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# A Rocha Australia *ENEWS*

Autumn, 2021

We are a Christian organisation engaging communities in nature conservation

## Chair's report...

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Welcome to the autumn 2021 issue of A Rocha Australia's ENews.

Did you manage to do some birding to celebrate John Stott Memorial Birding Day on Saturday 8 May? John Stott was a renowned English evangelist and bible teacher, and a very experienced ornithologist. He was a principal author of the Lausanne Covenant in 1974. Thirty-three years ago I listened to him talk to a university Christian group, and remember it still. A Rocha Australia executive officer Roger Jaensch, members and supporters celebrated the day with a birding outing to the botanic gardens in the heart of Melbourne.

We have purchased two additional camera traps to record images and video of wildlife in our various conservation projects. It is so encouraging to get a close-up view of our amazing fauna. Native animals are visiting sites where volunteers work with partners, such as in dry rainforest in Council parks in Toowoomba to remove weeds like cat's claw creeper which smothers and kills trees. My hope is that in the years ahead each of our projects will benefit from the use of camera traps to allow us to better communicate why caring for God's creation matters.

A Rocha Australia is engaged in nature conservation projects and Creation care theology initiatives with a growing list of partners. It is a truly exciting time, and we are very thankful to the Lord. Here are some examples:

In March, the executive officer and a small team of A Rocha volunteers visited the Dusky Woodswallow...



Friends of A Rocha in SA day out

## Chair's report continued...

...Conservation Reserve in the NSW Central West to compile a biodiversity inventory. The property supports significant woodland and shrubland habitats in a landscape with little remaining bushland. The site has benefited from major revegetation on land that had been cleared for a century, and is next door to a nature reserve. We hope to extend our partnership with Cassinia Environmental to undertake more surveys and biodiversity monitoring on this site, and their other protected areas.

Feel like getting your hands dirty and sharing in some fellowship in the beautiful Southern Highlands near Sydney? A Rocha Australia is partnering with Capernwray Australia and the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service to plant native trees along the Wingecarribee River in Cecil Hopkins Nature Reserve on Saturday 12 June.

Directors appointed a small working group to provide recommendations on how to purchase land for conservation and Creation care, supported by a resource group with diverse expertise and backgrounds. The working group will provide its report in December. I would love to hear from you if you have expertise in buying and managing land for conservation, or in establishing a field studies centre or intentional Christian community.

A Rocha International's Forum Festival will be held virtually between 5 and 11 June, with a staggered schedule to accommodate participants from different time zones. A Rocha Australia members are encouraged to join some of the Zoom sessions timed for our hemisphere, which will occur mainly in office hours. It will be a time of encouragement, celebration, prayer and praise, learning, lament and fellowship.

May I encourage you to support our work through becoming a member, or encouraging another person, getting involved in a local bush regeneration or ecotheology project, talking to us about establishing a local A Rocha network, donating to support our projects including buying more camera traps, or considering leaving a gift to A Rocha in your will.

We are seeking people with expertise in financial accounting, corporate governance, business administration, fundraising and the law to help govern the organisation. If you are interested and want to support A Rocha Australia's work, please get in contact to discuss current volunteer opportunities.

I would also ask you to pray for A Rocha India, which is facing very challenging times as the Covid pandemic is reaching into people's lives across the nation. The A Rocha India team has not escaped so we are joining with A Rocha family worldwide to seek God's protection and healing for them.

I hope you enjoy this issue of ENews.

Stuart Blanch

President, A Rocha Australia



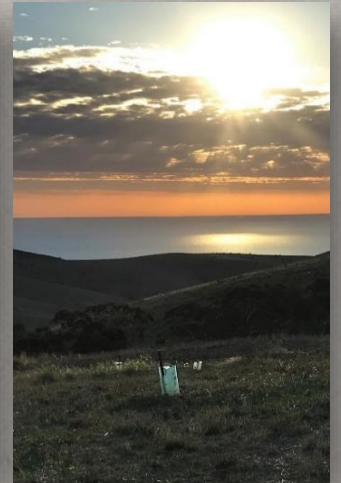
# Friends of A Rocha in South Australia day out – 1 May

Eighteen friends of A Rocha in SA recently enjoyed visiting conservation projects on two properties near Myponga Beach on the Fleurieu Peninsula.

Paul Green has owned a 100 acre property for over 40 years, and has been actively revegetating 15 acres, which he gave a very informative and entertaining tour of. His property demonstrates how denuded farmed land can be transformed into habitat for a variety of fauna and flora, as well as being a restorative place to walk. Paul spent many years teaching ecology at Adelaide and Flinders Universities. Through Paul's ecological expertise his property is now a valuable seed bank, one which Tim Jarvis' nearby Forktree project is benefiting from.



Tim Jarvis is an environmental scientist, author, film maker, adventurer and public speaker. He purchased a degraded 133-acre former pastoral property in April 2019 and established a registered charity [the Forktree Project](#). Although starting out recently, they have already planted thousands of native trees and shrubs with the aim of bringing back native animals, insects and birds as well as sequestering tens of thousands of tonnes of carbon (the average Australian's carbon footprint each year is roughly 25 tonnes). Tim is committed to finding pragmatic solutions to major environmental issues related to climate change and biodiversity loss.



It was lovely to meet together as a Friends' group and to see these projects in action. We also planned some future adventures.

Sally Shaw  
Director – SA

# John Stott Memorial Birding Day – 8 May

On 8 May teams around the world took part in the John Stott Memorial birding day, a one-day event run by A Rocha to commemorate and celebrate our great friend and supporter John Stott's legacy as a theologian, pastor and birdwatcher in his centenary year.



Here are some statistics from one of the international activities, The Bird Race:



An A Rocha Australia-led group in Melbourne visited the Royal Botanic Gardens next to the Yarra River, which is in it's 175th year since establishment.

The group recorded 25 native bird species and 3 exotic bird species, and recorded a [video](#) of their visit.



Preparations are already underway internationally for the 2022 John Stott Memorial Birding Day, to be held next May. For more information about this event visit [this website](#).

# Dusky Woodswallow Conservation Reserve, NSW

On the south-western slopes in New South Wales near West Wyalong, A Rocha Australia is providing expertise in support of Dusky Woodswallow Conservation Reserve (DWCR), another venture of Cassinia Environmental.

This former cereal and grazing farm of 1700 hectares is about one third comprises mallee tall shrubland and box-ironbark-cypress woodland while most of the cleared fields have been planted with Acacia shrubs for carbon sequestration.



tall shrubland of green mallee

grey box/mugga ironbark grassy woodland

As the property is many hours' drive from Sydney and Melbourne, an expeditionary effort is needed for A Rocha Australia engagement. In March 2021, a small team comprising staff, board-directors and another volunteer undertook an orientation followed by surveys of birds in the major habitat types. An encouraging 67 bird species were found, and ten plots for standardised 2-hectare, 20-minute surveys were established.

Although no species of national conservation significance were detected on this visit, data from nearby nature reserves suggest that some may occur at DWCR, which is part of the easternmost remnant of mallee shrubland in Australia.

Dusky Woodswallow *Artamus cyanopterus cyanopes* is listed as a vulnerable species in NSW and is one of a number of declining bird species dependent on intact woodland ecosystems for foraging and nesting.

A flora survey has recently been conducted and more studies are scheduled to take place on the site – we look forward to sharing more details soon.



Black Honeyeater

White-necked Heron

Grey-crowned Babbler

# WildLife @ Yea Wetlands, VIC

On Saturday 27 March the beautiful Yea Wetlands were the location for A Rocha Australia's first "WildLife" event in partnership with SU Victoria and Interserve.

Thirty keen explorers aged from 4 to 80 spent the morning discovering the wetland's bird, snake and aquatic life with local wildlife experts. After lunch there was

time to reflect on the relationship between nature, ourselves, each other and God; and to hear words of hope and encouragement from the Bible.



There were opportunities throughout the day to connect with nature and each other and to experience more of God through his creation. Friendships were deepened and new friendships forged over good conversations – united around a common conviction about the responsibility to care for creation as part of our discipleship journey and expression of our love for God and one another.



A great many thanks go to the staff and volunteers at the Y-Discovery Centre and Rev Dr Geoff Leslie (Chair of the Yea Wetlands Committee of Management, expert birder and Baptist pastor) for helping to make it such a wonderful day!

Julia Jardine and Philip Hughes  
Directors – VIC

# Hart Road Wetland happenings, SA



## Five-year-olds and frogs – 17 May

Seventeen five-year-olds wearing colourful wellies clambered noisily off the school bus. I had been invited by the Aldinga Southern Vales Christian College to show them Hart Road wetland and to learn about frogs. Even though it was five minutes from their school, this was their first visit.

Leanne Lawrence, the conservation community liaison officer from the Onkaparinga Council joined us. Trying to get five-year-olds to be quiet as they eagerly anticipated catching a frog was challenging! We did manage to find an area where there was a loud chorus of frog noises. This encouraged them to stay still for a few minutes. Seeing any proved difficult but they did enjoy putting their fish nets into one of the ponds to catch various bugs.

As we walked around the wetland, I picked up any litter as a way of demonstrating the importance of not letting rubbish pollute the waterways. On their way back to the bus they enjoyed seeing some kangaroos, as well as examining the scats of foxes and kangaroos.

I have been asked to lead another excursion with some of the older children at the end of this month.

## Clean Up Australia Day – 7 March

We also joined other community groups around the country in collecting rubbish from natural environments.

Sally Shaw  
Director – SA



# Sydney Network helps at Wilkins Green, NSW

Sydney members and supporters are now able to meet regularly at Wilkins Green, part of Wilkins Primary School in Marrickville in the Inner West.

Wilkins Green is a multi purpose space that has chickens, edible gardens, bush tucker gardens, an Aboriginal learning area, composting toilet and bushcare area.

The first meeting was on 13 March, where a member of the Wilkins Green Bushcare group taught some Bush Regeneration 101 skills, and how to care for local plants.

On 15 May there was a habitat planting day. Another tree planting day is coming up on 19 June. Sydney members and supporters are also invited to take a day trip down to the lovely Capernwray site in the Southern Highlands on 12 June to enjoy tree planting and bird watching along the Wingecarribee River.

If you would like to join other Christians at Sydney events, please join the Sydney Network [group](#) on Facebook or email [Isabel.lyons@arocha.com](mailto:Isabel.lyons@arocha.com).



## Tree planting with Capernwray, NSW

The A Rocha Australia partnership with Capernwray continues as students planted another fifty River Tea Trees in Cecil Hoskins Nature Reserve alongside the Wingecarribee River on 19 May.

This will improve the habitat of the riparian corridor and connect up with existing plantings on Capernwray land and remnant vegetation within the Reserve.





# Serving the Lord in Creation Care: Stuart's reflection

*In late 2020, President of A Rocha Australia, Stuart Blanch was asked to write an article for [Manna Gum](#). The full article is linked on our [website](#); below is a second extract:*



After my journey with A Rocha began, Bible passages familiar and obscure took on deeper meaning. I increasingly saw nature conservation through a theological lens, which was part-affirming and part-convicting as the Spirit helped me understand both the joy of serving God through creation care and the personal cost this requires as a disciple in how I live. God's command was to 'take care' of the garden of Eden, which I see as God's direction to care for ecosystems and farm sustainably (Genesis 2:15).

King David observed 'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it' (Psalm 24:1), meaning we are stewards, not owners. What does that mean to me today? I am a citizen of a wealthy, high-carbon nation that is disproportionately contributing to heating God's Earth. How must I change how I live and speak out in response to God's commands that 'You shall not murder' and 'You shall not steal' (Exodus 20:13, 15) when extreme weather events amplified by climate change are killing millions and robbing billions of a safe climate?

I re-read Old Testament prophets who called on God's people to show justice and mercy to the poor, widows and orphans (Zechariah 7:10, Isaiah 1:17, Jeremiah 22:3). And I read anew Jesus' teaching to 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:31). It struck me that choices I made regarding my food, car, house and job could indirectly impact people through global supply chains, global financial systems and the global climate. For good or ill, how I lived impacted them, wherever they lived. This made me both uncomfortable and joyful. I could obey God's commands to care for and love the weak and marginalised — albeit in very small ways and indirectly—in how I lived.

I pondered why God seemed to know well and delight in flora and fauna across Testaments Old and New: sparrows, ospreys, lions, cedars, sycamore-fig trees, geckos, hyrax, papyrus, ants and jackals. If Jesus said we should 'consider the lilies of the field' (Matthew 6:28), then they must be important to the Lord.

I was confronted by my impacts and hypocrisy, and sometimes fatigued by the moral choices when buying stuff.

It was easier to blame others, but also dishonest. I have played a part in the degradation, from catching too many of the fish in my creek in my youth, to yielding to consumerism, to living a high-carbon life.

I started emailing people involved in A Rocha in different parts of the world, then talking by phone, then Skyping, then occasional visits to their field study centres and forums.

For perhaps the first time in my life, I met a group of committed believers who knew their Bible and wanted to see people saved, who saw ecology and conservation as a very worthwhile career and mission. To them, it was normal Christian discipleship and mission. They saw creation care as a gospel issue, and sought to live out their commitment to 'take care' of the Garden.

## Upcoming events

Join us to plant some trees along the  
Wingecarribee River in the beautiful  
Southern Highlands

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2021

9:30am to midday

To register your interest or for further information contact

Greg at [greg.stone@arocha.org](mailto:greg.stone@arocha.org) or 0422279946

Hosted by A Rocha Australia, Capernwray Australia and NSW National Parks  
and Wildlife Service



The A Rocha International Forum Festival is set for 5–11 June 2021, and the theme is Connection: connection through technology and connection through Covenant.

Connection is local as well as global – one of the benefits of a virtual Forum is that everyone can join in! This is a chance to 'travel' around the world and get to know your Worldwide Family.

Through lectures, worship and films (made by A Rocha Regional Offices), the goals of this Festival are to learn together, listen to one another, pray together and get a taste of each other's work, places and hopes. Would you like to join some of the sessions? Contact [australia@arocha.org](mailto:australia@arocha.org) to find out more details about the program and to get online access.

A Rocha Australia has compiled a video of the Capernwray project starring A Rocha Australia director Greg Stone (pictured right). We'll look to put this video on our website once it has debuted at the Forum.



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Send feedback and suggested events or articles for the Winter ENews by 15 Aug to [australia.comms@arocha.org](mailto:australia.comms@arocha.org)

