

River Conservation Society

Newsletter No. 41
March 2015



From the Chair

Here we are at the beginning of a fresh year. Once again we turn our thoughts to what might best serve the function of the River Conservation Society. Our projects are moving forward steadily; the Committee has held its first meeting and shall soon be holding the second for 2015. So, you may imagine, even be wondering, what is in the pipeline for this year.

The water rat project is progressing and following on from visual observations at several locations along the foreshore of the Avon River, camera traps have been activated. Robert Pearce has been especially busy and working in consultation with a small group of willing volunteers and folk from the University of WA. Of course, we always have room for more volunteers who have an odd hour to spare to walk along the foreshore while observing potential signs of burrows and feeding sites of the water rats.

We are still need to encourage interested folk to take up financial membership so the Society can validly claim that we are conforming to the Federal Government's legislation. To remain on the Register of Environmental Organisations the RCS must have 50 individuals as financial members in each financial year.

Our forward planning for 2015 includes at least one day's outing at one or more of the Reserves, which come under our care. This could involve a clean-up, tree planting, surveying flora or fauna and conclude the day with a BBQ or Picnic.

Following on from our most recent Tortoise Study we're looking at drawing up a collection of maps which specify where and when trapping took place, and the outcomes at each location.

I'm very conscious of the fact that the River Conservation Society needs to re-establish its identity in the York District. With this in mind the Projects Trailer has been refurbished and sign written with our logo, which should lift our profile around the district. Thanks to Robert Pearce for the time and work he put into this restoration.



Plate 1. The repainted RCS works trailer.

Taking everything into account we can move forward with a growing sense of belonging and a real sense of being part of the wider Community.

I look forward to meeting up with you in the year ahead.

Trevor Moffat (Chair)



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Healthy Soils, Healthy Rivers Program: Funding Available for the Avon

The Perth Region NRM, Wheatbelt NRM and the Swan River Trust have teamed up to assist landholders and community groups to implement on-ground activities that will improve soil health and contribute to improved water quality in the Swan-Avon river system. The program is funded by the Australian Government National Landcare Programme and Western Australian Government.

In the Wheatbelt, the catchments that contribute significantly to nutrient loads in the Swan-Avon system are the Lower Avon, Middle Avon, Upper Avon, Mortlock East, Mortlock North and Dale catchments. These catchments will therefore be targeted in the Healthy Soils, Healthy Rivers Program.

The program encourages an integrated approach to nutrient management by supporting landholders to better understand their soils through soil testing and analysis, development of nutrient management plans and adoption of better nutrient management practices that improve soil health and crop performance whilst reducing nutrient export to waterways. The protection of waterways through fencing and revegetation with native plant species is also supported.

Funding of \$2,500 is available for landholders and community groups in the target sub-catchments for:

- Baseline and follow-up soil nutrient testing;
- Building capacity to increase understanding and application of soil test results;
- Adoption of soil and nutrient management practices; and

Some applicants may also like to apply for a further \$7,500 for fencing and revegetation of waterways.

Application forms and guidelines can be found at <http://www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au/hshr> or contact Dr Vanesa Gonzalez on 0499 499 119 for further information.

RCS Reserve of the Quarter: Mt Hardy.

At a glance...

Reserve Name: Mt Hardy Nature Conservation Reserve.

Area: ~13 ha

Location: York

Access: Quairading-York Rd

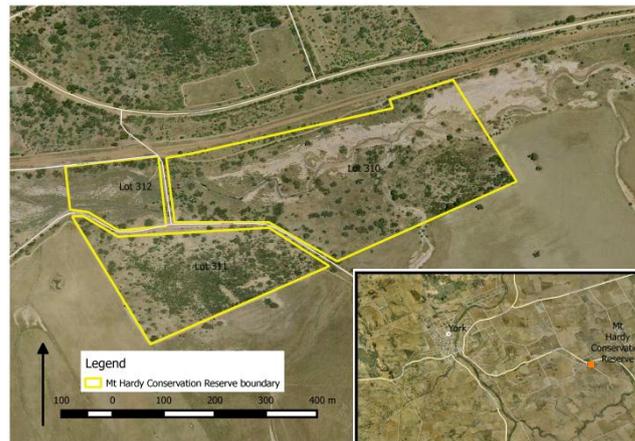


Figure 1. The location of Mt Hardy Conservation Reserve, York.

After considerable negotiations made on behalf of the RCS over 5 years, Mt Hardy Reserve came under the management of the Vale of York Reserves Committee (VOYRC), a sub-committee of the RCS, in 2009 when the parcel of land known as Lot 23 (part of the old Mt Hardy Townsite) was re-zoned.

Part of the reserve area (Lot 310 and 312) was placed under the management of the VOYRC for the "Protection of Natural Landscape" and the remaining area (Lot 311), being under Native Title strictures, was also vested in RCS care under a special licence agreement.

The area was fenced in 2009 by the RCS using funding allocated by the Department of Water's Avon River Basin Fencing funds and using labour supplied by the Green Corp.

Mt Hardy reserve supports healthy stands of Salmon Gums (*Eucalyptus salmonophloia*) with intact understory which is uncommon in the region. Other plant communities within the reserve include *Hakea preissii* shrubland, Casuarina forest, mixed York gum and jam tree scrub and wandoo and Tammar scrub. Many ant hills suggest there may be echidnas present. Pitt Brook is a saline and eroded tributary of the Mackie River that runs west-east through the reserve.

This reserve needs a guardian; contact info@riverconservationsociety.org if you're interested.



Plate 2. Salmon Gums at Mt Hardy Conservation Reserve, January 2015.

AWC Report: Water Rats breeding at Karakamia

Juvenile Water Rats (Rikali) captured on camera trap footage have confirmed the success of Water Rat reintroductions at Karakamia. The Perth Zoo in their "Urban Renewal" program translocated seven Water Rats to Karakamia during 2013-14 into artificial burrows in the lakes at Karakamia. More information can be found at: <http://www.australianwildlife.org/field-updates/2015/camera-trap-reveals-new-addition-to-native-water-rat-population-at-karakamia.aspx>

Coming up....

Wheatbelt NRM Bush Care Grants

Bushcare Grants open for applications on Friday 13 March 2015. The grants are available to landholders for projects that protect and improve existing native vegetation via fencing, revegetation works and feral animal control. Go to: www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au for more information on this and several other funding opportunities for wheatbelt landowners.

Great Cocky Count (7th event!)

WA's biggest survey for Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo will be held on Sunday 12 April 2015. Register to monitor a location at

<http://www.birdlife.org.au/projects/carnabys-black-cockatoo-recovery/great-cocky-count>.

Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo is a threatened species that breeds in the wheatbelt from August to December, thereafter migrating to coastal areas. The birds are vulnerable to increasing levels of clearing for urban and industrial development in areas where human populations are rapidly growing.

While the birds might have moved on from your property in York by April, if you happen to be on the coastal plain on the survey date, you can make a valuable contribution to our knowledge of this species that will be visiting you in York again next year.

RCS NEWS

Electronic banking

You can now pay RCS electronically for your membership subscriptions and donations. For memberships use our **General Account: BSB 633000 / ACC 118624899**. To make donations to our **Public Gift Fund: BSB 633000 / ACC 127661080**. Give your name as the description/reference when making payments and please then email our treasurer; attention to Robert Boggs (info@riverconservationsociety.org) with your full name and contact details.

Find a Conservation Group

The society has now been listed on the DPAW "Find a conservation group" website app. This app is a one stop shop for groups and members of the public to easily find and contact a conservation group in their area. With the society listed on this website it gives us more exposure to the public and to other groups wishing to participate in our activities. <http://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/off-reserve-conservation/urban-nature/find-a-conservation-group>.

Water Rat Progress

Our water rat project is progressing well with a number of pools being surveyed for signs of the

native rodent. We have had some positive results regarding their presence in the area but to date no visual sightings of this elusive animal. Camera traps loaned to RCS by the Wheatbelt NRM have been deployed in the field and the University of Western Australia has also deployed cameras at identified habitat areas.

This is an ideal time of the year to be targeting this native rodent as the pools are isolated and the water rat numbers should be concentrated making the possibility of a sighting very likely.

On-ground surveys are now extending to the Mackey and Blands pool areas in York with the possibility of a water rat trapping programme being conducted in the coming months.

We have also found that we have some resident foxes at some of our pools that are very photogenic! Predator control may be an interesting avenue through which we can engage landholders to participate in the water rat program.

If you would like to become involved with the surveys and have some fun walking or kayaking around the pools while having a picnic then please contact us by email at info@riverconservationsociety.org

This is a great way to spend a Saturday or Sunday away from it all while caring for our environment and its native flora and fauna.

Herbarium Website

As you are by now aware the society has embarked on a project to build and launch a website to host the societies' herbarium data. At present this data has been collected and catalogued into electronic format and is on display at various locations around Perth and in the York library where it is accessible to those who wish to discover the diversity of York's native flora. We are now taking this one step further and will be developing and launching a user friendly database website containing all this herbarium information in a user friendly way. For people wishing to become involved in this interesting project please contact us via info@riverconservationsociety.org. This project promises to be very interesting indeed and we

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have a number of people already involved working towards making this happen.

What's out in York?

Rainbow Bee Eaters

The Rainbow Bee-Eater (*Merops ornatus*) is the only species of bee-eater in Australia and listed as a migratory bird under the *EPBC Act 1999*.



Plate 3. *M. ornatus*. Photo from: <http://ibc.lynxeds.com/>

Present in the wheatbelt from October-March, they nest in sandy banks of rivers, creeks or dams, roadside cuttings, gravel pits, quarries or cliffs, often in large colonies. The birds migrate north in April.

Unlike many species in the south-west, their distribution is thought to have expanded. However, projected climate change is likely to affect Rainbow Bee-eaters by changing their migration times and breeding season. With the warming climate we could expect Rainbow Bee-eaters to migrate earlier, and to breed earlier in southern Australia. It may also affect the duration of their breeding activities.

Your backyard observations of Bee-Eaters may be the data that documents this change into the future!

Bumper flower season for Marri

You might have seen and smelt the prolific flowering event of marri trees (*Corymbia calophylla*) in the region this season. Kingsley Dixon reports that, "Marri from time to time do what is



Plate 4. *C. calophylla* flowers March 2015.

known as 'mast flowering' - a term applied to trees that will periodically burst into outstanding bloom. Such flowering is a response

to seasonal conditions in the previous 6-8 months that are presently not clear. However, Nyoongars believe that if the Marri blooms then the winter will be a rainy one - this season will be an excellent test”.

The marri is widespread in the south-west and grows on a range of soil types through a variety of habitats. The flowers are generally white but there is a pink flowering form. Marri trees are primary food sources and nesting sites for all three of the south-west’s threatened cockatoos; Baudin’s, Carnaby’s and the Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoo.



My thanks to those who contributed to this quarterly newsletter. We rely on your input to make it interesting and relevant. All members are welcome to contribute. Please forward email submissions to:

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