee has been promoting creation care through practical activities. Over several years, Rowan has propagated seedlings of native rainforest and coastal trees at his own property at Trinity Beach near Cairns. He has donated the plants to nature conservation projects at sites where the tree species are most suited, including a revegetation program on Thomatis Creek. This estuary, a distributary of the Barron River, is naturally becoming larger and the banks are migrating laterally. To restrict the erosion process on privately-owned land, a landcare organisation (Terrain NRM) started planting trees to stabilise the riverbank.



Photo of Rowan (Shee family)

A local community organisation took charge of the project and Rowan provided technical advice as well as many hours controlling voracious competing grass and other weeds. Working bees, including the latest on 19 January, saw enthusiastic volunteers of many ages planting additional seedlings beside Thomatis Creek. As A Rocha Australia gains more members in the Cairns region, potentially they could play a significant role in this project and other demonstrations of creation care.

Roger Jaensch
Executive Officer

In Southern QLD: Toowoomba team takes off

A growing number of A Rocha members in and near Toowoomba led to a search in late 2019 for local creation care projects. This city of 137,000 is situated on a plateau with its eastern escarpment marking the Great Dividing Range, at elevation around 700m. A series of bushland parks managed by Toowoomba Regional Council preserves remnants of blackbutt (eucalypt) forest that formerly thrived on the rich volcanic soil—now mapped as an endangered regional ecosystem. Meeting at Nielsen Park last November and in January, the members decided to support a community organisation, Friends of the Escarpment Parks, in helping Council manage the Park. The first outing focussed on removing four weed species including *lantana* and *asparagus*, so that native shrubs including *pittosporum*, *acacias* and 'coffee bush' can re-establish with reduced competition. In the future we may work in larger escarpment parks with semi-evergreen vine thickets (so-called dry rainforest) overrun with *cat's claw creeper* and *Madeira vine*.



Roger Jaensch
Executive Officer

In Victoria: first Melbourne celebration for 2020

Douglas and Jonathan Moo, in their book *Creation Care* (Zondervan, 2019, p23), identify "*The first and vital step in learning to care for creation is to celebrate creation*".

Fourteen A Rocha Australia members, supporters and friends did just that on 15 February when we came together at the Royal Botanic Gardens (RBG), Cranbourne, for a picnic and guided walk. We marvelled at the Australian Garden's showcase of native plants and ecosystems, as we followed the journey of water from the arid inland landscapes along dry riverbeds and down flowing rivers to the coastal fringes of the continent. The exhibition gardens demonstrate the beauty and diversity of Australian plants, and the evolving connections



between people, vegetation and the landscape. The RBG guides were very patient and knowledgeable as we quizzed them on the plants, and lingered at the water features and stepping stones!



Thank you to those who came along, and we look forward to other opportunities to connect throughout the year – we do hope that others can join us too.

Julia Jardine
Board director – Victoria

In SA: A new project to start in Aldinga Beach

In the Spring 2019 Enews we reported on planning that was underway for conservation activities at Hart Road wetland in Aldinga Beach, about 50km south of Adelaide. These wetlands were designed, created and planted by the Council to manage stormwater from new housing estates in the area.



It is with great excitement that the board of A Rocha Australia can now announce that a project partnership has been formalised, and a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed with The City of Onkaparinga for an 18-month project.

On-ground works will include controlling weeds, monitoring birds and vegetation, and revegetating the zones in green in the map below to restore ecosystem functionality and to provide habitat. The local species that will be sourced by Council are in the list to the right:

If you are interested in joining this project group please email Sally Shaw: sally.shaw@arocha.org

Species	Common Name
<i>Acacia acinacea</i>	Round-leaf Wattle
<i>Acacia paradoxa</i>	Kangaroo Thorn
<i>Acacia pycnantha</i>	Golden Wattle
<i>Acacia rupicola</i>	Rock Wattle
<i>Atriplex paludosa</i>	Marsh Saltbush
<i>Atriplex semibaccata</i>	Berry Saltbush
<i>Bursaria spinosa</i>	Christmas Bush
<i>Dodonea viscosa</i>	Sticky Hop-bush
<i>Eucalyptus fasciculosa</i>	Pink Gum
<i>Goodenia amplexans</i>	Clasping Goodenia
<i>Melaleuca lanceolata</i>	Dryland Tea-tree
<i>Olearia ramulosa</i>	Twiggy daisy-bush



Upcoming:

Annual General Meeting

Our AGM is on 26 March via skype. Members are being notified by email. Only 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 australia@arocha.org.



As A Rocha Australia grows and expands its on-ground activities across Australia, we would love to hear from members and supporters who would like to assist us with **fauna and flora surveys**. We have current opportunities in Victoria, NSW, SA and QLD. If you would like to contact us to find out more, please email australia@arocha.org.

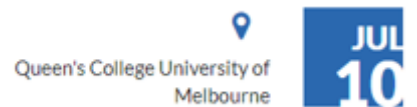


ISCAST is a network of people, from students to distinguished academics, exploring the interface of science, technology, and Christian faith.

The patron of ISCAST is Professor Graeme Clark AC FAA FRS, bionic ear pioneer.



<http://www.iscast.org/cosac2020call>



April 22, 2020 will mark 50 years of Earth Day. Earth Day Network's mission is to build the world's largest environmental movement to drive transformative change for people and planet. For more details visit: <https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2020/>

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Send feedback & suggested events/articles for the Autumn ENews by 10 May to australia.comms@arocha.org

