



ALFRED COVE OSPREY ENTANGLED IN FISHING LINE

Over the years SERAG has reported on many distressing situations in which much-loved wildlife have been caught in carelessly discarded fishing and crabbing gear. You will perhaps remember most vividly the recent deaths of river dolphin and their dependent young.

In early December the community was once again alarmed when one of Alfred Cove's three resident osprey became entangled in fishing line and debris, inhibiting its capacity to fish and perch. Over succeeding weeks the many people hoping to help it could only watch and wait, as it is very difficult to catch and assist any bird when it can still fly.

Later sightings of the osprey family indicate the bird may have successfully freed its talons - and we hope it can once again function fully. However, fishing line is tough and can be difficult to see, so we remain vigilant.

To mitigate the high likelihood of similar problems arising again from recreational fishing at the site, we have written to relevant State Ministers requesting that the small area of river shallows forming the Swan Estuary Marine Park is managed as a 'no-take' sanctuary zone for native flora and fauna.

There are many less-sensitive places in the Estuary for fisher-folk to enjoy, but very little habitat left for wildlife conservation.



Photographs courtesy A O'Connor

HELP FROM WA SEABIRD RESCUE

WA Seabird Rescue (WASR) is a dedicated non-profit community organization working to conserve wildlife. The group was formed in 2003 to rescue and rehabilitate orphaned and injured seabirds and waterbirds in southern regions.

Properly trained and equipped, WASR volunteers provide excellent support - including in the Swan River Estuary - as the photographs (right) and others on their website attest:

- The entangled wing of a Caspian Tern, rescued from Attadale foreshore;
- Removing a fishing lure and hooks embedded in the chest of an osprey rescued at Point Walter, and
- WASR volunteer Claire Greenwell searching for the distressed osprey at Alfred Cove on an extremely hot day in December - one of numerous people actively concerned for the bird's welfare.



SERAG urges people to contact **WASR (08) 6102 8464** if they encounter a seabird or waterbird in difficulty. If the matter is not urgent, email info@wasr.org.au.

The **Wildcare Helpline (08) 9474 9055** provides advice to people on where to find care for sick or injured native wildlife - including for marine mammals such as dolphin. It can be called in any wildlife emergency anywhere in WA.

Native ARC (08) 9417 7105 is a local organization that cares for injured wildlife.

*Photographs courtesy L Beavis;
C Greenwell & C O'Neill*

PEOPLE-PRESSURE ON PELICAN POINT



Some of the birdlife dependent on undisturbed beaches and shallows at Pelican Point *Photographs courtesy C O'Neill*

Unrestricted access to Pelican Point Marine Park is placing enormous pressures on the fragile natural values of this small but life-sustaining refuge for native flora and fauna - many of which are threatened or priority species.

Protected by fencing until recent years, the Marine Park at Pelican Point includes melaleuca woodland, a lagoon of temperate coastal saltmarsh, beaches and dunes, mudflats and sea-grass meadows, shallows and a sand-spit. Each of these provides essential resting, nesting and/or feeding habitat for a diverse assemblage of beautiful birds.

To name but a few: Osprey; Variegated Fairy-wren; Rainbow Bee-eater; Buff-banded Rail; Striated Pardalote; Welcome Swallow; Mistletoebird; Black-winged Stilt; Yellow-billed Spoonbill; various species of Cormorant, Egret, Heron and Duck; trans-equatorial migratory waders including Red-necked Stint, Grey Plover and Curlew Sandpiper; beach-nesting birds such as Fairy (and other) Tern, Pied Oystercatcher and Red-capped Plover; and of course, Black Swan and Pelican.



Unfortunately, damaged sections of the protective fence have not been replaced, allowing for unrestricted beach access. This has resulted in resting, nesting and foraging birds being increasingly put to flight, discouraging their continued use of what was once a safe place.

For migratory shorebirds it means energy vital for journeying is wasted; for beach-nesting birds it means eggs and young are abandoned.

These photos are a tiny sample of daily disturbance over summer:

- People with three dogs ignore multiple signage and play on the spit;
- Man with dog ignores signage and strides along the beach;
- Items discarded on the shore over the Australia Day long weekend.



Despite explicit responsibility to protect the ecological values of Pelican Point and the clear endorsement of the community to do so (*The natural areas along the river are really important and should be retained (95.6%) & It is acceptable for certain parts of the river foreshore to be closed off for the protection and rehabilitation of the natural environment (92.5%). (SRT, 2007)*) we fear a misplaced and short-sighted vision of 'parks for people' is being given precedence over conservation.

Yet each man kills the thing he loves... (Wilde)

ENTRIES FOR *SUMMER ON THE SWAN* PRINT EXHIBITION

'Overwintering' is an environmental project created by Melbourne artist Kate Gorringer-Smith which invites artists from Australia and New Zealand to visit and respond to the unique nature of their local migratory-shorebird habitat.

The Printmakers Association of Western Australia (PAWA) and SERAG are preparing for an exhibition of Overwintering works at Nyisztor Studio, Palmyra in October 2020, to correspond with World Migratory Bird Day in the southern hemisphere. The exhibition will be called *Summer on the Swan*.

PAWA is inviting its members and other Western Australian artists to create prints that respond to the unique nature of the shorebird habitat provided by the Swan Estuary Marine Park and other important local resting and foraging sites - such as Thomsons and Forrestdale Lakes.

To register your interest in contributing to the Exhibition, please contact Shelley Cowper at shelleyc@inet.net.au or through PAWA at admin@pawa.org.au.

Shelley will also run a 'skill-share' for PAWA members in April and a print-making workshop thereafter. Others are very welcome, but they would have to join the Association. Again - please contact Shelley for further information.

FOLLOWING THE SUN



Greenshanks among other water- and wading birds at Pelican Point and Alfred Cove Photographs courtesy D Brauhart & M Matassa

Migratory shorebirds such as the Common Greenshank undertake the longest known migration of any species.

They follow the sun, flying the length of the East Asian Australasian Flyway from Australian shores to the Arctic Circle to breed each year during the northern summer, then return to spend the southern summer here.

Destruction and degradation of their wetland and intertidal habitats all along the flyway means migratory shorebirds have experienced population declines, with latest figures from BirdLife Australia revealing declines of up to 80% over the last 30 years. The protection and recovery of habitat areas across the flyway - including within Australia - is vital to arrest this decline and strengthen numbers into the future.

BIRD-WATCHING & IDENTIFICATION OPPORTUNITIES

Over the summer months - with scopes and binoculars to share and with the guidance of some very experienced members - SERAG hosted a series of bird-watching and identification opportunities for the wider community.

Depending on ambient conditions and time of day, participants have been introduced to some of the many species of birdlife using Alfred Cove.

A highlight of a particular evening event in December was spotting a Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) - a migratory shorebird that has journeyed here from its breeding grounds on the Arctic tundra in western Alaska.



Pacific Golden Plover; Experts, binoculars and scopes assist in identifying birdlife Photographs courtesy C O'Neill

BROWN SONGLARK AT ALFRED COVE

On a similar community event held on a morning in January, a Brown Songlark (*Cincloramphus cruralis*) was an exciting discovery near Troy Park.

A small passerine bird found throughout much of Australia, it is highly nomadic, moving from drought-affected areas to areas of recent rainfall. It prefers open country or grassy scrub, and feeds on seeds and insects.

Males are significantly larger than females and are the singers. They engage in 'song flights': displays of musical song, delivered from perches and when rising steeply above their breeding territory.

The pair's nest is a small depression in the ground - often in a protective clump of grass.



Brown Songlark (male, in its dark cinnamon breeding plumage)
Photographs courtesy J Christenson

ANOTHER UNUSUAL SIGHTING

During the same event a White-necked Heron (*Ardea pacifica*) was seen on the saltmarsh of Alfred Cove.

It was in breeding plumage - having no spots on its neck.

These heron are nomadic and more usually found in fresh waters, rather than in tidal areas such as the Cove.

They feed by wading in shallow water or stalking through wet grass looking for fish, amphibians, crustaceans and insects.

Photographs courtesy J Christenson



SEDGE-PLANTING TO ARREST EROSION

On a rare cool summer morning, over a hundred pots and nine large hedge bags of mature *Juncus kraussii* were planted along the Attadale foreshore, where steady erosion has narrowed the already thin margin of A-Class Nature Reserve.

SERAG was grateful to have had the assistance of people from CVA and DBCA in planting these and other sedges before the end of January, to allow them to establish strongly before the onset of winter storms and tidal surges.



Photographs courtesy Y Tulloch

AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE FESTIVAL EVENT

'Our Heritage for the Future' being the theme for this year's Australian Heritage Festival, SERAG's contribution to the celebrations will be an event called *Saltmarsh and Shorebirds* - a morning's exploration of Alfred Cove, focusing on some wonderful much-treasured aspects of our natural heritage.

Coastal saltmarshes are recognised nationally and globally as ecosystems of immense ecological value which are increasingly under threat - as are many of the species of shorebird that rely on and form part of them.

The event will include speakers such as samphire expert Bindy Datson, and a guided walk along part of Alfred Cove foreshore, pausing to identify some of the native flora and fauna of this important remnant in the Swan River Estuary. Panoramic views of the Cove's unique biodiversity and landscape values - surviving within their urban context - can be directly appreciated. There will also be an opportunity to learn a little about the challenges ahead and community efforts to protect this special place - for both its intrinsic value and for the enjoyment of future generations.

The Festival runs from 18 April to 19 May, with our event scheduled for opening day.

BURSTING INTO FLOWER

A beautiful young *Corymbia calophylla* - planted at Pelican Point by Professor Stephen Hopper as part of SERAG's celebration of the 2016 Heritage Festival - burst into flower this year.

Formerly known as *Eucalyptus calophylla*, *Corymbia calophylla* can grow up to forty metres in height and occurs naturally through the south-west of Western Australia in a range of habitats.

The species can be easily distinguished by its brown to grey-brown rough bark, arranged in a tessellating pattern. Its large urn shaped nuts are commonly referred to as 'honky nuts' and hold large seeds that provide a fabulous food source to native birds such as parrots and cockatoos.

The tree also exudes a red or rust-coloured sap that weeps from wounds in its bark - and its common name, *Marri*, is a Nyoongar word for blood.



Photograph courtesy T Graham-Taylor

GRANTS TO ASSIST SERAG IN 2020

Continued support through DBCA's *Community Rivercare* Program will enable SERAG to complete its second and embark on a third year of concentrated effort on the Attadale foreshore. Invasive weeds, breaches in vegetation and erosion mitigation will be tackled by both our volunteers and students from Curtin University.

A State NRM *Community Stewardship* Grant of \$8,550 will assist us extend improvements in heavily degraded margins along the Tompkins Park foreshore, with a focus on weed-management and replacement.

Finally, SERAG has been fortunate to receive support for its bush-care efforts at Pelican Point through the Swan Alcoa Landcare Program (SALP). Funding of \$8,300 will help in the recovery of an area impacted by fire last year, and the continued restoration of a damp-land site where a beautiful swale of samphire and sedges had been overtaken by weeds. In this we are pleased to have the assistance of students from the University of Western Australia.

WORK CONTINUES

Weeding has continued each Tuesday morning over summer at various spots along the riparian margin of the Marine Park at Alfred Cove.

Even on 40° days, cool breezes off the River and very early (6.30am!) starts have thankfully made for quite pleasant working conditions.

On this occasion, while some volunteers tackled outbreaks of Caltrop on adjacent grassed areas, others - such as those in the photo - removed *Juncus acutus* from among native sedges on the Attadale foreshore.

Photograph courtesy M Matassa



FOR YOUR MARCH CALENDAR

- *TREEmendous Tuesdays* Alfred Cove 6.30am - 8.30am
- 01 *World Wildlife Day & Clean Up Australia Day*
- 01 (Sun) *UWA@PP* 8.30am - 10.30am
- 09 *Monthly Monday at Milyu Litter Collection* 7.30am - 9.30am
- 12 (Thur) *CV!* Alfred Cove 9.00am - 12.00noon
- 13 *International Day of Action for Rivers*
- 13 (Fri) *Bushcare* Alfred Cove 9.00am - 12.00noon
- 21 *Saturday Morning at the Cove* 7.30am - 9.30am
- 23 *National Eucalypt Day*
- 26 (Thur) *CV!* Alfred Cove 9.00am - 12.00noon
- *Watering at Alfred Cove & Pelican Point*

Please contact SERAG to register your interest and for further details.

MMMILYU RESUMES

After a year unable to access to Milyu due to Freeway widening works, we are please that the *Monthly Monday at Milyu* team can once again complete regular early-morning litter collections.

Our first clean-up for 2020 will be on 9th March.



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