**MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING OF BIRDS SA**

held on Friday August 31st, 2018

at the

**CHARLES HAWKER CONFERENCE CENTRE, WAITE ROAD, URRBRAE**

1. **Welcome address:**

John Gitsham (President), opened the meeting at 7.45pm.

1. **Apologies:**

Lynton & Karen Huxley, Jeff Groves, Karen Donkin, Sue Winwood, John Hatch, Graham Carpenter,

William Brooker, Andrew Black.

**2.1 Members Present - 100**

1. **Confirmation of the Minutes of the Birds SA General Meeting 27th July, 2018,**

as posted on the web site and notice board.

Moved by Hazel Cowie. Seconded by David Robertson. CARRIED

1. **New Members**

Kelsey Bennett Blackwood

Julie Kuchel Glenalta

Clementine Menz Murray Bridge

Catherine Burt Lockleys

Karla Wilson Laura

David Condon Black Forest

1. **Announcements**

John Gitsham

* 1. **The Birder**

The August edition of Birder is available tonight. The list on the table is the list of Members who have paid to have a printed copy. For Members who receive the Newsletter electronically, simply type in your Membership number and you will be able to download your copy.

* 1. **Membership Information on the Website**

The Management Committee of Birds SA are working to simplify our Membership information on the website, for example, “full time” students will receive the concession rate, regardless of age.

* 1. **Laratinga Bird Fair**

The next Laratinga Bird Fair organized by the Mt Barker Council will be held on Sunday, October 27th, 2019.

* 1. **BirdLife Twitchathon**

The BirdLife Australia “Twitchathon” will be held on 9th of October. There are various categories, such as, 24 hours, 12 hours, or even 3 hours. There is no cost to enter and entry forms are available on-line. It is also an opportunity to raise money for BirdLife, though there is no obligation to do so.

* 1. **BirdLife “Birds in your Backyard”**

The BirdLife Australia “Birds in your Backyard” programme is being advertised and you can get involved by going on the BirdLife Australia website.

* 1. **“Hooded Plover Surveys”**

Details of the “Hooded Plover Surveys” are up on our web site.

* 1. **“Flourishing Fleurieu 23-29 September”**

Birds SA will be involved in the “Flourishing Fleurieu” event at Goolwa on Wednesday 26th September, Signal Point Gallery. As Birds SA Members you are welcome to participate in this event.

* 1. **“Friends of the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary” (FAIBS)- Anna Woods**

The Migratory Birds will be returning from the northern hemisphere soon. We have two events in the AIBS where you can assist with various conservation activities and possibly get to see some returning waders. Sunday 16th September we are holding “Springtime in the Salt Marshes” at Middle Beach. Ecologist Joan Gibbs will be assisting with the recognition of native plants. This is an important “samphire vegetation area”. Sunday 21st of October there will be a ‘Regeneration Workshop’ run by Trees for Life, and also education on how to identify native plants, weed control, techniques and timing.

Please advise us if you are planning to attend either of these events. They will be advertised on our web site, or you will receive an email direct if we have your contact details. As well, the AIBS will be “Park of the Month” in November.

* 1. **“Willunga Birds” - Ann Houghton**

John Gitsham – “Congratulations” to Ann Houghton on the publishing of this excellent book. It is available in various book shops and down at Willunga.

* 1. **“Nature Foundation” – Quiz Night**

John Gitsham – The Nature Foundation is holding a Quiz Night on Friday 16th November to raise money for their various projects. As Birds SA work quite closely with this group it is an opportunity for Birds SA members to form a team and participate in the Nature Foundation Quiz Night.

* 1. **“Night Parrot”**

John Gitsham – The “Nature Conservation Society” although they did not receive the Grant monies to support the Night Parrot survey work, have decided to still go ahead with this project.

* 1. **“Landscape Act”**

John Gitsham – The new “Landscape Act” that will replace the “NRM Act 2004” is being publicized through various public workshops. If you wish to attend any of these work shops, in order to voice your opinion check the Department for the Environment web site for dates and details.

1. **Introduction of Guest Speaker, Sharie Detmar - “SA Review of the Status and Distribution of the White-bellied Sea-Eagle and Osprey in SA”.**

John Gitsham – Sharie Detmar will give her presentation on “SA Review of the Status and Distribution of the White-bellied Sea-Eagle and Osprey in SA”. She will take questions at the end of her presentation, supported by Terry Dennis.

Sharie Detmar

Growing up in a nature loving family on Yorke Peninsula, I decided to study Environmental Science. My particular interest has been with Coastal Management and has been the major part of my work within the Department for the Environment for 18 years.

As a “hobby” I became involved in researching the threatened coastal species. I would like to “Thank” Birds SA for their support in my research.

The Osprey and White-bellied Sea-Eagle are important because they are both top water predators, with no predators of their own. If you protect these two birds, you are by default protecting a much larger area of species. Both birds are in significant decline in South Australia. There is only a small and isolated population remaining.

Terry Dennis has been involved in “Coastal Management” in various ways for over 40 years and I have often sought his expert advice and assistance.

My research was on the White-bellied Sea-Eagle and Osprey as both species are listed as endangered under State legislation. The research on these species up until 2008 was under-resourced or done ‘piece-meal’. Terry’s research over three years a found that 80% of the White-bellied Sea-Eagle population is on off shore islands. Up until 2015 no protection methods were put in place. It was time for a significant study to be made of these birds.

In conjunction with Birds SA and others, we put together survey logistics and outlined the scope and planning of these surveys. The South Australian coast is a large area and breeding habitat is “off-shore”, so some Grant funding was used to charter boats.

Disturbance minimization protocols were important because both breeds are sensitive to disturbance. We surveyed 500 metres from the Osprey and double that for the Sea-Eagles.

We started seeing significant decline in the Osprey popular from 14 down to 7, a 50% decline. We wanted to be sure that our surveys were robust and accurate, so work was carried out at Chowilla, Eyre Peninsula, islands off Coffin Bay and Pt Lincoln.

2016 was a particularly stormy year and it is not ethical to survey in bad weather, but we still got quite a few areas done and identified a new threat in Lincoln National Park, they held a “prescribed burn” which narrowly missed one nest and scorched another. Osprey sites also failed because of the storms, both from the swell and the wind.

We undertook field work over 3 seasons, we travelled over 45,000 Ks, and did 210 field days and 20 boat trips. Over the three seasons we had so many wonderful volunteers who donated their time and resources I would like to say a very big “Thank You” to all the volunteers, and in particular to Helen Dennis for her patience and understanding of this important work.

Results – in 2010 we had 72 White-bellied Sea-Eagles - 16 pairs on the mainland the rest on offshore islands. In 2017 only 14 were left on the mainland. The pressure on these birds is from human impact. We also documented the significance of the Upper River Murray, the Coorong and both Gulfs as important foraging areas for these birds.

We have estimated that there has been a 20% decrease in their populations in the last 25 years – with a 40% decrease since colonisation. But if we go back to the mainland population estimation of 52 pairs down to 14 pairs, then the loss is over 70%.

Ospreys, 2010 = 58 pairs, 2017 = 43 pairs. This rapid rate of reduction is of huge concern to the viability of the population in South Australia. The loss has been across the whole range of the distribution but particularly on Kangaroo Is and Streaky Bay. On the mainland there has been a loss of 40% in the last 5-10 years. This puts more pressure on island habitat. Ospreys can’t all move to the island because the Sea-Eagles are there, and the two do not co-habit. Of the population that we still have, Ospreys tend to favour a particular primary nest site multi generationally, but we had a majority moving to another nest site which might further impact on their productivity.

We think that there are probably several reasons for the decline since 2010, anthropogenic on the mainland, environmental reasons affecting their hunting, presence of disease, parasites impacting on their body condition, food availability. We really need more urgent research to define the causes so that they can be mitigated. These birds are sensitive to disturbance during breeding season and SA is unique in that our breeding habitat along the coastal areas has few trees and no forests. They are also impacted by natural inter-species conflict, human, foxes, cats, but most of the disturbance is human, such as the development and land use, - wind farms, mining, buildings, vegetation clearance. Recreation and land management activity can have a large impact, surfing, photography, rock climbing, land management activities done at the wrong time, such as weed management, wild life monitoring, as well as air craft - increasing impact by drones going into more remote areas.

Recreational activities have resulted in nests being abandoned or the birds “lofting” leaving the chicks exposed to predators such as Pacific Gulls and Ravens. Disturbance “above” the nest is the greater threat. There has been deliberate persecution such as egg collection, shooting, and deliberate photography. We have the dilemma – if you make the nest sites public in order to protect the birds, it could result in the reverse happening.

Despite being endangered there is no current protection policy in South Australia!

What can you do as bird watchers?

Knowing and understanding their issues, avoiding disturbance during breeding seasons – White-bellied Sea-Eagles breed May to December, Ospreys from July to February. Both species are at a crucial point of their long-term viability in South Australia. If active management is not undertaken it is highly likely that their decline will continue. The key to conserving their population is to protect their breeding habitat and their prey resources to minimize disturbance thereby increase their breeding success and hopefully reoccupying previous breeding sites. In the short term the use of refuge buffers could protect the highly disturbed sites, which are often in Parks, or in close proximity to developments.

I ask Birds SA to lobby the South Australian State Government to implement State wide “Management Plans” for both species and to develop buffer zones to prevent immediate loss. World figures do show that populations do recover if active conservation measures are implemented.

J Gitsham, - Birds SA will support the protection of these birds and write to the State Government supporting your suggestions.

QUESTIONS

1. Do both species pair for life – Ospreys are known world wide and they are known to habituate to people.

(Terry) Ospreys are adaptable to changing to circumstance, whereas the eagles are not.

(Sharie) They do pair for life.

1. Are you aware of disturbance from boats, recreational or otherwise?

(Sharie) There is less disturbance from boats than there is from land disturbance because boats are at a lower level and the birds due habituate to boats.

1. Sea-Eagles in Brisbane seem to be less disturbed by human activity.

(Sharie) The trees in Brisbane can be up to 20 metres in height so the birds can be well away from the activities. Both Osprey and Sea-Eagle populations are doing well in the eastern States, so it is difficult to get national recognition for the problems in South Australia.

1. White-bellied Sea-Eagles are seen on Torrens Island.

(Sharie) There used to be a Sea-Eagles nest in Buckland Park area but that has been abandoned. We get reports of “single” birds, not pairs. It is a really important area for foraging.

What is their territory?

(Sharie) They can be quite transient.

(Terry) Foraging areas are very important. The White-bellied Sea-Eagle does not mature until they are past their 5th year.

1. With such a small isolated population is genetic diversity a factor?

(Sharie) A bird banded in Cowell was found on Stradbroke Island. The birds do travel long distances.

I would again like to Thank Birds SA for their support with our work - in particular, Brian Walker, Brian Blaylock, John Spiers and Jody Gates.

John Gitsham - Birds SA does have a birding and bird photography policy regarding respect and distance in order to prevent disturbance of birds.

Terry – I would like to take this opportunity to add my thanks to Birds SA and their Conservation Committee in 2015, 2016, 2017 for their support for our project, and to pay tribute to Sharie who has also done a lot behind the scenes with regard to coastal management.

1. **Conservation** (J Gitsham – on behalf of Jeff Groves)

**Ski Race - River Murray**

After drawing the Minister’s attention to the inappropriateness of this activity, the ski race has been abandoned.

**Tolderol**  -

A planting day at Tolderol was conducted on Sunday 19th August. Birds SA Members supported this day.

**AIBS** –

A questionnaire from a Flinders University masters student entitled “**Assessing the cultural services of the coastal wetlands between Torrens Island and Thompson Beach”** has been circulated and Birds SA members of the Management Committee and Conservation sub-Committee have been encouraged to respond.

**Laratinga** –

David Andrewartha has been investigating the potential impact on birdlife at Laratinga Wetlands from the planned expansion of the wastewater treatment plant that feeds water to Laratinga. Birds SA member Kevin Williams has expressed concern that birdlife will be adversely affected. Birds SA will attend the next meeting.

**State of the River Murray**

Phil Cole advised that SA is making 100% water allocations to all water entitlements for 2018-19, including environmental water on SA licences. This has been possible because the upper catchment storages, in particular, Dartmouth, have sufficient reserves. If dry conditions persist the situation for 2019-2020 will be much more difficult.

The management of Lakes Alexandrina and Albert for good environmental outcomes remain a priority for use of environmental water and Birds SA input, particularly for monitoring bird numbers, is worth further discussion. Phil is awaiting contact from DEW regarding these discussions. Phil confirmed that there doesn’t seem to be much interest in developing further sites like Tolderol.

**Aldinga Washpool**

David Hansman reported on a recent visit he had made with A Rocha Australia to the Aldinga Washpool and noted that there are plans to add it to the nearby Aldinga Scrub Conservation Park. There are apparently four State and Local Government bodies with an interest in the area. David confirmed that the Washpool was an excellent birding habitat. A draft re-vegetation plan for the area has been prepared for the AMLR Natural Resources Management Board and is publicly available.

**Duck and Quail Hunting**

Birds SA will pursue its policy opposing quail harvesting due to lack of independent scientific evidence of sustainability of the species in the lead-up to the reference group meeting later in the year which will be convened by DEW. Submissions will be made to the Minister, to the CEO of DEW and to the Manager, Abundant Species and Wildlife Management within DEW.

**Brookfield Conservation Park**

Birds SA are in discussions with Bush Heritage Australia representatives and DEW, regarding Brookfield Conservation Park.

**AIBS**

After nearly two months there has still be no reply from the Minister regarding the excessive crabbing and cockling on the beaches in the AIBS.

1. **Bird Call** (John Gitsham) – Redcapped Robins Felixstowe. Varied Sitellas Maccesfield. Nesting Currawongs, Felixstowe. Black-shouldered Kite O’Hallaran Hill and Klemzig. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Curlew Sandpipers have started returning to Tolderol. Wedgetail Eagle, pair, Maccelsfield. Horsfield’s Bronze Cuckoo, Castle Ponds. Large flocks Corellas, 1000, Barossa, 80 Long-billed Corellas in that group.
2. **Field Trips – Membership Officer (Alan Burns)**

Thank Youto thenew members for attending

Father’s Day Sunday so there will not be a field trip, but Fleurieu Birds are holding a field trip to Scott Creek tomorrow.

Please submit any outstanding field trip reports.

Don’t forget the “October Campout”.

“Thank You” to the folk who have undertaken supper duties whilst the Huxleys have been away.

1. **Any Other Business - Nil**

**Next General Meeting will be held on Friday 28th September 2018 at 7.45pm**

**Close 9.22**

Signed……………………………………………………. Date………………………