



## 'HAPPINESS APPEARS' AT ALFRED COVE

'Happiness Appears' was a community art trail, made by the Melville community over a weekend in late June.

SERAG contributed a flock of around 100 birds to the trail - life-sized templates of *Common Greenshanks*, *Red Knots*, *Grey Plovers*, *Red-necked Stints*, *Whimbrels* and *Bar-tailed Godwits* - cut by volunteers from recycled corflute.

They represented the many species of trans-equatorial migratory shorebirds that return annually to the Swan River Estuary from their breeding areas in Arctic regions.

The templates were installed on the foreshore of Alfred Cove - an important foraging and resting site - allowing visitors to walk among them and learn their names.

Information on each species' particular attributes and the epic journeying undertaken each year was also presented.

Representatives from the *Friends of the Melville Bird Sanctuary* were on hand to discuss an important community initiative to protect these and other birdlife for generations to come, by establishing Alfred Cove as a safe refuge. For more information see: <https://www.facebook.com/melvillebirdsantuaryanddiscoverycentre/>

Visitors took advantage of breaks in the wet weather to see this joyful display - anticipating both the real birds' arrival in these parts during September, and later the *Overwintering: Summer on the Swan* Print Exhibition at Nyisztor Studio.

The exhibition will open on 10th October (World Migratory Bird Day) and run for two weeks.



Photographs courtesy  
M Matassa & A Fairbairn



## IMPROVING FORESHORE RESILIENCE

Again this year SERAG has focussed much of its attention on improving the ecological health of Attadale foreshore - an extremely important margin of A-Class Nature Reserve along the Swan Estuary Marine Park. Unfortunately it is narrow, now almost treeless and heavily degraded by various urban pressures.

With the support of a DBCA *Community Rivercare* grant, both our Saturday and Tuesday morning teams have been hard at work during winter removing weeds and planting native species that hopefully will be tough enough to survive unnaturally harsh conditions in the many breaches in foreshore vegetation.

The main species planted to supplement existing sedges were *Rhagodia baccata*, *Scaevola crassifolia*, *Ficinia nodosa*, *Atriplex cinerea* and *Conostylis candicans*.

A diluted seaweed solution was applied to help their establishment in exceptionally hydrophobic soils; however summer watering will be required as well.

Once winter storms have abated we will plant *Juncus kraussii* along the water's edge to strengthen the sedge-banks against increasing erosive pressures.



On various days and at various breaches in vegetation along the Attadale foreshore

Photographs courtesy R Napier, C O'Neill & N Peters



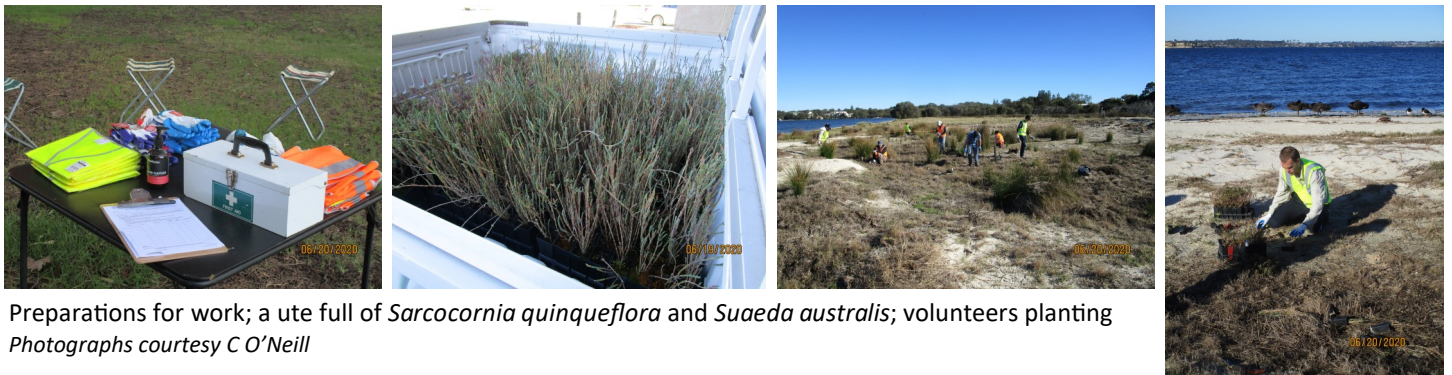
# UWA@PP TEAM REFORMED FOR PELICAN POINT

COVID19 has impacted significantly on SERAG's restoration programs - especially those involving student volunteers.

Given the need for even greater care for volunteer safety than usual, when restrictions on movement and limits to the size of gatherings were eased, the UWA@PP team was reformed with the number of participants halved, each student given their own set of hi-viz vest and gloves, and effort made to ensure tasks allowed for appropriate social distancing.

The team's first session was on a beautiful June morning and focused on a plot we have been preparing for two years, with the support of a SALP grant. Around 600 tubes of *Sarcocornia quinqueflora* and *Suaeda australis* - propagated for us by APACE from local specimens - were planted in the terrestrial section of the Marine Park.

This project aims to recover a coastal saltmarsh community impacted by weeds and strengthen the Point's habitat value to a diversity of local birdlife - including beach-nesting Red-capped Plovers, Pied Oystercatchers and Fairy Terns.



Preparations for work; a ute full of *Sarcocornia quinqueflora* and *Suaeda australis*; volunteers planting  
Photographs courtesy C O'Neill



A local osprey oversees volunteers at Pelican Point Photographs courtesy T Chia

Soon after we began planting, a female osprey - who had been bathing nearby in the River - flew in and perched on a sign a few meters away. She stayed there for the whole of our session, drying herself and watching us work.

It was a remarkable privilege to be supervised by such a magnificent bird.

## LATER ....

Rain in the weeks that followed saturated the project area, creating ideal conditions for both the natural recovery of samphire and new plantings of this and other coastal saltmarsh species.

By the end of July pairs of little Red-capped Plovers (*Charadrius ruficapillus*) were dashing about, foraging and preparing to nest on this important area of open beach. They lay their highly camouflaged speckled eggs in shallow scrapes in the ground - sometimes protected by a low shrub, but nevertheless vulnerable to walkers and their dogs.



Project site awash; one of a number of tiny Red-capped Plovers preparing to nest on Pelican Point  
Photographs courtesy S Graham-Taylor & C O'Neill



## PROJECT AREA 2 AT THE POINT

The second site being restored with the support of the Swan Alcoa Landcare Program is an area of riparian vegetation in Bush Forever Site 402, destroyed by fire last year.

SERAG and UWA@PP volunteers worked steadily and strenuously during autumn and winter, removing seasonal and woody weeds and replacing them with seedlings and a few mature saplings from the Vasse vegetation complex.

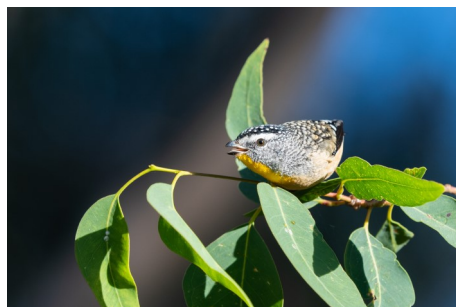
Recycled plastic sleeves have been used here to protect some species against hungry rabbits and trampling by walkers.

We celebrated National Tree Day by planting a sapling *Melaleuca raphiophylla*. Co-founded in 1996 by Planet Ark and Olivia Newton-John, it now is one of Australia's largest community tree-planting and nature-protection events.



Planting sessions in the second recovery area supported by our SALP grant; UWA@PP team plants a sapling for National Tree Day  
Photographs courtesy Y Fong & A Mraz

## SPOTTED PARDALOTES IN BFS 402



A Spotted Pardalote at Pelican Point  
Photograph courtesy T Chia

Over past months, Spotted Pardalotes (*Pardalotus punctatus*) have been seen among the plethora of tiny birds using Bush Forever Site 402 at Pelican Point.

It is one of the smallest of Australian birds and one of the most colourful.

Striated Pardalotes already use the site extensively, so discovering their jewel-like relatives residing there too is a lovely bonus.

Pardalotes are often very difficult to see as they usually stay high in the canopies of eucalypts, where they forage for insects - especially psyllids.

Following food sources, both Spotted and Striated Pardalotes travel periodically, highlighting the importance of maintaining ecological corridors in urban areas.

## 58 KILOS OF LITTER & 'NUISANCE' FISH AT MILYU

Winter storms and tidal surges washed up and deposited large quantities of litter on Estuary shores.

In June the MMM team collected 58 kilos of debris from the foreshore at Milyu - the weight of an adult person! - comprised mainly of small bits and pieces of plastic. Milyu Reserve is only 4.4 hectares, so imagine the litter problem facing the Estuary as a whole. Perhaps it is time to 're-think' our use of plastics.

At the July clean-up volunteers were disturbed to discover Common Blowfish (*Torquigener pleurogramma*) tossed to die on the Marine Park foreshore by someone disappointed at not reeling in a preferred catch. Sadly this indicates a lack of understanding of, or disregard for, the important contribution this native fish makes to wider ecosystem health. Apparently the behaviour isn't illegal - even in the Marine Park.

'Blowies' are opportunistic feeders, so are attracted to regular fishing spots by scraps of bait and burley - waste that would otherwise be left to foul our waterways.

The Department of Fisheries advises returning those caught to the water as soon as possible - '*Leaving blowfish on the shore or jetty is cruel and does nothing to reduce their numbers. It could also lead to the fatal poisoning of pets such as dogs.*' - and provides tips to help avoid catching these so-called 'nuisance' fish.

See [http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/Documents/recreational\\_fishing/fact\\_sheets/fact\\_sheet\\_blowfish.pdf](http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/Documents/recreational_fishing/fact_sheets/fact_sheet_blowfish.pdf)



Photograph courtesy R Weir



# BIRD-COUNTING AT ALFRED COVE

High tides and storm surges over winter made it difficult for local wading and water birds at Alfred Cove, so during SERAG's June and July counts a little more attention was able to be directed to surveying bush birds in riparian margins.

Hence the following fabulous photos were taken of a pair of Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) cozily snoozing in a *Melaleuca raphiophylla* and of a Collared Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter cirrocephalus*) very much alert in a eucalypt.



There is much to cherish at the Cove. The more one pauses to quietly look, the more one sees.  
*Photographs courtesy S Waller*

However, during the August count photos were taken of a migratory shorebird - the first of the travellers from Arctic regions to be noted by our birdwatchers this season.

The small wader was initially thought to be a Common Sandpiper, but after a closer look and much discussion it was confirmed to be a Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*).

This intrepid species is very rarely seen on the Estuary mudflats as it prefers shallow freshwater wetlands.

## MANAGING EMBANKMENTS

In winter our *TREEmendous* Tuesday team devoted considerable time to stabilizing sections of the steep embankment between the dual-use pathway and Marine Park foreshore at Tompkins Park. Embankments pose problems - both in the choice of suitable species to arrest erosion and in keeping plants alive over their first summer.

Although close to the River, these raised, artificially constructed sites can be very dry and exposed. Nevertheless we are hopeful that, despite well below average rainfall and above average temperatures this season, the seedlings we have planted will have established themselves strongly enough to survive a long hot summer.

The team also filled breaches in sedge-banks, where woody weed species have been steadily removed or previous plantings lost - and has now begun the interminable task of hand-removing winter and spring weeds: wild radish, fumaria, capeweed *et al.*

The recovery of this degraded section of foreshore is supported by funding from the Western Australian Government's State NRM Program.

Earlier in the season the *TREEmendous* Tuesday team was delighted to discover some 'new kids on the block', living towards the eastern end of the Marine Park foreshore.

With the quality of habitat much improved, Buff-banded Rails and Purple Swampheens are regularly sighted. However, in addition to these and other familiar local birds, volunteers began glimpsing a different resident - a shy plump ground-dwelling one, which would quickly take cover in dense vegetation before a photograph could be taken to verify its species.

There was a breakthrough when, cycling home, one of the team confirmed a pair of Brown Quails (*Coturnix ypsilophora*) - also known as 'swamp quails':

*'I have also included some shots of our Brown Quails. I think they are the rufous form of the race australis.*

*I saw them as I rode past and they obligingly hung around for a photo shoot, although the light was not good and I had to shoot against the sun.'*

We hope they will have offspring soon.



Steady work on an embankment  
*Photographs courtesy R Napier & C O'Neill*



One of a pair of Brown Quails  
hiding among sedges and rhagodia  
*Photograph courtesy S Waller*



# APOLOGIES FOR DISTURBING YOU

Skinks form over 50% of Australian lizards, and the family of skinks (*Scincidae*) has well over 300 species in it. Of the twenty-nine species in the Perth region we believe we have encountered *Hemiergis quadrilineata*, *Ctenotus fallens* and *Acritoscincus trilineatus* this season - although it has often been difficult to identify with certainty.

*Hemiergis quadrilineata* 'two-toed mulch skink' shelters beneath leaf-litter, rocks and logs. It has a long tail; absence of ear-holes; shiny skin with a yellow underside; short weak limbs with two toes, and it travels in a snake-like manner.

*Ctenotus fallens* 'west coast ctenotus' burrows beneath shrubs and rocks. It has four narrow white stripes on its back with other white dashes, spots and blotches on its greyish-brown body and tail; comb-like projections at its ear openings; five toes on each of its strong little limbs, and it is swift and agile.

*Acritoscincus trilineatus* 'southwestern cool skink' is also brown/grey in colour. It usually has five indistinct dark brown/black lines on its back and a reddish chin and throat - the colour intensifying during breeding.

When occasionally in winter a drowsy skink is accidentally disturbed by our work, it is quickly returned to a warm safe spot nearby - with an apology of course!



Photographs courtesy C O'Neill & H Carrick

## DONATIONS SUPPORT SERAG EFFORTS

SERAG has been fortunate to receive some generous donations that have allowed us to tackle re-emerging problems in an area of A-Class Nature Reserve in front of 'Pelican Cove Apartments' at Alfred Cove.

Around ten years ago the site was almost completely covered with invasive kikuyu and typha, which were steadily removed and replaced with native sedges. Too difficult to remove by hand, over the past eighteen months kikuyu and couch had returned to again smother sedge-banks, and in open places nut grass (*Cyperus rotundus*) became rampant.

A donation from a quiet supporter of biodiversity protection facilitated a herbicide treatment of these weeds, in preparation for our planting of hundreds of seedlings donated by *Plantrite*; and assistance from *Wirambi Landcare* volunteers in planting and weeding there has also been very much appreciated.



Taking delivery of seedlings donated by *Plantrite*; SERAG and Wirambi volunteers at work

Photographs courtesy C O'Neill

## LANDCARE WEEK

Landcare Week was a time for some 'last minute' dry-land planting and the start of a seasonal emphasis on hand-weeding in our various project areas.

This photo shows the 'Saturday Morning at the Cove' team at work planting and weeding in a beautiful remnant area of melaleuca/eucalypt woodland, adjoining the Estuary.

Particular care is taken at this recovery site, as among the native flora being conserved is *Caladenia latifolia* - a lovely orchid commonly known as 'pink fairy'.



Photographs courtesy C O'Neill

We first noticed this species just a few years ago, when two plants revealed themselves in what for many years had been a neglected location. Since then, care and attention has seen the orchid spread to form quite a large patch.

During our Landcare Week efforts volunteers were very pleased to see a mass of single hairy leaves and tall flower spikes again emerging for Spring - each stem preparing to blossom with up to four pink flowers.

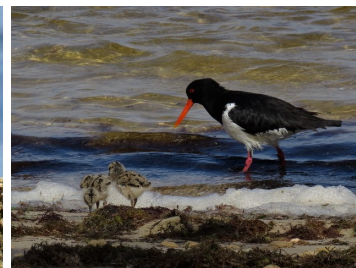
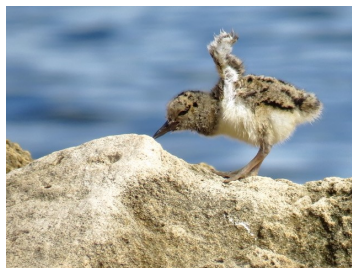
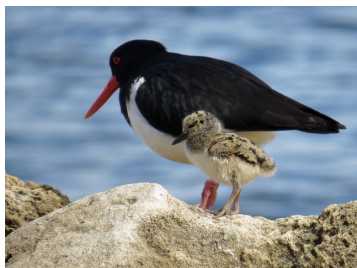


# MAJOR PROBLEMS FOR BEACH-NESTING BIRDS

The breeding season for the Estuary's beach-nesting birds (ie Pied Oystercatchers, Red-capped Plovers and Fairy Terns) generally commences in July/August, and will continue until the end of March. With so few relatively safe places left on the Estuary for their use - and the season coinciding with the peak period of recreational use of beaches - it can be a particularly hazardous time for them.

The family of Pied Oystercatchers below was spotted near Milyu, along the rocky waterfront beside the jet-ski beach:

*'I looked for the nest from atop my bike seat and saw a female Pied Oystercatcher sitting halfway up a mulched bank on the side of the freeway on-ramp. A very exposed location for a nest. Also, the chicks have to cross a busy bike path to get to the water. It all looks a bit perilous.'*



Mid-August, Pied Oyster-catcher and wonderfully camouflaged chicks head to the shoreline to forage *Photographs courtesy S Waller*

Given existing challenges of weather, predation and loss of habitat through development, the threat for beach-nesting birds now is disturbance from people using their few remaining breeding sites for recreation - walking, fishing etc.

Highly camouflaged eggs are easily trodden on by accident; if an adult is scared off a nest by passers-by, its eggs may either become too hot or too cold (depending on the weather) and the chick developing in the egg will not survive; or if people disturb a chick, it will run away to hide, interrupting its essential feeding time and possibly leading to starvation.

Hopefully we will all take *extra* care to avoid the beaches of the Swan Estuary Marine Park and other nesting sites.

## PLANTING AT MILYU NATURE RESERVE

On a recent crisp still morning, volunteers from SERAG and Curtin University gathered for an annual planting event at Milyu, organised by DBCA. Around seven hundred sedges were planted - tube-stock that had been steadily conditioned to withstand the salinity of the Estuary.

Maintaining the narrow strip of A-Class Nature Reserve between the foreshore and Kwinana Freeway not only supports the ecological values of the Marine Park, but also strengthens the last remaining ribbon of native vegetation between Canning Bridge and The Narrows, to function as an important wildlife corridor.

Motorists and cyclists travelling north during storms will also have noticed the strip's considerable buffering effect - significantly diminishing the force of wind and water blown onto transport infrastructure and eroding shorelines in denuded places.



Heading over the Freeway to Milyu  
*Photograph courtesy C O'Neill*



## FOR YOUR SEPTEMBER CALENDAR

- *TREEmendous* Tuesdays Alfred Cove 7.00am - 9.00am
- 05 (Sat) *UWA@PP* 8.30am - 10.30am
- 07 *National Threatened Species Day*
- 10 (Thur) *CV!* at Pelican Point 9.00am - 12.00noon
- 11 (Fri) *Wirambi* at Alfred Cove 9.00am - 12.00noon
- 12 (Sat) Community Bird Walk 3.30pm
- 14 Monthly Monday at Milyu Clean-up 7.30am - 9.30am
- 26 Saturday Morning at the Cove 8.30am - 10.30am
- 27 *International Rivers Day*

Please contact SERAG to register your interest in any event.



Notice is given of SERAG's  
Annual General Meeting  
to be held on  
Wednesday 21st October 2020  
commencing at 6.00pm.



Swan Estuary Reserves Action Group Inc.

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