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A Rocha Australia ENEWS

Autumn, 2020

We are a Christian organisation engaging communities in nature conservation

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A male Musk Duck at Hart Road wetlands, South Australia

Chair's report...

Welcome to the Autumn 2020 issue of A Rocha Australia's ENews. Thanks so much for your support, it really means a lot to us.

Thanks to God we are deepening partnerships, accepting invitations to speak and share, researching and conserving amazing wildlife and ecosystems, and seeking to live our faith through Creation care.

As with many nations, businesses and communities around the world during the coronavirus pandemic, A Rocha has been hurting. Some A Rocha organisations have laid off staff, ecologists have been office-bound writing reports rather than banding birds, and some have closed. Yet we wait and hope, and collectively do what we can whilst we wait.

Across the A Rocha family around the world there has been much progress in developing a new covenant to guide us and grow us. It will be finalised in a few months, and a new executive director of the global organisation is being recruited.

In Australia, travel and field work has been suspended for more than two months and is only now starting again. But we have not been idle. This ENews captures some of the activities we have undertaken. Field work has been planned. The board has reviewed and tweaked our strategic plan. Our office and finance systems have been upgraded. And, perhaps like yourself, we've been working hard via Zoom and email. We're planning online seminars to continue our environmental education and outreach work, so please do keep an...



Chair's report continued...

...eye on our website and Facebook site for information on events.

I'm pleased to announce we have appointed a Council of Reference to guide our work. Members have a wide range of expertise, including vegetation ecology, ornithology, systematic theology, advocacy, mission, law and water management.

We have started considering where and how to set up a small field studies centre that would allow people to undertake research and practical

conservation projects, build a community, and bless a region. If you pray, would you ask God to grant us wisdom and support in this endeavour?

We held the annual general meeting in late March to report to our members on our activities in 2019. Thanks to all who attended and contributed. Directors then met to appoint office bearers. I thank all directors who have committed to serve in roles challenging and unfamiliar. Please do keep them in your prayers.

In March I had the pleasure of speaking to theological students and lecturers in Sydney about serving God through Creation care. We are committed to partnering with Bible colleges and Christian organisations to support the church's leaders of tomorrow consider and experience God's natural world. Occurring just after the end of the unprecedented bushfires, a key theme of the talk and discussions afterwards was how church leaders and congregations should and could consider and respond to global heating and the biodiversity extinction crises in their daily lives, in managing churches, and in their teaching and preaching.



I hope you enjoy this issue. We would greatly appreciate your prayer and support. If you are looking to make a tax-deductible donation at this time of the year, please do consider supporting our work. And if you are not a member, why not [join](#) today?!

Thanks, and enjoy.

Dr Stuart Blanch
President (Chair, board of directors)

Conference on Science and Technology, July

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE: Unfortunately "COSAC At Queen's: is no longer possible, however, "COSAC in the cloud" will go ahead online, [register now](#).

What does it mean to be a Christian in the 21st century? What does it mean to be a Christian in a time when Western patterns of consumption are unsustainable and are damaging the creation? What does it mean to be a Christian in a time when many people look forward optimistically to

"the singularity" and the transhuman possibilities of overcoming the limitations of the human body? What does it mean to live in a time of climate change and CRISPR, of animal extinction and AI? Under the overall theme of "A Hopeful Future?" COSAC 2020 will take up these two urgent global challenges. How do Christians think and live faithfully in such a world, and what sort of hope does Christian theology offer?



A Rocha Australia board strategic meeting via Zoom, May



Sharing about Creation Care during COVID-19

There has been a growth of online Creation Care resources and interactions recently, which as a national organisation spread across such a large continent, we can benefit from! Here are two recent samples we'd love for you to know about, and be encouraged by in your own home:

Activate is an annual missions conference held in Victoria, designed to inspire, challenge and mobilise young adults toward missions involvement. It is a ministry of Missions Interlink. The 2020 Activate mission conference has gone online this year with the theme "In His Name". A Rocha Australia was invited to record some conversations around "Creation Care and Mission" as part of this.



Our conversations with Andy McCulloch (Global Interaction), Katherine Shields (Interserve), Anna Radkovic (Cassinia Environmental) have been posted and are really encouraging! A further video with Tony Rinaudo (World Vision) will be available soon. View them on the [Activate website](#) or their [Facebook page](#).

Merri Creek Anglican in Melbourne had a [online Facebook Sunday service](#) in April which focused on Creation Care during the week of the 50th anniversary of World Earth Day.



There are excellent interviews with:

- Christine Parrott (birder)
- Emma Wyndham-Chalmers (TEAR)
- Mick Pope, Ecotheologian, Lecturer, author
- a contribution from Joel McKerrow.

Jo Knight (TEAR) presents creation care as a gospel issue and exhorts all followers of Jesus to explore this further and take action.

We hope you are finding other sources of encouragement online. Please keep in mind that there is a wealth of excellent resources also available on the A Rocha International [website](#).

Call during COVID-19 for a rethink in our relationship with nature

You may have pondered the link between COVID-19 and wildlife during this pandemic, but have you been thinking about it biblically? We would commend watching this [10 minute video interview](#) on the Renew Our World website.

It stars Revd. Dr Dave Bookless, who is Director of Theology for A Rocha International – his profile is [here](#).

We were delighted to have Dave with us in Australia in April 2018 for the Lausanne/World Evangelical Alliance Creation Care Consultation – Oceania in Tahlee (where this picture was taken).

Here are more details about this rethink campaign:



Renew Our World is a global movement of Christians who believe that since we are truly image bearers of God, we should act like it – living out love for one another in actions and in truth.



We have a vision for a world where all people have their basic needs met, everyone has the chance to flourish, we care for creation, and reduce inequality between rich and poor. We believe the church is called to lead the way.

As Christian organisations working in the fields of development, justice and creation care, we call for a fundamental rethink regarding humanity's relationship with nature in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We believe that God has created an interdependent world within which humans have a responsibility to use the gifts and resources contained in the natural world wisely, cautiously and sustainably. We acknowledge that this has rarely been the case, and mourn both the rapid loss of biodiversity worldwide, and the consequent problems for human health and livelihoods.

We endorse and echo the words of Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Acting Executive Secretary of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity: "The continuing loss of biodiversity on a global scale represents both direct and indirect threats to our health and wellbeing. Biodiversity loss and ecosystem change, including through land use change, habitat fragmentation and loss, and climate change, can increase the risk of disease emergence and spread among people, animals and other living species."

In particular, we note that both the destruction and fragmentation of natural habitats, and also unsustainable, often unregulated, and frequently illegal use of wildlife and wildlife products contributes to the disruption of ecosystems and the likelihood of pathogens transferring to humanity from wild animals.

We recognise that many human societies, including some indigenous and traditional peoples, depend on wildlife products for food and medicine, and we call for full implementation of national and international laws against the illegal wildlife trade, and better regulation of legal wildlife commerce, for the good of human health and for nature's flourishing.

Alongside this, we urge Christian communities worldwide to teach the inherent value of all creatures to God and to encourage virtues of compassion, caution and care in relation to the human use of nature and its constituent parts.

TEAR leads the Renew Our World campaign in [Australia](#).

Update from project in South Australia

In our Summer issue we announced the new Hart Road wetland project partnership in Aldinga Beach, about 50km south of Adelaide. Executive Officer Roger Jaensch was able to visit the project site in February and as well as conducting bird surveys, helped to set up some photo points of the different habitats. Below are some photos of the transformation, habitats and resident plants and animals. If you are interested in joining this project group please email Sally Shaw: sally.shaw@arocha.org



New viewing platform and plantings, 2008
(photo supplied by Onkaparinga Council)



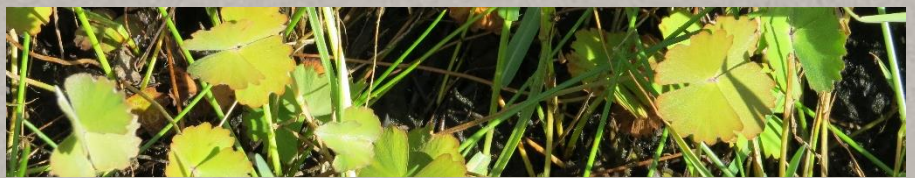
Viewing platform in Feb 2020 with
extensive reed habitat now established



deeper pond with Cumbungi (*Typha sp.*)
and rushes (*Juncus sp.*)



area for additional small plant revegetation



Left: lignum (*Duma florulenta*)
Above: nardoo (*Marsilea drummondii*);
Right: a sedge – *Schoenoplectus sp.*;
Below: male Musk Duck



Bird surveys underway at Hart Road Wetlands, South Australia

A key activity under the recently begun collaboration between A Rocha Australia and City of Onkaparinga at Hart Road Wetlands is monitoring of biodiversity. Birds are the first subject that A Rocha Australia will study and data are now being collected from 2.0 hectare plots each surveyed over 20 minutes, which is the national standard for robust analysis. Plots have been delineated to match habitat zones, to provide the property managers with information for optimal management of the constructed wetlands and partly revegetated surrounds. The first round of 12 surveys in February 2020 yielded 51 species including Baillon's Crake, skulking in shallow sedgeland, and delicate Elegant Parrots drinking at a sheltered lake edge. Weeding and tree planting activities are proposed for the cooler months: volunteers are welcome! It is hoped that the project will attract significant support from members and friends of A Rocha and from churches, schools and other sources in the Aldinga Beach community.



Above: shallow sedgeland, good habitat for Baillon's Crake (below)



Left: Elegant Parrot



Roger Jaensch
Executive Officer

How do you say goodbye to piece of land you've taken care of for 10 years?



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In 2007 we moved to Crafers in South Australia. At the top of our new property was a small area of bushland that was an ugly mass of 2 metre-high broom, gorse, and blackberries, all on the Weeds of National Significance list due to their invasiveness and environmental impacts.

The area was an eye sore as well as a fire hazard. The land belongs to the local council but due to being inaccessible, apart from through our and the neighbour's property, it was considered a degraded piece of land. I started to care for it, over my fence.

As I removed the invasive weeds (with a little help from others) I discovered to my amazement that the local plant life hadn't give up, it just needed it be released from its bondages! It has though been necessary to plant additional indigenous plants in the more degraded areas.

So, 10 years on it is now thriving, a blessing to us, enjoyment to the neighbours, as well as the local kangaroos, koalas and birds. The weeds of course haven't totally disappeared, so it still needs maintaining.

Doug and I are moving on ... so who will look after this special piece of land? I will grieve its loss but hope maybe someone else might care for it.

I am reminded of Paul's words to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:58) "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, *because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*"

I have been obedient to God's call to care for his creation and as I've cared for it, I have learnt so much about his amazing creation. Time and time again I have been in awe of its beauty, the remarkable relatedness of all the fauna and flora. How death is not wasted as new life comes or adds nutrients to soil around it. Its intrinsic ability to praise its Creator (Ps 148).

I'm also reminded that "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of Heaven and Earth and does not live in temples built by human hands" (Acts 17:24).

Saying goodbye to it will be very hard but I am so grateful to God for the many valuable things I've learnt and for the privilege of being able to restore a tiny bit of his precious creation.



Sally Shaw
Board director – South Australia

Early results from bird surveys at Nielsen Park, Toowoomba

Applying the national standard of 2-hectare, 20-minute surveys, A Rocha Australia members in Toowoomba have now monitored birds in Nielsen Park, Toowoomba, over four months. It is hoped that results will shed light on the benefits of weeding activities by Friends of the Escarpment Parks and A Rocha Australia, to encourage regrowth of indigenous shrubs.

The cumulative tally of 25 bird species from this remnant forest, surrounded by housing, is dominated by aggressive species such as miners, lorikeets, currawongs and kookaburras—probably contributing to the scarcity of small bush-birds.

There are some gems, however. A pair of Tawny Frogmouths is in residence. And Satin Bowerbirds have at least four active bowers, including three in one clump of regenerating shrubs; at each bower, it seems the preferred decoration is blue clothes pegs!



Roger Jaensch
Executive Officer



Helping to restore, reconnect and protect Australia's forests

One of the practical ways to help biodiversity is to plant trees. The loss of trees and vegetation over many decades has had a profound effect on Australia's biodiversity. Many



Philip Hughes
Board director – Victoria

organisations are now involved in reversing this trend. A Rocha Australia recently donated funds to *aTree* to enable the purchase and planting of several hundred tubestock of native eucalypts and shrubs. These plants will be planted as part of the *aTree* initiative of Cassinia Environmental: <https://www.atree.com.au/>. Cassinia is a strong supporter of A Rocha, and A Rocha currently engages with Cassinia formally through an MoU (see the article in the [Spring 2018 ENews](#)). Thank you to all our members and supporters whose gifts to A Rocha Australia have made this conservation activity possible.

We hope that A Rocha members will be able to be involved with planting later in the year, just as we have done previously (see articles in the [Winter 2018](#) and [Autumn 2019 ENews](#)).

Book Review: Not Home Yet (Author: Ian K. Smith)

I don't read many books these days. But I kept picking up *Not Home Yet*.

Traveling is fun, but after a while we long for home, starts the book. Ian Smith asks 'where is home'?

Perhaps like me you have struggled with bible teaching and Christian lifestyles that, whether implied or explicit, appear to establish a dichotomy between salvation of souls and Creation care. Ever found yourself skipping over some texts, such as Chapter 3 of 2 Peter and Revelation 21, that can be used to question the motivation of Christians who are passionate about landcare, threatened species, or solar power?

The subtitle of his book gives a clue as to his dominant theme: *How the renewal of the Earth fits into God's plan for the world.* He points to Creation as a theme throughout the Bible, not something to be consigned to the first chapters of Genesis. He eschews a gospel-focused only on personal salvation of our souls and escape to heaven which leaves little room for seeking to live a godly life now on Earth and in our resurrected physical bodies in the future in the renewed Creation. He breaks down the unbiblical distinction between spiritual and physical, between worship and work. Creation is being reconciled in Christ through his resurrection, both people and penguins.

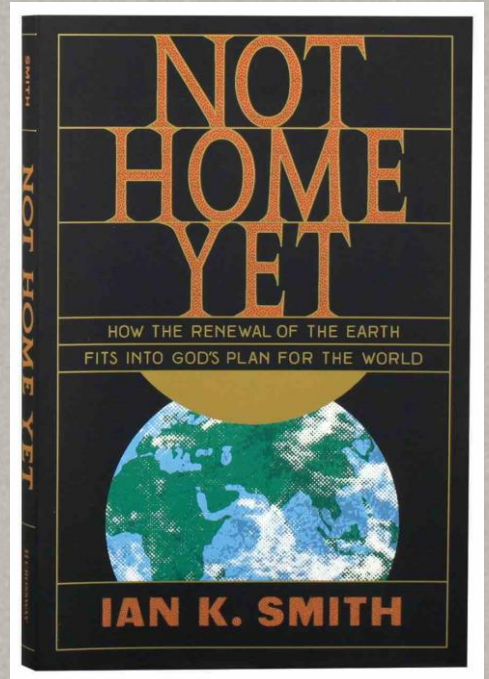
For those who have endured months of coronavirus shutdown at home the chapter titles might present a challenge: *The Creation of Home, The Problem with Home, The Land as Home, The Promise of a Better Home, the Journey Home, and Arrival at Home.* Be not deterred!

Ian Smith's book explains passages of the Bible that have confounded and discomforted me for decades. He explains how different interpretations of key Greek words in the New Testament can make a big difference to how we consider Creation care in the context of God's judgement on Earth. Such as whether believers will inherit a *new* or *renewed* Earth, and whether Earth *will be found* or *burned up*.

He urges the reader on to love and serve Jesus in mission, well articulates the themes of creation and renewal, and encourages those seeking to live out Christian faith through nature conservation and ecosystem restoration.

The book is scholarly, practical and personable, reflecting the author's resume that includes pastoral ministry, missionary work in Vanuatu, and now Principal of Christ College in Sydney. His book presents a lesson in biblical history and a warm yet concerned survey of our modern church and world. Smith urges believers to gospel mission to see people receive Christ as Lord and Saviour, and to grow churches outwardly engaged to bless our communities, landscapes and climate.

Not Home Yet is published by Crossway, Illinois. You can watch the launch of *Not Home Yet* at Christ College in Sydney in October last year [here](#).



review by Dr Stuart Blanch
President (Chair, board of directors)

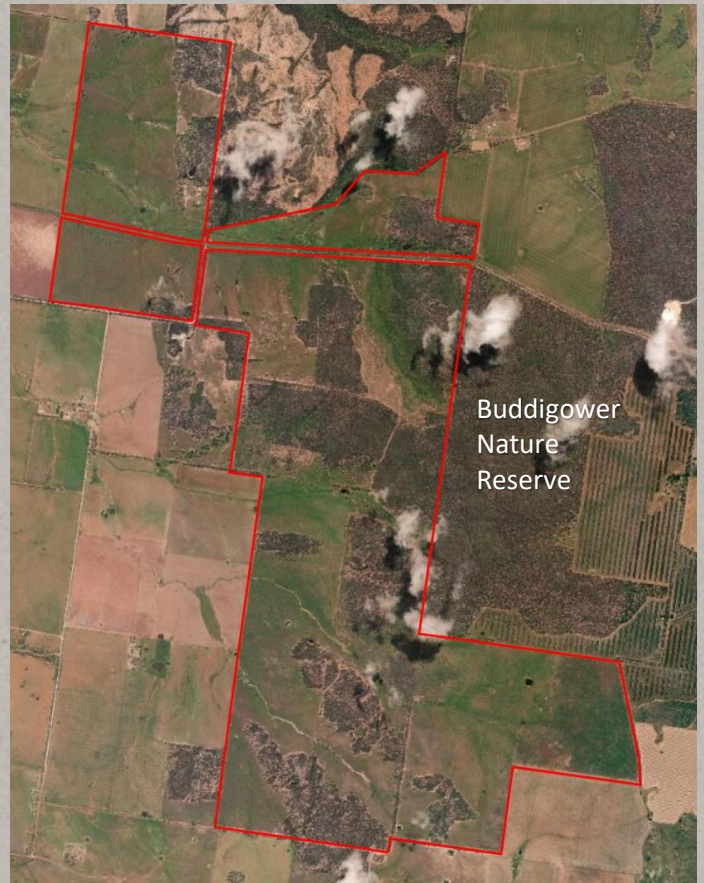
Ian's photo on his [college profile](#)

Cassinia Environmental collaboration extends into NSW

A Rocha Australia is collaborating with Cassinia Environmental by assisting with nature conservation activities on private land. You can read more about this collaboration [here](#).

Cassinia has invited A Rocha to become involved with the conservation management of a property in Alleena, near West Wyalong in NSW. 'Avoca' is a 1700ha property which includes areas of remnant woodland and 848ha of former grazing and cropping land revegetated by direct seeding in 2013.

A Rocha will be working with Cassinia to undertake field surveys to identify vegetation and habitats in order to collect baseline data for the property. Bird surveys will be repeated at regular intervals to both monitor changes to biodiversity and to provide information to guide future property management. The project will be managed by Cassinia, with A Rocha Australia participating as a project partner.



This Google map at left shows the location of Alleena in relation to the cities of Sydney and Canberra, as well as some regional centres.

A field survey to describe vegetation and habitats will be initially undertaken to collect baseline data for the property. Bird surveys will be repeated at regular intervals to both monitor changes to

biodiversity and to provide information to guide future property management. Survey and data collection methodologies will be in accordance with current standard practices in NSW.

'Avoca' in Alleena is near to [Buddigower Nature Reserve](#), created in 1963 and covering an area of 327ha. Grey box, mugga iron bark and white cypress are found growing on lower slopes. Areas of blue mallee, bull mallee, green mallee and congoo mallee are found on low gravelly ridges. The reserve provides typical habitat for the endangered Malleefowl, Shy Heathwren and Southern Scrub Robin.

Cassinia collaboration in NSW continued...

Here is the methodology that is planned to be followed:

Literature and database search

- Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) and other biodiversity databases (e.g. BioNet Atlas of NSW Wildlife, Threatened species profiles, Atlas of Living Australia etc.)
- Other relevant literature.

General biodiversity assessment

- At least one survey site will be located within each identified remnant Plant Community Type (PCT) or vegetation class. (If a PCT is present in varying conditions within the property, additional survey sites will be established to capture variations.) Survey sites will also be located within revegetated areas.
- Biodiversity assessment will be undertaken using a methodology based on the Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM) (NSW Government, 2020) which utilizes field and spatial data to assess vegetation and habitat condition and landscape context.

Bird surveys

- Systematic embedded bird surveys using the 2ha / 20min search and 500m / 5km methods will be employed at each site.
- **Photo-monitoring**
- Permanent photo-monitoring sites will be established at each survey site.

Here are some great photos available to view [online](#), taken by a naturalist who visits Buddigower Nature Reserve every three years for a bird banding project:



Sand Monitor (or Gould's Goanna) *Varanus gouldii*



twining fringe-lily *Thysanotus patersonii*

We look forward to sharing our own photos with you in the next ENews as a small group of A Rocha members are hoping to visit soon to commence the field studies.

If you are interested in learning more about the Cassinia Environmental collaboration and possibly assisting with nature conservation activities on Cassinia properties in Victoria and NSW, email Greg Stone: greg.stone@arocha.org

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