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A Rocha Australia ENEWS

Autumn, 2022

We are a Christian organisation engaging communities in nature conservation

Chair's report...

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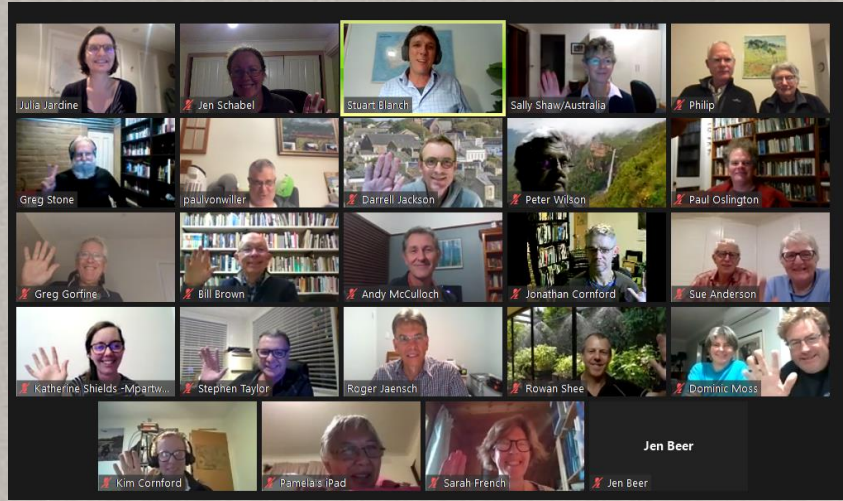
Welcome to the Autumn 2022 issue of A Rocha Australia's ENews.

I'd like to say a very big thanks to the 26 members who attended the Annual General Meeting on 31 March. It was so encouraging to see so many faces, many well-known but some new ones too, to hear about what you're A Rocha Australia achieved in 2021.

On behalf of the Board I'd like to say a very large 'thank you' to Greg Stone, who did not seek re-election at the AGM, and to welcome Peter Wilson who joined the board. Greg has been a very committed member and director of A Rocha Australia, and holds so much knowledge about vegetation and landscape ecology. We will miss him dearly, not the least his wonderful

sense of humour and deep faith! I am delighted that Peter has joined the board. He brings a fabulous blend of expertise in the law, human resources management, corporate governance relevant to charities, nature conservation and protected areas advocacy. This will stand our Board in good stead in the years ahead. Please get in contact with me for a chat if you are interested in discussing joining the Board.

The board hopes to announce the appointment of an Executive Officer in June. We've been operating for six months without a paid staff member since Roger Jaensch left the role last Christmas. I want to express my sincere gratitude to the directors who have done even more heavy lifting during this time, and the other volunteers who have been such a great help.



Our March AGM!

Chair's report continued...

On Saturday 2 April I visited the Dusky Woodswallow Conservation Reserve near West Wyalong in the Central West of NSW, with fellow directors Philip Hughes and Julia Jardine. A highlight was spotting perhaps two dozen Superb Parrots, as well as flocks of Grey-Crowned Babbler and Apostlebirds. We toured the Reserve with a local farmer who is very knowledgeable about soil health and land management needs in the remnant box-ironbark forest and regrowth mallee woodland in the region. On the following day I worshipped at one of the churches in West Wyalong, and had the opportunity to discuss Creation care with people from two churches over a great lunch at one of the minister's house.

This allowed me to visit John and Juanita Anderson in the headwaters of the Lachlan on my trip home. They started the Tahlee Creation Care Centre north of Newcastle from 2014, which led to the establishment of A Rocha Australia. We miss having John on the board, and his pastoral guidance. They live in a wonderful sustainable home, which will surprise no-one who have known them during their lives of service. In the backyard there's a delightful fruit and vegetable garden, chooks, an alpaca, a Maremma dog, plus platypus in the creek at the bottom of their block.

I had a great visit to Toowoomba on 30 April with Roger Jaensch to visit two of the Council-managed parks on the Escarpment where A Rocha Australia members have been volunteering in weed removal and bird surveys. We also talked to a potential donor about opportunities for partnering in land conservation in Queensland.

One of our tasks this year is to commence seeking tax deductibility status through being added to the Register of Environmental Organisations. This is a long-held goal that will recognise A Rocha Australia's work in nature conservation. It will also enable us to expand the list of potential donors from whom we seek funding to also include those who only give to charities with tax-deductible status. This will also allow us to issue tax deductible receipts to our supporters.

In the wee hours of the night over recent months I've been Zooming with colleagues from A Rocha organisations in Europe, Africa and the US to review the existing Commitments that guide all A Rocha organisations: Christian, Conservation, Community, Cross-cultural and Cooperation.

From 5-11 June I'll be attending the A Rocha Forum at the Les Courmettes A Rocha centre in the mountains inland from Nice, France. This is the first time in four years that leaders from the A Rocha worldwide family will be able to meet in person. It will be great to see so many wonderful people serving in Creation care. We will also have the opportunity to make decisions about amending the Commitments, Mission and Vision of A Rocha globally, plus agreeing a statement on Creation care to guide all our work. Look out for my report-back in the Winter issue of ENews, due out in early September.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the ENews.

Dr Stuart Blanch
President (Chair, board of directors)



Werribee Open Range Zoo WildLife Day, Victoria

On March 26 about 30 members and friends of A Rocha Australia and Scripture Union visited the Werribee Open Range Zoo (*land of the Bunurong people*) for a hands-on day of exploring God's creation and reflecting on our part in caring for it. WildLife was a special opportunity for children, youth, and adults to explore together the marvels of God's Creation and reflect on our place in it.

We were privileged to have A Rocha members Nicole and Dominic (who work at the zoo) guide us during the day to see a range of African animals including Western Lowland Gorilla, African Lion, Hippopotamus & Cheetah.

They also explained the zoo's important conservation work for animals and birds both



in Australia and overseas.



At the conclusion of the day, Nicole led us in a reflection of what we had seen during the day and how we, as part of God's creation have an important role to care for God's creation and worship and honour God as the creator of all things.



WildLife is a partnership initiative between Scripture Union and A Rocha Australia to engage people in discovery of God's wonderful and wild creation.

Philip Hughes,
Director - VIC

ISCAST Conversations 2022

Creation Care in the Climate–Change Century

From March to May this year ISCAST (Christians in Science and Technology, Australia) and NZCIS (New Zealand Christians in Science) teamed up to present a [series of conversations](#) on the topic *Creation Care in the Climate–Change Century*.

Most of the presenters have had at some time a close association with either A Rocha Australia or A Rocha Aotearoa NZ. It is therefore not surprising that A Rocha and its activities in Australia and NZ, and also internationally, were mentioned during the course of the lectures!

There were ten presentations in the series and all the presentations were grounded in some way on the biblical narrative that began with creation, ranges through the coming of Christ and aspects of the Christian life, and progresses towards the redemption of all things and the new creation. The details of presentations addressed a wide range of topics including indigenous aspects relevant to creation care, the place of creation care in the context of ecumenism and the global church, theological understandings in the

context of climate change, living with our neighbours, the wonders of creation and ecology, the re-enchantment of nature, the practical steps that people can take to care for creation, whether eco-theology is relevant to modern society, the connection between faith and creation care, and the relationship between science and theology and the future.

Click on each of these ten pictures to watch them on YouTube.

Philip Hughes,
Director – VIC



John Stott Memorial Birding Day 2022 – global results

2022 marked the second year of the John Stott memorial birding day organised by A Rocha to commemorate and celebrate John Stott's legacy as a theologian, pastor and birdwatcher. Held this year on 14–15 May, the [event](#) included a bird race, photo competition and shared resources for having a bird-themed spiritual retreat. The aim of the Bird Race is to work together to see 2000 species globally – the total on John Stott's life list.

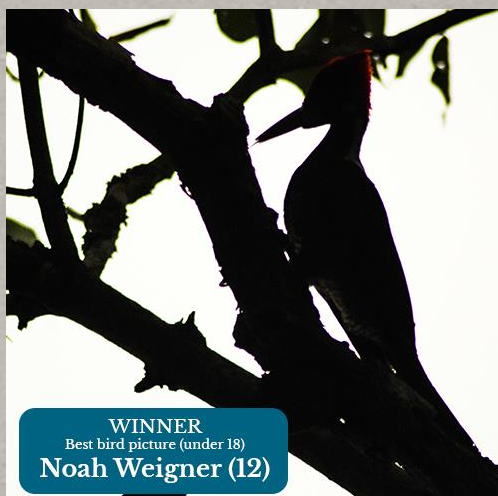
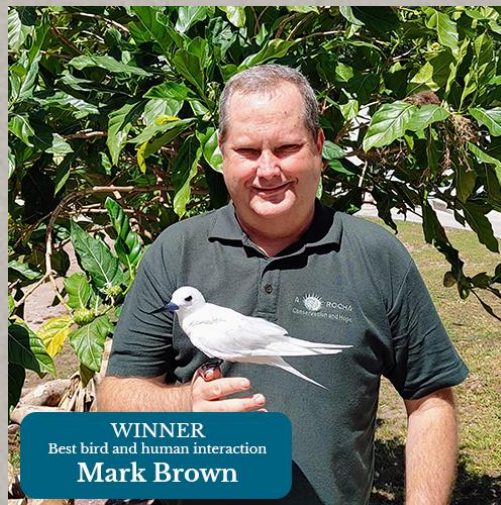
The Bird Race – results

The number of birds observed this year was an increase of 22 species from 2021. The winner was James Omenya, Kenya who saw 142 species!



The Photo Competition

Here are the winners from the four categories:



About John Stott – the man

A Rocha compiled this wonderful [tribute](#) to John Stott that we wanted to share with you:



John Stott
Wikimedia Commons

John Stott was at the forefront of bringing creation care to the attention of the global Church. He cared deeply for the plight of the planet because he was hardwired with a love of nature in general and of birds in particular. But he was also someone who listened carefully to the Bible and he heard within it God's great love and concern for all he had made, as well as for people.

He particularly loved Psalm 104, which he said on the tenth anniversary of A Rocha in 1993 was "perhaps the earliest essay in ecology in the literature of the world." On that occasion he preached a sermon which cited many psalms, but one reference which particularly struck us was Psalm 105: 1.

*Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name;
make known to the nations what he has done.
Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell of all his wonderful acts.*

And he said,

"Of course we're used to the idea that we're to bear witness to what God has done in Jesus for the salvation of the world. But the Scripture says we are also to bear witness to the wonderful works of our Creator. God's mighty acts in creation and redemption are to be made known throughout the world... I hope, sisters and brothers, that we will not be afraid to bear witness to the Creator as well as to the Redeemer."

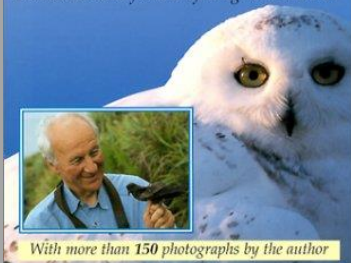
Born in London, England in 1921, in 2005 John Stott was ranked among the 100 most influential people in the world by [Time magazine](#).

Miranda Harris, co-founder of A Rocha wrote a 2013 [tribute](#) to John Stott's ability to cultivate community, one of A Rocha's core commitments.



Peter Harris and John Stott making friends on the Bosphorus, Turkey
(credit: A Rocha)

JOHN STOTT
THE
Birds
OUR TEACHERS
Biblical lessons from a lifelong bird-watcher



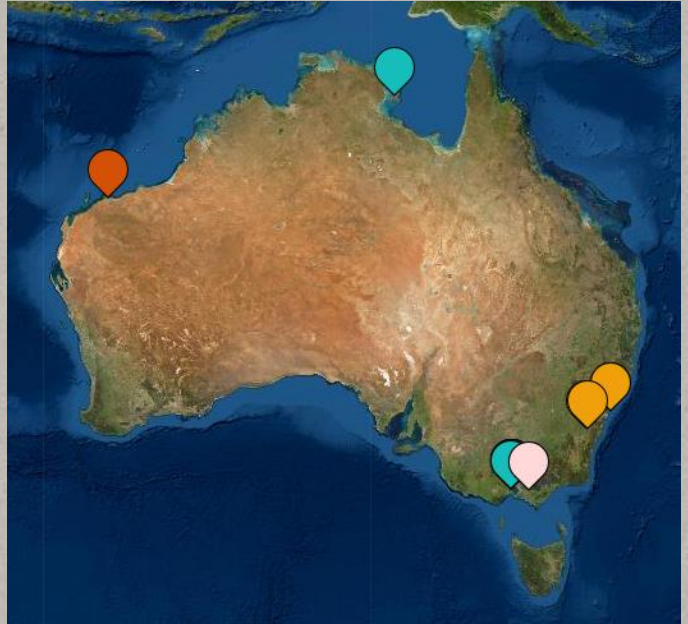
In this book John Stott describes how a lifetime of observing birds around the world taught about faith, repentance, gratitude and other aspects of the Christian life and instilled a desire to appreciate, protect, and preserve the environment given to us by God.

– Philip Hughes, VIC

John Stott Memorial Birding Day 2022 – Australian results

In Australia this year six teams contributed to The Bird Race across 16 field locations.

A team of five A Rocha members and supporters spent the day at Melbourne's Western Treatment Plant (land of the *Wadawurrung* people), a RAMSAR listed site. The area is famed as the non-breeding destination of many thousands of shorebirds, but at this time of year most have departed for their northern hemisphere breeding grounds. However, we did see 53 species including a Blue-wing Parrot and Buff-banded Rail. The highlight was seeing two Brolgas engage in their graceful "dance".

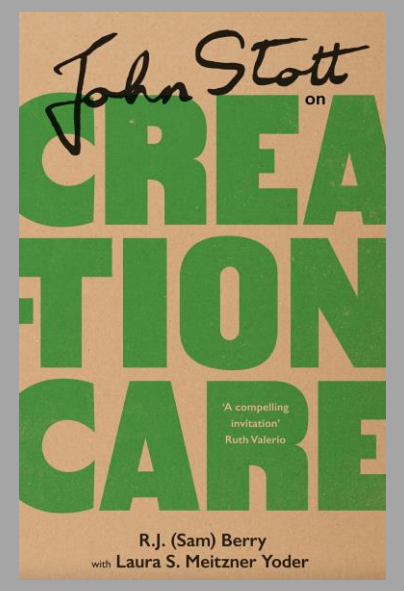


Dancing Brolgas



Melbourne's Western Treatment Plant bird hide fun

Another book, *John Stott on Creation Care*, was published posthumously in 2021 and brings together many of his written works and sermons on creation care. The range of topics span the biblical story of creation to the redemption of all things and includes his personal reflections on the wonder of God's creation, the groaning of creation, the problems of dualism, personal discipleship, and the integral role that creation care has in Christian mission and proclaiming the gospel. – *Philip Hughes, VIC*



Soggy conditions this year at Goulburn Wetlands, NSW



Year Two bird surveys at Nielsen Park, Toowoomba QLD

A Rocha Australia has been collaborating with Friends of the Escarpment Parks (FEP) at Nielsen Park, Toowoomba, southern Queensland (land of the *Giabal* people).

Background details about Nielsen Park

Nielsen Park is owned by Toowoomba Regional Council and lies in the south-eastern part of a plateau of volcanic origin, at altitude around 600m. It protects a remnant of eucalypt open forest dominated by New England blackbutt *Eucalyptus montivaga* and common blackbutt *E. pilularis*, with associated pink bloodwood *Corymbia intermedia* and some grey gum *E. biturbinata*. Under Queensland legislation the entire park is mapped as an Endangered regional ecosystem (RE 12.5.6d).

The park came into existence in 1991 when Miss Mabel Nielsen, the last living member of the family whose home was adjacent, donated 8 acres to Toowoomba City Council. Two later additions resulted in a total area of approx. 7ha. While relatively close to the extensive Toowoomba escarpment bushland, the park has become a bushland island due to progressive subdivision of the surrounding land for residential housing.



Tawny Frogmouth (credit: Rob Brodribb)

FEP has been working in the park since approx. 2010 removing invasive weeds mainly *Lantana*, *Pavonia* and privet. The last few years have been wetter and an understorey of native plants have started to reestablish. A bird list of 80 species was compiled by Toowoomba Bird Observers over a number of years prior to surrounding subdivision for housing starting 15 years ago.

We felt it was important to try and document what was happening in the park as a measure of the effectiveness of the work undertaken to try and preserve this area of creation. There is no doubt that native plant species have increased as the weeds have disappeared. However, an anecdotal report had suggested the eastern whipbird hadn't been heard for more than 12 months so we thought a survey of birds would be a starting point to determine what was happening to the fauna in the park.

Systematic bird surveys started in early 2020. The "2.0 ha 20 minute" method of BirdLife Australia was applied and records were documented in the *Birdata* app; the data are publicly available online. Surveys were conducted in two plots (sites), each of 2.0 hectares, one in the northern section and the other in the southern section. A few "incidental" surveys were also included in the data.

In Year 2 there were 30x 2ha surveys and three incidental surveys: a similar effort to Year 1. The cumulative list for the project is 46 bird species, after 65 surveys. Eleven species were added to the project list in Year 2, including Golden Whistler, Rufous Fantail, Lewin's Honeyeater, Little Lorikeet and several passers-by (overhead, or...

Year Two bird surveys at Nielsen Park *continued...*

...present only briefly). The eastern Whipbird reappeared towards the end of 2020 and was recorded on every survey since. A nest with young was found in 2021 and 3 birds were seen in Dec 2021. The total number of bird records in Year 2 was 326 (cf. 261 in Year 1), with the noisy miner being the most common.

However, relative to survey effort the species richness is low for this location and habitat. For example, a somewhat lesser effort (44 surveys) over a similar area of open-forest less than a kilometre away has yielded 100 species (over 3.5 years).

An apparent increase in use of the park by small bush birds is certainly encouraging. This may be due partly to improved habitat, especially the indigenous shrub layer, resulting from weeding by FEP over many years. (But it was interesting to note that scrubwrens were sometimes recorded in a remnant patch of thick *Lantana* in the far south-east of the park.) Another factor, especially in the return of and breeding by Eastern Whipbirds over the past year, may simply be due to the run of average to above-average rainfall in 2020 and 2021 in contrast to severe drought before that.

The dominance of Noisy Miners and prevalence of several other aggressive/predatory species, (Grey Butcher Bird, Laughing Kookaburra and Pied Currawong) may be contributing to the small numbers of small birds. As an 'island' of forest surrounded by suburban housing, the park is an ideal headquarters for these species.

The surveys have demonstrated some of the problems facing small remnant patches of bushland in urban sites. It highlighted issues A Rocha members need to consider when undertaking creation care projects:

- Did the weeding techniques of FEP cause a reduction in habitat for small birds and so what should be our approach to further work?
- What is the best way of monitoring success of any work we undertake?



Satin Bowerbird bower (credit: Rob Brodribb)

Rob Brodribb, QLD

Monitoring Malleefowl, north-west Victoria

The Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*) (classified as endangered in Victoria, federally vulnerable) is an intriguing Australian bird that buries its eggs in a mound of soil and decaying vegetation. Its strong legs and claws are used to distribute large quantities of material to create the correct temperature for incubation of the eggs. The Malleefowl lives in semi-arid scrublands across southern Australia and its overall population continues to decline as a result of fire, predation by feral animals, and habitat destruction and fragmentation.

Recently, A Rocha members and supporters volunteered to work with Cassinia Environmental staff in conducting surveys for Malleefowl at a small, isolated remnant patch of mallee vegetation in north-west Victoria (*land of the Wotjobaluk people*). The task involved walking transects through the mallee looking for mounds or evidence of birds. Mallee can be quite dense and so the group maintains a 20m separation between observers so no one gets lost, but sometimes people “disappear” into dense stands of broombush. Several active mounds were discovered, and a remote camera trap recorded the birds working on their mound.



Malleefowl (credit: Cassinia Environmental)



A Malleefowl mound

Acoustic monitoring for Bitterns, Victoria

The Spring 2021 edition of ENews reported on the deployment of an acoustic monitor to monitor the presence of Australasian Bitterns (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*) (classified federally as endangered). The monitor recorded the sounds from the wetland for four hours at dusk and dawn every day for two months. Although the wetland was secluded and contained seemingly ideal habitat, no Bitterns were heard in the recordings. However, the booming calls of several Bitterns were recorded at other nearby wetlands in South-West Victoria (*land of the Gunditjmarra people*).

A total of 24 other species of birds were recorded and two of these, Jacky Winter (*Microeca fascians*) and Mistletoebird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*) are uncommon in the immediate area as judged from other bird surveys. Other birds of interest that were heard in the recordings included Olive Whistler, Southern Emu-wren and Restless Flycatcher. Six species of frogs were heard: Eastern Banjo Frog (*Limnodynastes dumerilii*), Striped Marsh Frog (*Limnodynastes peronii*), Spotted Marsh Frog (*Limnodynastes tasmaniensi*), Southern Brown Tree Frog (*Litoria ewingii*), Growling Grass Frog (*Litoria raniformis*) [Vulnerable federally], and Common Froglet (*Crinia signifera*). You can listen to [a recording](#) of the sounds of the wetland at 4am.



The wetland where the acoustic monitor was deployed

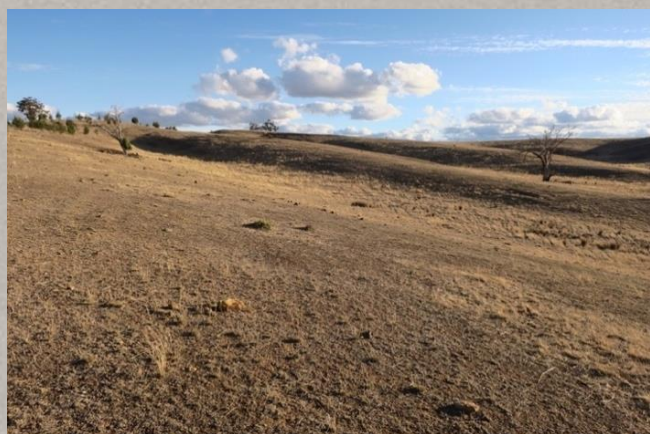
The Glenelg-Hopkins soundscape project is supported by Glenelg Hopkins CMA through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme. Thanks to Bradley Clarke-Wood from Birdlife Australia and Cassinia Environmental as the landowner.

Birds on Farms Surveys, central Victoria

Since 2019, several A Rocha members and supporters have made seasonal bird surveys as part of the Birds on Farms project conducted by Birdlife Australia. Agricultural land, especially where it is managed with conservation in mind and when it is revegetated may potentially provide safe habitat for a wide range of biodiversity.

So far, 68 standardised surveys have been conducted in four different habitats – open pasture, pasture with remnant “paddock trees”, riparian zone including a shallow creek, and revegetated areas on two properties managed by Cassinia Environmental near Kyneton and Broadford in central Victoria (*Taugurung Country*).

The survey method involved counting all birds in a 2 ha site for 20 min in winter, spring, summer, and autumn at seven different habitat sites. Our surveys are part of several thousand surveys conducted by volunteers at more than 200 properties across Victoria.



The four habitats in which surveys were made, clockwise from top left: pasture, pasture with paddock trees, riparian, and revegetation.



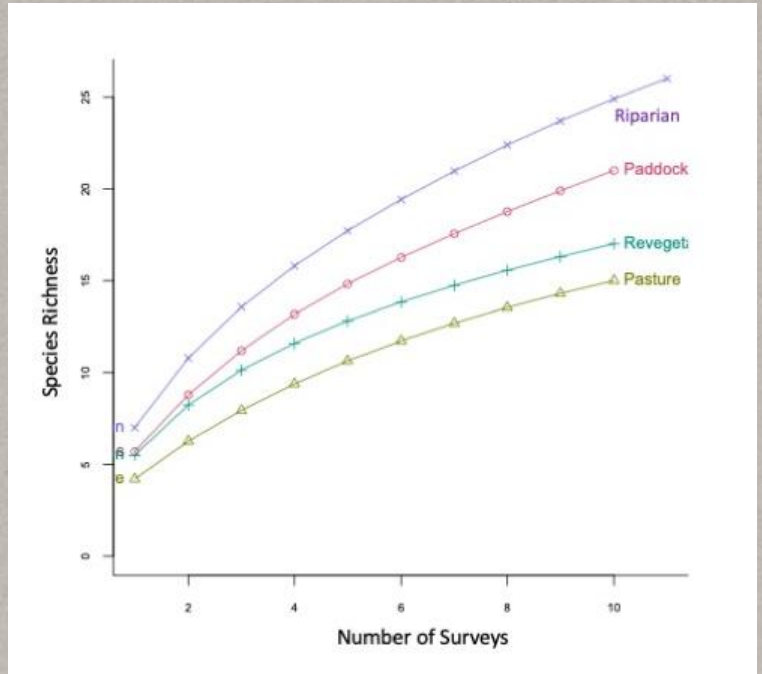
The total number of birds (abundance) at one site was highest in the riparian habitat (230 individual birds) followed the revegetation site (184), paddock tree site (124), and open pasture (115).

The most frequently observed birds in the riparian habitat were Superb Fairy-wren and Weebill; Red Wattlebird and Weebill in the revegetated areas; Australian Magpie and Eastern Rosella in the paddock tree areas; and Long-billed Corella and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo in the pasture.

Birds on Farms Surveys, central Victoria *continued...*

The graph to the right shows how the number of different bird species (richness) increased as the number of repeated surveys increased over time in each habitat, and that the riparian habitat supported the greatest number of different bird species.

These results demonstrate that managing remaining creeks and watercourses and creating revegetated areas in agricultural land do provide habitat for biodiversity.



Surveying amongst the paddock trees.
(credit: Anna Radkovic)



Surveying along the creek

Thanks to Stuart, Anna, Julia, Greg, John, Marilyn, Jonathan, Roger, Charlie, Josh, and Stephen for being part of these surveys on the cold and wet days of winter and during the hot days of summer.

Please make contact if you would like to be involved.

Philip Hughes, Director – VIC

Aussie 'Forest Maker' tells his story of hope for a planet in crisis



Photo: Silas Koch/World Vision

World-renowned agronomist and A Rocha Australia member Tony Rinaudo has helped millions through his work in Niger. Now he wants to inspire the next generation by telling his story.

Nicknamed the 'Forest Maker', Tony Rinaudo is widely known for bringing back forests without planting trees. His work has been called "the largest environmental transformation in the Sahel and perhaps in all of Africa."

For his influential contributions, Tony has received numerous awards including the [Right Livelihood Award](#), and was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia.

A Rocha asked him about his miraculous journey, and his recently launched autobiography, [The Forest Underground: Hope for a Planet in Crisis](#).

Tell us a bit about yourself and what you're known for!

I am 65 years old, married with four children and eight grandchildren. My wife, Liz and I spent 17 years in Niger Republic, West Africa as [SIM](#) Missionaries, working to improve the livelihoods of rural communities. Now, I'm the Principal Climate Action Advisor for World Vision. I'm called the 'Forest Maker' because of my work on restoring trees and landscapes. While in Niger, I began developing and promoting a low cost, rapid form of reforestation called Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration, or FMNR, which is spreading around the world.

So, what is FMNR, and what potential does it have?

Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) is both a technical practice and community development approach for mobilising and empowering local communities to restore their natural environment through the systematic regrowth and management of remnant vegetation on diverse landscapes, which has climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits. Basically, FMNR is an embarrassingly simple and affordable method of greening land by reviving trees rather than planting new ones. You can find out more about it and all its benefits at <https://fmnrhub.org.au>.

There is *enormous* potential to implement FMNR across large swathes of land in a wide range of environments—from hyper-arid, through arid and semi-arid zones, tropical, alpine and even coastal environments. Tens of millions of hectares contain remnant living tree stumps with the capacity to re-grow, or dormant seeds with the ability to germinate and grow given the right conditions. Even where there are no seeds or living stumps, if human behaviour/land management patterns change, in previously forested areas, nature itself has a chance to colonise the land with grasses, shrubs and trees...

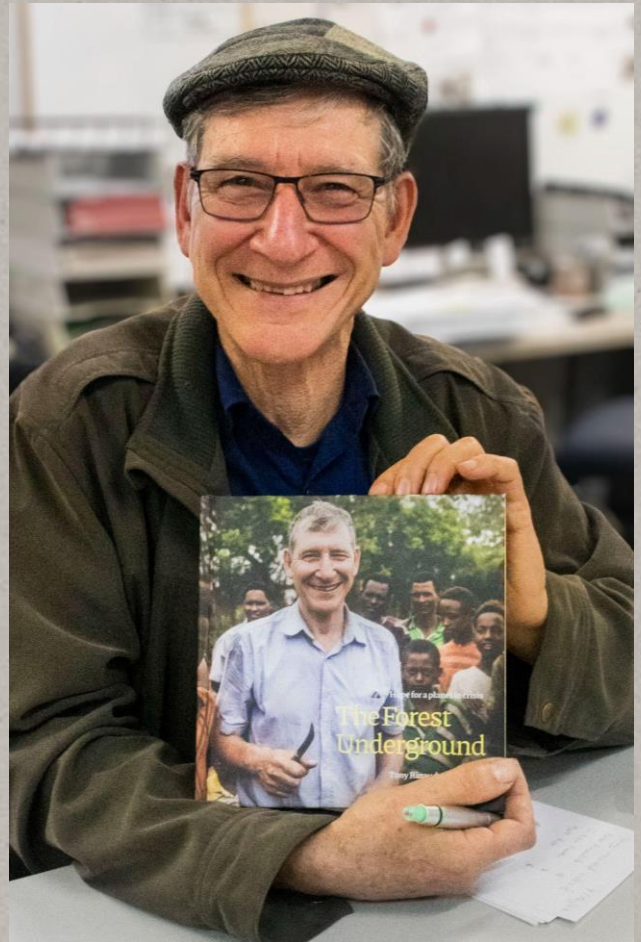
Aussie 'Forest Maker' tells his story *continued...*

What is *The Forest Underground: Hope for a Planet in Crisis* about?

The Forest Underground is my autobiography, tracing my early years growing up in Myrtleford, NE Victoria, my struggles to find solutions to severe desertification and the global spread of FMNR and challenges ahead. The book speaks of my motivation and faith journey and outlines how the Lord has called, provided, and led me. Ultimately, *The Forest Underground* is a story of hope in the face of climate change, deforestation and land degradation, biodiversity loss and poverty. It really is the good-news story that, I hope, will move hearts and hands to care for God's planet.

What inspired you to write an autobiography?

I was deeply influenced by autobiographies of pioneers in my youth. For the longest time I discounted the suggestion of writing a book. But as I was reflecting on my life, I asked myself, "What should I be focusing on at this stage in my life to have the most impact?" I had the privilege of hands-on field work and managing projects internationally, and enjoyed those roles immensely. However, that time has passed, and there are plenty of others ably equipped to take up the challenge. I came to the conclusion that the best use of my time in this stage of life is to inspire and encourage the next generation to use their God-given talents for good; to not sit back and let climate change and global destruction of nature overwhelm them, but to be part of the solution.



This is an incredibly powerful story. What do you hope readers will take away from it?

I hope readers will not just be inspired, but beyond that, moved to action in whatever capacity God has gifted them with and has provided an opening for. I hope those in the land restoration sector will take the hard-earned lessons to heart and incorporate an FMNR type approach to environmental problem solving to their work; that donors and governments will increasingly give to these types of interventions.

I think too that *The Forest Underground* is a call to all of us to trust God and listen to him in the face of our most pressing problems. He is there for us. Let's reach out and let him lead us.

Aussie 'Forest Maker' tells his story *continued*...

In the book, you speak of the FMNR Movement. How can we be a part of it in Australia?

Get informed. Read as much as you can. A good start can be found at [FMNR Hub](#).

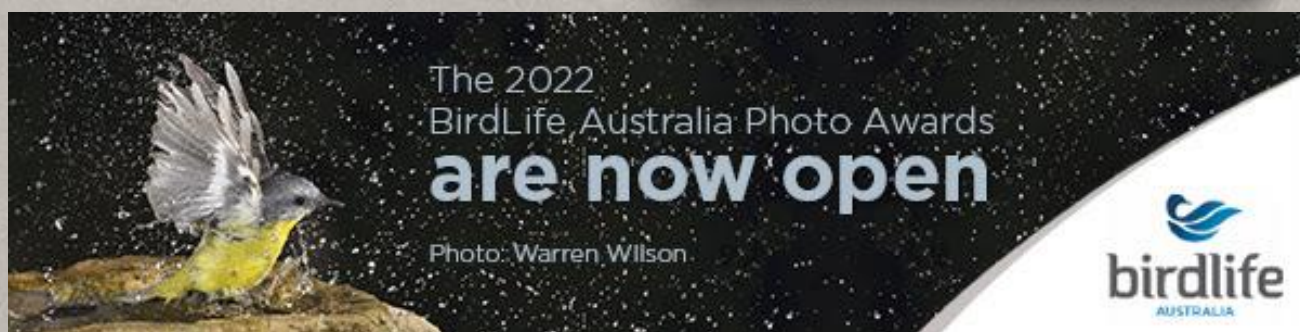
If you are a praying person, please pray for the movement. God answers prayer! There is still much to be done, and mountains to move in order to get them done. Please pray that the barriers would be removed, pray for more hands to do the work, and pray that as in Niger, FMNR would spread organically from farmer to farmer simply by word of mouth.

If you are a giving person, please give. While FMNR is low cost, it is not no-cost, especially when you think in terms of spreading this movement globally. World Vision implements FMNR projects in various countries around the world and is mounting an international campaign. There is a donate button on the [FMNR Hub site](#) too.

If God is calling you to this type of work, or calling you to support somebody else who is—then please consider it prayerfully and with wise counsel from others.

And finally, how can we buy the book?

Go to <http://iscast.org/tfu/>. Any royalties I make will go towards the FMNR movement!



The [2022 BirdLife Australia Photography Awards](#) are now open! Entries are open from May 27th – Monday August 1st. The categories for 2022 are:

- Backyard Birds
- Birds in Flight
- Bird Portrait
- Bird Behaviour
- Special Theme: Australasian Robins
- Landscapes and Habitat
- Human Impact
- Youth
- Portfolio

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Aboriginal country names are taken from traditional custodian acknowledgements on local Council websites.

Send event or article suggestions for the Winter ENews by 20 Aug to australia.comms@arocha.org

