



Superb Fairy-wren. Photo: Tony Bailey

Conservation

DON SAUNDERS AND JENNY LAU

THREATENED SPECIES – EPBC ACT

The 2011 Priority Assessment List has been determined from nominations submitted by the public; it includes seven species, six ecological communities and one key threatening process. These will now be assessed by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee to advise the Commonwealth Government whether they are eligible for listing under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The process of assessment will include an opportunity for public comment.

Two of the assessments relate to birds. Although currently listed as Vulnerable, the Australian Painted Snipe will be assessed for listing in a higher category and the impact of Noisy Miners on other native birds will be assessed to identify whether further and more co-ordinated national measures are required to manage this threat.

A full copy of the 2011 Finalised Priority Assessment List can be accessed at www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/index.html.



Australian Painted Snipe, Edithvale, Vic. Photo: Geoff Jones

CAPE YORK PENINSULA

In a joint media release, dated 8 September 2011, the Environment Ministers for the Australian and Queensland Governments announced \$23 million of new funding towards protection of environmental and cultural values on Cape York Peninsula.

It was stated that the new funds would allow acquisition of land of high conservation value for inclusion in the national reserve system and support consultation with Indigenous communities about a potential World Heritage nomination. The funding could also support participation of Indigenous communities in sustainable agricultural and natural resource management activities.

A commitment was given that a World Heritage nomination would not proceed without the consent of Traditional Owners.

NATIONAL HERITAGE LISTING FOR WEST KIMBERLEY

Following a comprehensive assessment by the Australian Heritage Council, the Minister for Environment, the Hon Tony Burke MP, announced that 19 million hectares of the West Kimberley, WA, will be placed on Australia's National Heritage List.

The Minister's media release identified the following as outstanding heritage values within the site:

- The incredible natural beauty of the coast from the Buccaneer Archipelago to the King George River, the Mitchell Plateau, King George Falls, Geikie Gorge, Windjana Gorge and King Leopold Ranges;
- Rich biodiversity, including many plants, mammals, reptiles, frogs and invertebrates that are found only in this part of Australia;
- Remnants of a vast coral reef, similar in scale to the Great Barrier Reef, that existed nearly 400 million years ago;
- Dinosaur footprints on the west coast of the Dampier Peninsula which are a remarkable remnant of past life in the region;



Mitchell Falls. Photo: Stephen Cook

- Ongoing Aboriginal traditions associated with Wandjina and the Rainbow Serpent;
- Sites which tell a more recent history including Jandamarra, the dispute at Noonkanbah Station and the cattle drive to Fossil Downs which became the longest overland cattle drive in Australia's history; and
- Evidence of early contact with Indonesia as well as early European exploration of the Australian continent.

Some of Australia's best birding sites are included within the area. In addition to those mentioned in the first dot point above, Roebuck Bay, Lacepede Islands, Drysdale River National Park, Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary and the Fitzroy River are also in the listed area.

A map of the West Kimberley National Heritage Place can be found at http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/laws/publicdocuments/pubs/106063_06.pdf.

FIRE OPERATIONS PLANS

BOCA made submissions on three Victorian fire operations plans: Murray Goldfields District, Mallee District and Wimmera District. While BOCA supports the use of planned burning to protect life and built assets and to maintain healthy ecosystems, in each of these cases we expressed concern about the extent of burning proposed in the plans.

With the Murray Goldfields plan we are particularly concerned about the high percentage of Greater Bendigo National

Park proposed to be burnt in the next three years. The Box-Ironbark forests and woodlands in the Goldfields bioregion provide critical habitat for a large number of threatened bird species such as the nationally endangered Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater, and State-listed species such as Speckled Warbler, Hooded Robin and the *Temperate Woodland Bird Community*. The decline of these species is directly linked to the loss, degradation and fragmentation of Box-Ironbark and woodland ecosystems as a result of past land use activities. Many bird species, particularly those in the *Temperate Woodland Bird Community*, are dependent on components of the forests targeted in planned burns, such as understorey shrubs and/or coarse woody debris, to provide important foraging and nesting resources. Other critical resources, such as hollow-bearing trees, may be lost if burnt by an intense fire.

The Wimmera District plan proposes further burning in three ecologically important parks which have been heavily impacted by fire in the last five or six years. One-third of the Little Desert National Park has been burnt by bushfire in the last five years. The fire operations plan identifies an additional 20,000 ha for broad-acre burning over the next three years – will there be any parts of the National Park left for Malleefowl and other species which require long-unburnt habitat?

The January 2006 bushfire burnt 50 percent of the Grampians National Park and the 2004-05 bushfire burnt 40 percent of the Black Range State Park. The fire operations plan proposes further burning in both these conservation reserves.

VEAC YELLINGBO INVESTIGATION

The Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC) is carrying out an investigation into public land in the vicinity of the Yellingbo Conservation Reserve. The Yellingbo area provides critical habitat for the Helmeted Honeyeater and BOCA has a long-standing involvement with the Yellingbo Conservation Reserve, having played a major role in the first reservation in 1965. The area is also important for the nationally Endangered Leadbeater's Possum. VEAC has been asked to: identify the biological and ecological values of the area; identify the threats to these values, including opportunities to reduce these threats; and to make recommendations on appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance these values.

The investigation follows a long running campaign by the Woori Yallock Creek Park Alliance (supported by BOCA) for the amalgamation of a number of parcels of public land into a single new park to streamline and improve management of the ecological values of the area.

CAN YOU HELP?

STARLINGS IN AUSTRALIA

The Common Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*, is one of the most successful invasive species in the world. Starlings originated from Europe but are now found all over; from the US to Australia, this species occupies a large and varied geographical range. During my PhD I would like to explore the success of the Starling in Australia, with particular interest in understanding how our landscape has shaped individuals and populations. Starlings provide a model system to explore this relationship because they have only been in Australia for about 160 years and should possess characteristics that allow them to adapt to novel environments. I plan to sample Starling populations from Tasmania to Queensland, examining the genetic and physical characteristics that may differ across their range.

This project relies on my ability to get samples of Starlings from as many places as possible. To this end, I would ask for help from anyone willing and able to provide it. If anybody is, or knows of someone, controlling Starlings at their home or on their farm, I would love to collect the carcasses (adult and/or chicks; ie removing chicks from nest boxes). Every sample would be of great help to the project and to gain a better understanding of this invasive pest species. Any information regarding Starlings in your area would be great. If you know where a large flock lives or have any other information you think would be useful please contact me. Thank you for your time and help.

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Superb Fairy-wren, Lake Connewarre near Leopold, Vic. Photo: Jennifer Carr

COASTAL WEEDS AND BIRDS PROJECT

Volunteers from Victoria, SA, WA, NSW and Tasmania are needed for a new coastal weeds and birds project.

Over time, Australia's coastal habitats have been altered by weeds, including weeds we introduced ourselves to combat erosion. As a result, dune systems are often dominated by Marram Grass, Wheat Grass, Pyp Grass, Sea Spurge, Sea Rocket, Boneseed/Bitou Bush or other weed species.

University of Melbourne researchers, in a joint project across departments (eg Botany, Social Science, Geomorphology) and together with BirdLife Australia, want to find out more about the impact this is having on native wildlife:

- Are birds or insects using weeds for foraging, cover, roosting habitat, etc?
- Are weeds harbouring introduced predators or pests?
- Are these stands of weeds devoid of life?

We need your help to find out! If you live in Victoria, SA, WA, NSW or Tasmania it is as simple as contacting Charlotte (details below) to request an information package, which includes:

- Instructions on what you need to report
- A weed identification sheet
- An observation sheet to record your findings

And then all that is left is to step out onto the beach this spring/summer to spot birds in the weeds.

This project has already commenced, but we are still very interested in receiving observation sheets up until February. We have also been receiving some fantastic photographs from your fellow community scientists and we thought that everyone would find it interesting to see the photographs. Therefore we have set up a group on Natureshare. So please feel free to upload them to our group (<http://natureshare.org.au/collection/171/>) or to email me your photographs.

This community based environmental monitoring is an important component in our multidisciplinary research project. It is providing us with a far more detailed understanding of the interactions occurring on our beaches than our research team could feasibly achieve without your community support. We hope you will continue sharing your observations with us and, as we begin to analyse the data, we will be sharing summaries of our findings with you and your organisations.

Please contact me if you have any questions and I look forward to receiving your observation sheets in the near future.

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