



THE EUCALYPTS OF MATILDA BAY

National Eucalypt Day is an initiative of the Bjarne K Dahl Trust, which aims to foster community awareness and appreciation of eucalypts and celebrate the important place they hold in the hearts and lives of Australians. The Trust focuses on eucalypts as an Australian icon and a significant aspect of Australia's natural environment and biodiversity, encouraging research into their numerous species.

This year National Eucalypt Day will be celebrated on **Wednesday 23rd March**.

Acknowledging the importance of eucalypts in the rich complexity of our ecosystems, SERAG will plant some mature saplings at Pelican Point to celebrate the Day.

Later in May, during National Trust Heritage Week, we will be inviting members of the wider community to join us on a guided walk to view the eucalypts of Matilda Bay and Pelican Point, to be led by renowned botanist Professor Stephen Hopper (AC FLS FTSE).

We thank Professor Hopper and the Bjarne K Dahl Trust for generously supporting what should prove a very interesting and enjoyable event.



Matilda Bay

Photograph courtesy: Tim Graham-Taylor

THE INAUGURAL 'CLEAN OUR RIVERS WEEK'

In response to the latest entanglement of river dolphin, *Keep Australia Beautiful* joined forces with the Swan River Trust's *River Guardians* to launch the inaugural *Clean Our Rivers Week*, held in mid January. Their aims were to raise awareness about the impact of litter on river health and to encourage community involvement in river care.

We chose a currently 'unloved' stretch of Marine Park foreshore in Melville to host our event, which was very well supported by young and old alike, with volunteers having an immediate impact by collecting sixteen bags of litter within a couple of hours.



Volunteers enjoy refreshments and a chat after the event

Photograph courtesy: Margaret Matassa

IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO REGISTER!



SERAG has again registered Pelican Point as a site for Clean Up Australia Day, to be held on **Sunday March 6th**.

For the last few years a large number of people have very kindly devoted a couple of hours of their Sunday morning helping to collect rubbish from in and around the foreshore of Matilda Bay through Pelican Point to JH Abrahams Reserve. An enjoyable and beneficial activity, finishing with light refreshments, the cleanup will also be the first of our monthly partnerships with the UWA Guild Volunteering Hub for the year.

If you would like to come along, it is not too late to **register on the Clean Up Australia Day website**, where you will also find details of what to wear and when and where to meet: www.cleanupaustraliaday.org.au/.

PLAN FOR BIKE PATH THROUGH NATURE RESERVE

The City of Melville has proposed the construction of a cycleway/boardwalk through Alfred Cove A-Class Nature Reserve to cater for the growing number of cyclists using the current dual-use pathway that meanders along the river foreshore. The concept (shown by a red dotted line in the lower left of the plan below) forms part of the Tompkins Park Precinct Re-development Vision, which aims to increase facilities available for sport and recreation.

If constructed, the boardwalk will greatly increase the impact of urban transport and recreational activities on this fragile Nature Reserve and the adjacent Marine Park - both of which already suffer under severe urban pressures.

Excising a large section of protected foreshore from this small conservation reserve for conversion to active human use will not only greatly diminish the area of habitat available to native fauna, but also introduce enormous disturbance factors as nesting, resting and foraging birdlife are exposed to pelotons of cyclists flashing by.

As well, access to the shoreline will become easier, increasing problems of littering, trampling of vegetation and vandalism. Construction may also lead to issues of soil acidification.

While any funding that may come from the transport sector for the cycle boardwalk may appeal as a “quick fix” to a number of issues, the installation will have massive and long-term detrimental impacts on the environmental values of this internationally significant wetland.

We believe that all levels of government should plan for the Reserve’s continued conservation as a matter of priority and allocate funding to this end. Hence, among other recommended modifications, SERAG will suggest a different route for the cycle path that will achieve positive outcomes for both active and passive recreation, without compromising the natural environment.

The Plan will be open for public comment in the near future, so we urge members and friends to take the opportunity to provide feedback.



THIRTEEN GREAT KNOT SIGHTED

One of many volunteers who collect population data on migratory shorebirds for BirdLife Australia, Toni Webster was thrilled to count thirteen Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*) feeding in the shallows at Alfred Cove late last year. To see such a number is now a rare occurrence.

Data from over twenty-five years of monitoring have indicated an alarming fall in shorebird numbers, with some species showing a 50% to 80% decline! Available evidence has led to the recent listing of Eastern Curlew and Great Knot as vulnerable to extinction on the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) 'Red List'.



Great Knot

Photograph courtesy: John Vogel

Destruction of shorebird habitat here and elsewhere has been the principal cause. However it requires international cooperation to maintain the habitats from Siberia to Australia that migratory species rely on to survive.

These long-distance travellers arrive in Australia in August or September and leave in March or April to return to their breeding grounds in the tundra areas of Siberia (and for some Alaska), to breed in June and July. While here, they live along quiet stretches of the coast or inland waters, spreading out over the wet sand or mud to feed on small worms and a variety of molluscs and crustaceans to restore their energy levels, or to rest.

BirdLife Australia's **Shorebirds 2020 Program** aims to provide reliable data on shorebird decline and the factors that cause it. It is hoped that this information will support efforts to protect shorebirds and their habitats effectively, both in Australia and along their migration route. For further details or to donate to this important initiative, please see: <http://birdlife.org.au/projects/shorebirds-2020>.

In the meantime, stronger protection of tidal ecosystems and wetlands is urgently required - including in and around the Swan River Estuary, where migratory shorebirds have come for millennia.

CAUGHT SNOOZING



Bobtail

Photograph courtesy: Cathie O'Neill

One of our younger volunteers was rather startled by this fabulous fellow, found enjoying a little snooze in amongst the grasses and sedges where we were hand-weeding. It is a *Tiliqua rugosa rugosa* - a short-tailed, slow-moving species of blue-tongued skink, commonly known as a bobtail lizard.

The bobtail is a much-loved inhabitant of our bush land. Harmless to humans, it eats such things as snails, insects, berries and flowers. When frightened, it will turn towards the threat, open its mouth wide and stick out its broad blue tongue, bluffing ferocity in the hope of scaring off the intruder.

Unlike most lizards, bobtails tend to be monogamous, partnering for life (on average 12 years). While each lives independently for most of the time, pairs reunite each breeding season, which is generally from September to November.

Unfortunately they and their young are easy prey for suburban dogs and cats, and predatory birds like kookaburras.

FENCE EXTENSION AT ALFRED COVE

With the assistance of a *Coastwest* grant, the low fence protecting much of Alfred Cove will soon be extended to protect one of the last significant areas of samphire and shore rush in the lower Swan Estuary.

Its installation will improve public safety by better delineating community access to the splendid views to be enjoyed across the Cove, while at the same time reducing the harm caused to the Cove's outstanding ecological and aesthetic values by the random trampling of fragile riparian vegetation and accidental intrusion upon native fauna.

DESTRUCTION OF HABITAT AT ALFRED COVE

The destruction of sedges, shrubs and trees at restoration areas in and around Alfred Cove and Troy and Tompkins parks continues, with a financial cost now conservatively estimated at \$70,000.

There are far more important repercussions of this terrible behavior, however, including:

- the negative impact that the loss of habitat will have on the diversity of birdlife and other native fauna that increasingly rely on the area for sanctuary;
- the deterioration of river water quality through the loss of the filtering function of riparian vegetation on nutrients and contaminants, increasing the likelihood of problems such as toxic algal blooms which cause the deaths of fish and other aquatic life as well as unpleasant odors, and water-borne pathogens that can cause a risk to public health;
- an increase in erosion of river embankments through the loss of the stabilizing effects of riparian vegetation, leading to loss of infrastructure and the exposure of old refuse sites, and
- the loss of the general amenity and health benefits provided to bird-watchers, photographers, walkers and cyclists and the many others who deliberately seek the natural tranquility of this place to enjoy.



Trees, shrubs and sedges poisoned at erosion site
Photograph courtesy: Cathie O'Neill

Further, the many hundreds of community volunteers - including school children, university students and corporate groups - who have joined with SERAG's members and friends to contribute thousands of hours caring for this unique and beautiful part of the Swan Estuary will be greatly distressed to see the wanton destruction of their achievements.

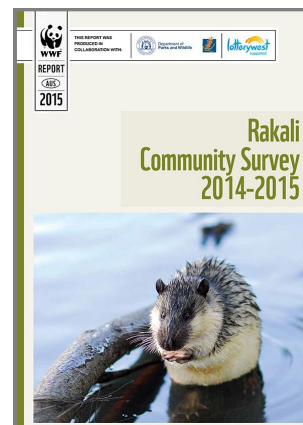
RAKALI REPORT LAUNCHED

Last December, having participated in a 'citizen science' project to ascertain the current range of the elusive Rakali (*Hydromys chrysogaster*), SERAG was delighted to accept an invitation from the World Wildlife Fund and the Department of Parks and Wildlife to attend the launch of their new report.

The survey was carried out between December 2014 and March 2015 and unfortunately found that the rakali's range has contracted towards the south-west and that there are areas of localised decline in the Perth metropolitan area. Habitat loss and degradation in association with a drying climate were identified as major threats to the species.

The survey also found that close to half of all the dead rakali reported had drowned in recreational marron (freshwater crayfish) traps. Hence, WWF is calling for greater efforts to address the illegal use of box/opera house marron traps in public and private waterways.

The report is available on: [Rakali Community Survey 2014-2015 - WWF Australia](#).



FOR YOUR MARCH CALENDAR

- TREEmendous Tuesdays Alfred Cove 7.00am - 9.00am
- 02 Bush-care at Pelican Point 8.30am - 2.30pm
- 06 Clean Up Australia Day Pelican Point 8.30am - 10.30am
- 14 Monthly Monday at Milyu 7.30am - 9.30am
- 23 National Eucalypt Day Bush-care at Pelican Point 8.30am - 2.30pm
- 26 Saturday Morning at the Cove 8.30 am - 10.30am
- Watering at Pelican Point & Alfred Cove

Please register your interest if you would like to participate in any event.

While our fauna-monitoring has not yet confirmed the presence of Rakali at Alfred Cove, we have found evidence of Quenda (*Isodon obesulus fusciventer*); so we hope that with continued restoration and care the river foreshore may become healthy enough to once again support the lovely native 'water-mouse with golden belly'.



Swan Estuary Reserves Action Group Inc.

Mail: PO Box 73 North Fremantle WA 6159

Phone: 08 9339 2439

Email: swanestuaryreserves@gmail.com

Website: www.swanestuaryreserves.org.au