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AUSTRALIA
A ROCHA
Conservation and Hope

A Rocha Australia *ENEWS*

Spring, 2022

We are a Christian organisation engaging communities in nature conservation

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Chair's report...

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

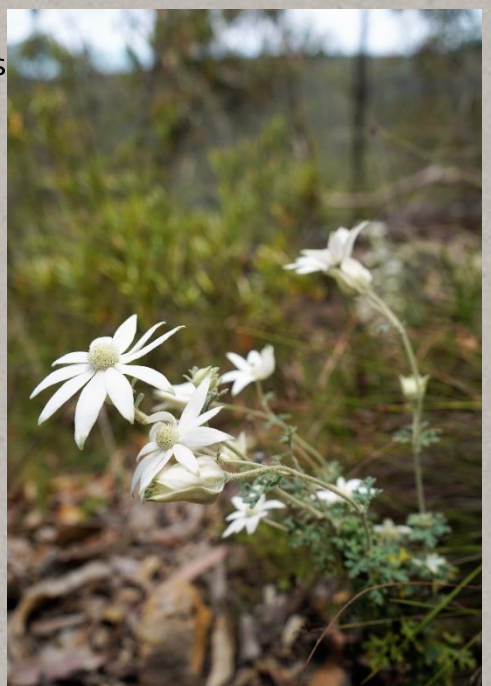
The board of directors worked diligently during spring to guide the work of A Rocha Australia in Creation care. You can read some of the inspiring stories in this issue, which range from weeding to hosting events to highlighting some great resources for people seeking to know God more deeply through experiencing nature.

Spring downpours have brought terrible flooding for many rural communities along waterways in southeast Australia. The devastating human and economic impacts of extreme weather were visible in dozens of towns and farmlands

from Moree to Eugowra to Moama.

Yet, together with the warming weather, the rains also triggered mass flowering in vegetation and breeding in wildlife populations recovering still from the droughts and bushfires of more than two years ago. During this season of Creation I hope you were able to delight in nature and be drawn in wonder to the creator God, even in times of doubt and anxiety.

The changing climate is a topic of much discussion among directors, members and partner organisations as we grapple with how to care for creation when "normal" weather is increasingly no longer the norm.



Flannel flower (*Actinotus helianthin*), Central Coast NSW

Chair's report continued...

Can I ask you to consider whether you may have the experience, passion and availability to serve as a board director of A Rocha Australia? We will soon email members with a position description for the voluntary role. Executive Officer Julia Jardine, or I, would love to chat with you if you are interested in knowing what is involved.

We have continued to investigate opportunities to purchase land for conservation, and hopefully establishing a field studies centre. We are very heartened by conversations with people who want to contribute to A Rocha Australia's goal of taking this next step, and we continue pray for God's guidance in this. We would greatly appreciate your support in praying for us as we continue exploring land parcels and partnership opportunities. Or perhaps you or someone you know have funds, or even a suitable block of land, that you would consider donating to support buying or leasing land for conservation?

Partly as an antidote to a busy and at-times difficult year, I have derived great satisfaction in recent months in further developing the community garden at the church where I worship near Newcastle. I've been planting cuttings of native wildflowers harvested from established plants in the garden, planting a couple dwarf banksias and climbing Wonga vines, and encouraging members of the



public to step onto the church property to sample the strawberries, Thai basil and parsley that are growing in the raised garden beds. As you can see in the image above, we also have installed a 2,000 litre water tank to help coax the garden through dry times in its exposed north-facing position beside a busy footpath and road.

As we finish the year and prepare to rest, I hope you are able to joyfully celebrate the birth of Jesus this Christmas. Indeed, if you have had a challenging year I hope you may be able to echo the words of the psalms:



"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble....There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells".

(Psalm 46, verses 1 and 4)

I hope you enjoy this issue of the ENews.

Dr Stuart Blanch
President (Chair, board of directors)

Latest Big Chat talks

It was very encouraging to have another Big Chat online forum on 1st December. Seventeen people were able to attend, and we heard updates on A Rocha Australia happenings around the country. This included a presentation on the restoration and monitoring activities in Toowoomba bushland parks from guest speaker Rob Brodribb.

We also enjoyed meeting Bob and Evelyn McDonald and hearing about their journeys to faith, love of bushwalking and photography, and the compilation of their two photography books.

They shared about how after encountering God, nature suddenly took on a new beauty, a radically different dimension – of what God created. They also shared some encouraging stories of how non-believers have responded to these books.

A Rocha Australia welcomes our new members! We value the contributions of our members and we look forward to having more Big Chats in 2023. Click [here](#) to check out how our membership works.



Rob Brodribb

President of Friends of Escarpment Parks, Toowoomba

Retired General Physician yet very nearly embarked upon a career in entomology (insects)

Lifetime passion for ecology and natural places

Motivated by the thrill of making a real impact on local biodiversity



Bob and Evelyn McDonald

Bob has a PhD in Biology and is a recognised photographer, avid bushwalker and environmental volunteer

Evelyn shares Bob's love of nature and is passionate about language as a teacher and wordsmith - delighting to share reflections on God and nature

Former students of Sydney Missionary and Bible College with ministries overseas and in Australia

Together they have published two books glorifying God through reflecting on the beauty of His creation.

Bird Surveys

Formal 20min 2 ha surveys entered into Birdlife Australia Birdata

R Brodribb

Incidental surveys

AAA motion camera photo R Jaensch

R Jaensch

Julia Jardine

Jen Schabel (on Gundun)

wendybrodribb101

Philip

Bob & Evelyn McDonald

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Screenshots from the Big Chat. Above: from Rob in Toowoomba. Below: from Bob and Evelyn.

Reflection 13:
Delighting in Creation

Background

During a bushwalking holiday on New Zealand's South Island, we set up our camera to capture a landscape photo of Mt Cook National Park. The scene was beautiful, challenging, and a little bit scary. The clouds had also rolled in to surround the peaks. The rain was heavy and the wind was strong. The rain was heavy and the wind was strong. The rain was heavy and the wind was strong.

Reflection

In high-to-mountainous terrain there is a high degree of physical exertion and a sense of awe and wonder. It is a place where the natural world is so beautiful and so powerful. It is a place where the natural world is so beautiful and so powerful. It is a place where the natural world is so beautiful and so powerful.

Devotion

Handmade was placed within it and created with grace and love. The beauty of the world is so beautiful and so powerful. It is a place where the natural world is so beautiful and so powerful. It is a place where the natural world is so beautiful and so powerful.

Julia Jardine

Jen Schabel (on Gundun)

Bob & Evelyn McDonald

Philip

wendybrodribb101

Sample page from Book 1 with photo, background and devotion

Bob and Evelyn McDonald's photo books

It was delightful this week to get a message alert that a parcel had arrived – my order of the Bob and Evelyn McDonald photo books had just turned up on my doorstep. Opening the parcel, my first impressions were great – lovely hard cover landscape books, spectacular pictures, in time for the Christmas stocking!

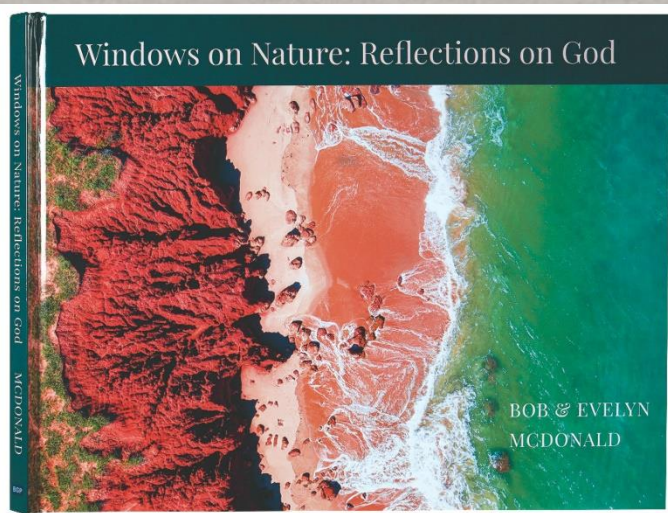
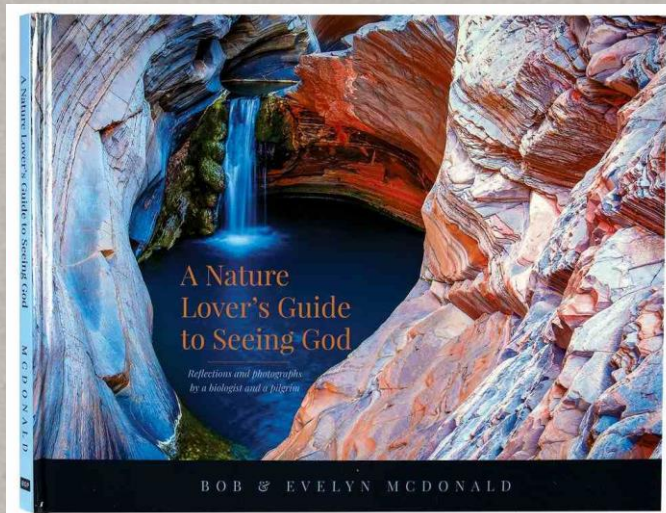
Each book has over 30 reflections including background context information with scientific content, a biblical reflection and an invitation to pray or meditate, suited to daily use.

I'm looking forward to using these over summer, and as a great way to be encouraged as 2023 kicks off. Bob and Evelyn share their own journeys to faith and their growing love of the intricate world God has made and sustains through Jesus.

The photos in these books are from the McDonald's travels in Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and Samoa.

I highly recommend looking at these books to be encouraged in your own faith and Creation care.

Jen Schabel– director, NSW



The following extract is from Tim Costello's foreword in the first book: "A Nature Lover's Guide to Seeing God":

"Through this book, Bob and Evelyn have given every reader a chance to experience the majesty of God's creation from the comfort of their own home. Not only this but the scientific facts included through this book allow each reader to learn new concepts and ideas, stimulating the mind and imagination.

I truly believe that all Bible-reading Christians should be 'greenies', because creation carries the imprint of the Maker. As Christians, we strive daily to know our Maker more, and learning more about His creation through this book provides us with an opportunity to grow closer to Him. Allow the amazing photography to wash over you as you experience His creation in new ways each day.

I want to encourage Christians as they read this book to be transformed by the beauty of God's creation and delve deep into the related Bible studies, but then go on and take a step further by looking at the reality of our world today and asking ourselves and the Holy Spirit "What can we do to maintain and enhance God's world as He truly intended it to be?" Then we can go from here being transformed by Him and into the world to make a difference."

Digging out weed orchid, Central VIC



South African
Weed Orchid

I never imagined such satisfaction from weeding! On a sunny Friday in mid-November three A Rocha members joined with Cassinia Environmental to rid a paddock at Glenaroua, near Seymour, of as many South African Weed Orchids (*Disa bracteata*) as possible.

Despite their beauty these orchids are an emerging threat to native wildlife populations, being found for the first time in Victoria in 1991, near Bacchus Marsh. They are a highly invasive environmental weed, each producing millions of dust-like seeds enabling it to spread easily. They compete with and exclude smaller native plants such as slender onion-orchid (*Microtis parviflora*), sun orchid (*Thelymitra spp.*), chocolate lily (*Arthropodium strictum*) and other wildflowers.

Manual removal of weed orchid before it sets seed in late November is the preferred method of control. Weed orchid is distinctive with reddish-brown flowers. We used mattocks to ensure that the underground tubers were removed along with the leaves, stems and flowers. The plant material was then double-bagged and secured, ready for "solarisation" or cooking in the sun for a week – a process that will kill the weeds so they can be safely disposed of in the garbage.



Left: Laura Henderson, Cassinia Environmental
Top: A Rocha volunteers Julie, Philip and Greg
Below: Glenaroua, Central Victoria

Practically caring for this small patch of land in the Spring sunshine was energising and life-giving, and a reminder of the harmony possible and that we long for between God, creation and ourselves through the redeeming work of Jesus. What an encouragement to roll up our sleeves and keep going!



Creation care in urban spaces, VIC

On a warm and sunny October 15 more than thirty adults and children attended the third WildLife creation care event organised jointly by Scripture Union in Victoria and A Rocha Australia. We met at the CERES Community Environment Park located in the inner Melbourne suburb Brunswick East for a day of learning about food and living sustainably.

Ben Howes guided us through a day of exploring and connecting with the different ways that God's creation provides all our food. We learnt about the role of soil and the microorganisms it contains, about composting, and how nutrients cycle through the environment to

enrich soil and help grow the plants we eat and the animals we farm. We then planted snow pea seeds in a newspaper pot to take home and watch grow. We searched for some of the edible native food plants that grow along the nearby Merri Creek and finished with a time reflecting on how interacting with creation in community can teach us about God and help us become more like him.



WildLife

Faith, Creation, Exploring, Caring

A day for all ages, learning about living sustainably while caring for God's creation.

Dates: Saturday 15th October 2022

Ages: All ages

Location: Ceres Urban Farm, Brunswick VIC

More info: suvic.org.au/wildlife

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This was the third WildLife event exploring different aspects of creation care. In the first event at Yea Wetlands, we explored the natural environment of wetlands and the biodiversity that lives there: plants, animals, frogs, birds and even the small organisms living in water. During the second event at Werribee Open Range Zoo we learnt about the conservation of endangered animals and birds from around the world and from Australia. The third event at CERES showed us that the wellbeing of people depends on a healthy environment even in the middle of the city.

What we have learnt from these different events is that caring for God's creation encompasses a range of different actions as part of our lives. We can observe and marvel at the wonders around us, we can work to provide safe environments for hippopotamus or even the organisms living in soil, and that living sustainably in cooperation with creation is all part of our worship of God our creator, and showing love to others.

Philip Hughes – director, VIC

Revegetating connections in fragmented landscapes, VIC



On a sunny August day with predictions of rain (more of that later) two Victorian A Rocha members travelled to a Cassinia Environmental owned property near Amphitheatre (two and a half hours north west of Melbourne) to help plant trees in this overcleared grazing landscape at the western limits of the Great Dividing Range.

Amphitheatre is in the Pyrenees Shire, land of the Wadawurung, Dja Dja Wurrung, Eastern Maar, and Wotjobaluk tribes.

Rolling green hills, lots of seedlings, many keen workers and the ubiquitous hole digger set us up for an energetic day of clambering up and down paddocks. By about 2pm the predicted downpour came and although a number of hardier souls braved the elements we escaped the rain and headed home.

It was a rewarding day's work as part of a week-long program where messmate, red stringybark, yellow box, red box, grey box, long-leaved box, and eurabbie species were planted.



Story and photos supplied by Greg Gorfine, member – VIC

Brown-capped Emerald Dove in Duggan Park, QLD

An A Rocha remote camera was set up on 30 August and left for 20 days in Duggan Park, one of the Toowoomba parks (land of the *Giabal* people) that A Rocha volunteers are regularly controlling weeds, in support of Friends of the Escarpment Parks. The camera was set up next to feeding scrapes ('platelets') of button-quail to investigate if the rare Black-breasted Button-quail (*Turnix melanogaster*) were present. This site was within the tall dense thicket of poison peach and brush box saplings, but in a different site to previous camera monitoring sites.

No Black-breasted Button-quail were filmed on the camera in this monitoring effort, although it seemed possible given it has been sighted in dense habitat and dry rainforest patches in other parks in the Toowoomba area. Painted Button-quail (*Turnix varius*) were filmed again, on eight of the 20 days, in two clusters of dates—suggesting that the birds work local patches for a while then move elsewhere. Up to two Painted Button-quail were recorded.



Remote camera photos of Brown-capped Emerald Dove

Of special interest from this camera monitoring effort was the above photographic records of Brown-capped Emerald Dove (*Chalcophaps longirostris*), a small ground-feeding pigeon, on 11 and 13 September. These are the first records of this species from 21 surveys here (2ha plot) by A Rocha and 48 surveys in the whole park by myself, over the past several years. Otherwise, this bird is regularly recorded in dry rainforest (semi-evergreen vine-thicket) on the Toowoomba escarpment at Redwood Park and other patches of that semi-closed habitat. Additional creatures recorded in the camera were brown bandicoot, long-nosed bandicoot, yellow robin, brush-turkey and a rat.

New technology certainly is helping us to unravel the secrets of God's creation and perhaps further interesting discoveries will be made in the future. Maintaining this bushland park in good condition, including through the weeding work as A Rocha volunteers supporting Friends of the Escarpment Parks, will optimise its biodiversity and conservation values.

In October a group of five volunteers did a bird survey yielding 14 species, the cumulative total in Duggan Park now being 55 species. Time was then directed to pulling/digging out lantana, pavonia, nightshade, cobblers, ochna, and a few privet, thorny Solanum, thistle and jacaranda plants.

Roger Jaensch, QLD

New RAMSAR celebration mural for Boondall Wetlands, QLD

In our Autumn 2019 ENews, we featured Brisbane-based artist and A Rocha member Deb Mostert. This year Deb and her daughter Meg painted a shorebirds and mangroves mural on a fire water tank at the Environment Centre in Boondall Wetlands in Brisbane.

This mural was commissioned by Brisbane City Council for the 30-year anniversary RAMSAR celebrations. Below are some photos of this work in progress. To check out more of Deb's work visit <https://debmostertartist.com.au/>



Boondall Wetlands is located 15km north of Brisbane's CBD. The wetlands lie on the edge of Moreton Bay and include approximately 1150 hectares of tidal flats, mangroves, saltmarshes, melaleuca wetlands, grasslands and open forest. The Boondall wetlands offer habitats for over 190 species of birds.

Migratory shorebirds feed on the food-rich mud flats and roost in the salt marshes and mangroves along the shore. Each spring they fly to Moreton Bay from as far as Siberia, China, Japan, Mongolia and Alaska. The Boondall Wetlands have ties with the Yatsu-Higata Tidelands of Japan as part of the Narashino Agreement.

Large numbers of international migratory shorebirds travel between the City of Narashino, Japan and Moreton Bay each year. They reside in Boondall Wetlands between September and March each year.

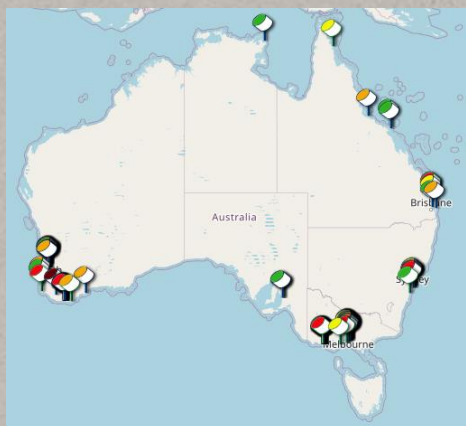
Local Aboriginal use has been celebrated on the Nurri Millen Totem Trail.

[Brisbane City Council website](https://www.brisbanecitycouncil.qld.gov.au/)



Photos supplied by Deb Mostert

The Great Nurdle Hunt, 2022



A Rocha Australia supporters in Brisbane and Melbourne this year participated in the 'Great Nurdle Hunt'. Data from these hunts were recorded on the [global map](#), including more than 40 sites in Australia, mostly around Port Philip Bay, Victoria.

Look out for the event in Sept/Oct 2023 and be part of this global citizen science project, mapping the prevalence of nurdles on our beaches and waterways.

From <https://www.nurdlehunt.org.uk/>:

Like other plastics, nurdles can be mistaken for food by marine wildlife like seabirds, fish, and crustaceans.

- Nurdles in the environment can pose a threat to creatures and habitats for years to come.
- This is because nurdles are tiny, persistent and potentially toxic.
- Due to their size, and often clear colour, nurdles can look like fish eggs which makes them particularly attractive to seabirds, fish and other marine wildlife.

Restoration program video – Lord Howe Island, NSW

A Rocha Australia isn't directly involved in this restoration program but it is a mighty impressive example of how good science and resources can lead to massive restoration outcomes. You might like to watch it [here](#) over the Christmas break.



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