



MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING OF BIRDS SA

Held on Friday 28 May 2021

At Charles Hawker Conference Centre, Waite Road, Urrbrae

OPENING

Steven Langley opened the meeting at 8.10pm following the Annual General Meeting.

The passing of the Duke of Edinburgh was raised by David Hansman. Some of the Duke's achievements were mentioned by the President, including being instrumental in the formation of the Australian Conservation Foundation. He was an early conservationist and active in Australia as well as internationally and has been remembered recently with his passing, by the Australian conservation movement.

Jeff Groves took over the meeting as Steven Langley was soon to leave the meeting.

APOLOGIES

Steven Langley, Allan Suter, Richard Woodland, Lynton and Karen Huxley, Wendy Phillips, Graham Collier, Rod Attwood, Colin Rogers.

MINUTES OF GENERAL MEETING 30 APRIL 2021

The minutes had been posted on the Association's website and on the notice board previous to the meeting. These minutes were accepted: moved by John Gitsham, seconded by Sue Winwood and confirmed by a vote of the meeting.

NEW MEMBERS

A list of new members was read by the chairman:

APRIL 2021

KATE MOFFIT	LITTLEHAMPTON
ELIZA MEREDITH	BALHANNAH
RICHARD DOLAN	McLAREN VALE
MAUREEN ALLAN	HAPPY VALLEY
LES BEYER	PORT PIRIE
LINKON FERGUSSON	OSBORNE
MARY CRAWFORD	FLAGSTAFF HILL
ROBIN WOODS	PORT ELLIOT
TAYLOR HEADLAND	KENSINGTON PARK
ROSE CASTINE	WATERVALE
DALE WACHE	WARRADALE
KATRINA BAKER	NORTON SUMMIT

MAY

JOHN SPENCER	HAZELWOOD PARK
DARCY WHITTAKER	MACCLESFIELD
SUSIE NUGENT	WOODSIDE
JOSHUA MARTIN	STOCKWELL
BARRY NEYLON	HILLIER
DAVID ROSHIER	MT BARKER
CALLUM MCDONALD	LINDEN PARK

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman requested that recipients of *The Birder* magazine, distributed at the meeting, check the pages of their copy; a few copies had Pages 3-4 missing due to the rush to get printed for tonight's meeting. Those who had this omission could get a replacement copy of the magazine. It was estimated that only about 6 Birders were mis-bound.

SPEAKER

John Hatch introduced the speaker, John Gitsham, immediate Past President of the Association and currently National Parks and Wildlife Service Ranger in charge of the Coorong. His topic was "Pelican Island Mice Monitoring Project: a NPWS project, Coorong National Park".

Notes:

- The Australian Pelican is an iconic bird of the Coorong region and culturally significant to the Ngarrindjeri people of the Lower Murray area.
- North Pelican Island, situated in the Coorong approx. 1 km. out from Jack Point, is the site of one of the largest pelican breeding colonies in the Southern Hemisphere, in the past having a population of up to 4,000 birds. More recently there have been around 900 adult pelicans there at the height of the breeding season.
- Early last century fishermen were destroying birds and nests. S.A.O.A sought to lease the island and it became a sanctuary, with the pelican population monitored by volunteer wardens. It became part of the Coorong N.P in the 1960s.
- John visited North Pelican Island in May 2020 and observed many burrows, indicating a large population of mice on the island. With the use of Elliot Traps, 60 mice were captured around the pelican nesting sites.
- This raised a number of questions about the impact, if any, of the mice on the life and activities of the island's pelican nesting sites. Were the mice preying on or interfering with the nesting activities: nests, eggs, chicks or adult birds? Or were the pelicans supplementing their diet with mice? Were there interactions with other resident birds – Kestrels, Australian Ravens or Silver Gulls?
- Baiting the mice on the island was not possible because of the risk of predators eating the dead and poisoned mice carcasses.
- In consultation with SA pelican expert, Dr. Gary Johnston, John set up a monitoring project on the island, which ran from late November 2020 to February 2021.
- Four monitoring cameras with solar panels were setup at the island's breeding sites, recording still images and 10 second video sequences. Using 4G technology, these images could be viewed remotely at the project H.Q. Regular mobile phone towers along the Coorong and Princess Highway provided ideal transmission conditions.

- As the mice were more active at night this equipment needed to be capable of providing clear images in the nocturnal hours as well as in the daylight. The most recent images were viewed each morning and both pelican and mouse activity was recorded. Infra-red cameras were used and viewing footage each morning provided the opportunity to react immediately if a problem was seen.
- The still pictures revealed no mice, but the video footage clearly showed the gleaming eyes of several mice.
- Usually 2 eggs are laid. A freshly hatched pelican chick is called a “pinky”, and the pouched lower bill of an adult pelican is referred to as the “gular”. The latter is deeper pink/red in the breeding season.
- Pelicans fly some distance to fish for feeding chicks – as far as the Northern Lagoon and Lake Alexandrina.
- The outcome of this research was that the impact of the mice in the pelican nesting area was negligible.
- Mice activity was registered into a spreadsheet; date, time, camera, species seen, numbers, evidence of predation etc.
- There was plenty of evidence of mice moving freely about, especially at night (10.00pm - 4.00 am), but there was no evidence of the mice interfering in any way with the breeding pelicans: no biting or other interference with the adult birds or chicks and no eating of eggs. In addition, there was no evidence of pelicans eating mice. The mice may well have been beneficial to the site: pelicans are messy feeders and the mice may have eaten scraps left on the ground, thus keeping it clean to some degree.
- The recorded visual monitoring did provide a great deal of other information about the daily activities of the breeding colony, some which had not previously been seen. Pelicans were observed acting aggressively towards each other and being intolerant to young which weren't theirs and large young Pelicans attacked smaller, younger chicks. On the 24th of Jan the temperature rose to around 45 degrees Celsius and 4 juvenile Pelicans perished. Mice, being nocturnal were unaffected by the hot summer weather.
- The ravens acted essentially as scavengers, not actively killing but annoying creches waiting for something to die.
- In total, 44 mice were recorded, 888 Pelican nests were counted with 397 Pelican chicks fledging or 0.45 fledglings per nest.
- (In reply to a question) Banding of pelicans has shown that they are very mobile, travelling from the Coorong to Port Adelaide, and much further around Australia and even to PNG, but they return to their ‘home’ rookery to breed. The trip to PNG took 9 months.
- Previously very little study of the nesting Pelicans had been carried out, other than reproductive success research carried out over 3 years by Claire Manning. This study over 4 months was the longest period of monitoring ever carried out in Australia.
- There is a Pelican egg from the 1870s in the SA Museum.
- It is the intention of the research team to publish a scientific paper based on this project.

REPORT

With the consent of the Chair, Denise Wilkie presented a report of the activities of an informal group within the Association. Denise and two friends, Heather and Tina, formed a group for birding outings, following their participation in a WEA course run by Birds SA in 2018 by the 3 Johns, John Gitsham, John Hatch and John Spiers. The initial aim of this group of strangers was to provide security as a group of bird watchers, rather than enjoying the activity alone. Denise presented an illustrated account of some excursions undertaken by this group, totalling 17 plus trips and explained how their passion and enthusiasm for bird watching had spread across their families and friends. Denise thanked Birds SA.

CONSERVATION SUB-COMMITTEE

John Spiers reported on recent activities of this group.

- **Potential Sale of Land close to Monarto**

John has spoken to members of the Kanmantoo-Callington Land Care Group. He has also spoken to the SA Minister for Agriculture, David Basham, who encouraged cooperation between the Land Care group and Birds SA with a view to committing to and entering into an agreement for future development of this land as a conservation reserve. This is good news!

- **Liaison with the Conservation Council**

John has met with Conservation SA concerning the development of a list of high priority conservation issues prior to the next State election in March 2020. He mentioned the following issues: coastal and marine issues, a proposed meeting with Susan Close, Shadow Minister, legislation re pastoral leases, vehicles on beaches, duck and quail shooting, the future of the Dry Creek salt fields and the catastrophic impact on coastal mangroves (St Kilda). In relation to some of these matters there has been liaison with Ray Nias from Birds SA with the AIBS, the Conservation Action Planning Group and Mangrove Alliance.

- **Thompson Beach Trial of beach closure to vehicles**

This trial from 5th October 2020 to 30th May 2021, is about to close. Birds SA will be proposing to the council that the closures should be resumed regularly during the sensitive period for migratory shorebirds, if not all year round. This action can be supported by good evidence from the current closure, as reported by Kate Buckley. On the 5th of May, 65 Great Egrets and 40 Cattle Egrets were spotted on the beach.

- **Rocket Test Launches**

Birds SA has responded to a proposal to conduct trial rocket launches at Whalers Way near Port Lincoln and after months of waiting for more detailed information, has decided to oppose the project. There are four listed threatened birds in this area. The rockets involved are much larger than at first described, ranging up to 100 tons, after being initially described as being “very small”. The time to launch is longer than previously explained resulting in much noisier launches than previously explained. It was reported that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) would be further delayed and a number of environmental groups had all agreed to oppose this activity. A submission to the State Government and Southern Launch was being prepared from this group, including Birds SA.

BIRD CALL

Graham Carpenter conducted the usual call for unusual bird sightings in the last month, from those members in attendance. Unusual being unusual to the location, unusual in its behaviour or a rarely seen species.

Responses included the following:

- Willie Wagtail in the city near the Adelaide Railway Station.
- Pink Robin at Piccaninnie Ponds, S.E.
- Graham advised to keep a watch out for Rose Robins, although it may be a little early.
- Crakes and Rails at Tolderol.
- Black-breasted Buzzard, Farina
- Eastern Spinebills, various locations in the Adelaide metropolitan area, but not as many as usual.
- Maree – a few Thick-billed Grasswrens seen.

- White-bellied Sea-Eagle – John Gitsham is looking for information about any sightings near Goolwa and a pair and a juvenile at Salt Creek, Coorong. Possibly a second pair at 42 mile crossing. John is looking for the mainland breeding site and would appreciate any information via an email. Other WBSE sightings on South Coast include Hallett Cove, Newland Head, Wirrina, a juvenile at the Bluff.
- White-plumed Honeyeater, Pirie Street, Adelaide city.
- Wichelina is recovering from two very dry years. Notable sightings: two Grey Falcons, breeding Inland Dotterels, Peregrine Falcon (just one previous record), Starling x1 not seen for 10 years – spotted at the home dam.
- Purple Swamphen observed high in a large tree, 20 m. above the ground, Thorndon Park
- Black-chinned Honeyeater calling, Yilki, (Encounter Bay). This species is hanging on at Victor Harbor.
- Blue-faced Honeyeater, six at Waikerie, including 2 fledglings.
- Pair of Osprey, not using current nesting point, Gleeson's Landing, Y.P. A new nest platform is to be installed soon.
- Single Australian Raven, where Little Ravens are usually seen, Gleeson's Landing, Y.P.
- One Osprey, west of Point Turton, Y.P.
- Five Eastern Curlew, on the beach at Port Clinton, Y.P.
- Barn Owl x11 over 3 nights, Warooka, Y.P. (Few mice seen on the roads)
- Two Black-tailed Godwits were seen at St Kilda Beach & a week later, one Black-tailed Godwit and 9 Bar-tail Godwits were seen at St Kilda Beach.

CLOSE

The meeting closed at 9.42 p.m.