



## VALE CATHIE

On October 22, 2021 we were profoundly sad to lose our foundational Chairperson, Cathie O'Neill to her battle with cancer.

It was clear from the tributes that poured in for Cathie following her death, that Cathie was a person who was tireless in her efforts for others in whatever role she found herself. These great strengths of spirit and selflessness were just some of Cathie's many gifts.

As principal and founding principal of several high schools, teachers, parents and students received the benefit of her deep understanding of human nature and her kindness, particularly to those whose struggle was greatest.

Cathie's retirement from the Education Department saw her able to fully engage in her great passion for the environment and all creatures great and small.

I first met Cathie down on the foreshore of Attadale at a community planting day in 2007 and we quickly found common ground in our love for the environment and our desire to see the Alfred Cove (& Attadale) A-Class Nature Reserve returned to the native habitat for which it had been created.

But Cathie's vision was always far-reaching and she very quickly grasped the vital link between the Marine Park foreshore at Attadale - Alfred Cove and its extension along Tompkins Park, with that of Pelican Point and of Milyu.

I remember gasping "Surely that's taking on a bit too much!" when Cathie expressed her desire to rehabilitate all of these areas, as we discussed forming an environmental group together.

There was no doubt in Cathie's mind however, and so the Swan Estuary Reserves Action Group was formed in 2010 with the goal of conserving and restoring the Reserves bordering the three sections of the Marine Park along with adjacent Reserves, with the livelihood of the flora and fauna that depend on them foremost.

These past eleven years has seen Cathie's vision gradually emerging – foreshore vegetation that was becoming overwhelmed and dying from the onslaught of weed species has come back to life and birds that had been listed as gone from the Swan Estuary are breeding again in the sedges.

Cathie's strong belief in education ensured that SERAG quickly linked up with volunteers from UWA, Curtin and Murdoch, and many of these students came to love and appreciate Cathie, and feel part of the big picture of restoration of our unique biodiversity.

Local high schools were invited to select students to participate in a weekend immersion that Cathie organised, and they were able to hear from DBCA staff, Indigenous leaders and historians to see the big picture of our iconic Swan Estuary.

Cathie had a great appreciation of art and of its capacity to inspire, so school children were invited to contribute their artwork to SERAG's displays at community fairs, or to take part in a poster competition about shorebirds.

Cathie was delighted when SERAG hosted the national Overwintering Art Exhibition, with local print artists invited to create prints about the wetlands and the birds that visit them, particularly the trans-equatorial migratory waders that fly home here to the Swan Estuary Marine Park shallows every summer.



SERAG organised Science events on the foreshore and celebrations of environmental milestones such as the closure of foreshore tips – any idea which might attract the public's attention was fair game with Cathie so as to promote greater understanding and appreciation of caring for our Estuary and its creatures.

To all of these events, Cathie added her touch of depth and style, and was an inspiration to the committee members who worked alongside her.

Colleagues, volunteers and students alike, have appreciated Cathie as a friend and mentor, who would always redirect any attention away from herself and towards the needs of our natural world.

In this way Cathie's legacy is very much ongoing, as she was always concerned to share her ideas and her thinking within the many groups she was involved with, and ensured everyone undertook roles and responsibilities, giving them whatever support they felt they needed.

Right to the end, Cathie aimed to leave no stone unturned in her quest for a better world for our native flora and fauna, and gifted her estate to environmental causes, including of course, SERAG. Cathie was a tireless advocate for better understanding and greater protection of what we have left of our environment before it is too late.

SERAG will hold a simple remembrance to Cathie with the installation of a pardalote box at Alfred Cove in the near future.

Cathie will also be honoured with the construction of a seat and arbor within the Alfred Cove A-Class Reserve donated by the City of Melville in recognition of the enormous contribution made by Cathie to the community through her tireless efforts to retain and restore natural areas throughout the City of Melville. SERAG thanks the City staff and Council for their condolences and ongoing support of Cathie's vision.

The committee along with friends, colleagues and associates will remember Cathie in the birds singing, the Osprey wheeling, and the pardalotes peeking from their nest holes. Her presence lives on.



## POSTER PARTNERS

Early in August 2021 the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) hosted their fourth Shorebirds poster competition. This unique environmental competition was free to enter and offered over \$4000 in prizes for Year 3 to 6 students in schools across Australia.

ANSTO invited students to create an ecotourism poster for a local wetland or coastal area that provides an important habitat for shorebirds and other animals.

Students from Ashburton Drive Primary School entered the competition and at its conclusion SERAG Committee members Robin Napier and Margaret Matassa attended the School Assembly to present books to five of the students for their creative work.

SERAG also gave a magnificent coffee table photobook of John Vogel's photos of Birds of the South Western Australia for the school library.

SERAG congratulated the students and their teacher, Nelomie Ranasinghe for their creative and thoughtful posters about taking care when visiting wetlands so as to observe and enjoy the birds without disturbance to them or their habitat.



Article - M Matassa Photograph - N Ranasinghe

## AGM OCTOBER 2021

At SERAG's AGM last October the presentations by the two guest speakers, Dr Peter Novak and Mark Thornley of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions were greatly appreciated by all in attendance.

Dr Peter Novak, presented preliminary findings from the WA Plan for Plastics study conducted in collaboration with the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation to establish a baseline for plastics pollution at twelve beach sites on the Swan and Canning Rivers.

Mark Thornley, Project Manager for the Plastic-Free River Park Project 2021 – 2025, outlined how the project is designed to reduce the amount of plastics entering the Swan and Canning Rivers and to work with food providers and other stakeholders near the waterways to introduce environmentally friendly ways to switch to non-plastic alternatives.

The Chairperson's and Treasurer's reports were well received and the Volunteer Coordinator thanked all volunteers for their help, issuing gift vouchers to those who contributed more than 25 hours since last October. Margaret Matassa then presented long-term members, Keith and Dot Collins, with Lifetime Memberships.

The retiring treasurer, Steve Napier was acknowledged for his great work over many years, including for his AV assistance with special presentations.

Robert Harvey was welcomed back to the committee, taking on the Chairperson's role, with Geoff Webster continuing as Deputy Chairperson, Margaret Matassa as Secretary and Nicole Elischer as the new Treasurer.

Seven general committee members were elected which included three new members. This gives SERAG a strong committee going forward and all these new and returning members were warmly congratulated.



Dr Peter Novak



Project Manager - Plastic Free River Park Mark Thornley



Keith Collins and Margaret Matassa

# The 18<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL WETLANDS CONFERENCE

## Healing the land, Healing the relationships

The theme for the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual WA Wetlands Conference, held at the Wetlands Centre in Cockburn was 'Cultural Wisdom and Scientific Innovations for our Wetlands'.

The Aboriginal People feel a strong connection to the land, so it follows that to heal and repair our damaged environment will also be steps in reconciliation.

The conference, whose first day was February 2<sup>nd</sup> (World Wetlands Day) covered the theme of drawing on Aboriginal Peoples' knowledge, wisdom and culture when building and working near waterways to 'decolonialise' development (*Jones, T 2022*).

Underpinning the conference though was that everyone has a stake in the conservation of our wetlands. Clear examples of this were demonstrated by Dr. Michael Coote in his presentation about buffer zones around wetlands.

A standard 50 metre buffer was adopted as the accepted practice, but not before roads, housing and infrastructure was built within the 50m next to a lot of the remaining wetlands.

Since the standard 50m buffer zone was introduced, research has shown different species have different buffering needs. For example, protection of the frog life cycle requires a buffer of about 159-200m and the movement of the quokka can be up to 40 km from waterways.

Protection from nutrient inputs and sedimentation are about a 100m buffer as a minimum, and protection from weed invasion, a major source of work for SERAG, can require a buffer zone up to 100m.

As we live, recreate, build and develop in the area of the river or wetlands, we are impacting on wildlife. Therefore, we have a stake in the future health of the river or wetlands, and our changes to the landscape are being watched and felt by our First Nations people.

This is a matter for deep thought, since over the last 300 years, a staggering 87% of the world's wetlands have been lost.

Noongar cultural knowledge will be vital in our fight to save our South West wetlands, with dual naming of places, plants and animals a step forward in increasing respect and understanding.



Noongar : Biboolboom

European : Swamp Paperbarks

Scientific : *Melaleuca raphiophylla*

## REWARDS OF WEEDING

Early Tuesday mornings throughout summer, our intrepid team of TREEmendous Tuesday volunteers tackles different weeds in widely varying soil types, each presenting unique challenges and rewards.

The bushland section shown in the photos below started out a few years ago as bare infill soil, and was planted out with local natives, so as to extend the protection of the remnant old-growth paperbarks and trees, *Melaleuca raphiophylla* and *Eucalyptus rudis* that comprise the dampland swales along Burke Drive.

There is a vast store of seed in the soil which mainly produces weeds but thankfully also a few *Acacia saligna* and *Eucalyptus rudis* saplings.

One of the annual tasks is to hand weed the very prickly Wild Lettuce - *Lactuca saligna* as seen in the first photo below, but great satisfaction is gained by revealing some of the planted understory of *Rhagodia baccata* as well as the thriving saplings of *Eucalyptus rudis*. This transformation is reward enough for the two hours of solid work, but there is no beating the pleasure of the cuppa and cake by the river that follows each session.



# GRANT NEWS

SERAG volunteers are a familiar sight working on the Attadale, Alfred Cove and Tompkins Park foreshores and regularly receive encouragement from passing walkers and cyclists. Fortunately, our ability to carry on that work received a significant boost with the announcement in January that SERAG had been successful in obtaining another grant under the Community Rivercare Program. The grant provides funding for 4 years from 1 July 2022 and will cover three projects.

First the removal and revegetation of the last section of *Typha orientalis* on the Tompkins Park foreshore. *Typha orientalis* is usually found in freshwater habitat and has only become established on the Marine Park foreshore because of the influx of fresh water from drains and from nearby reticulated areas. In this situation it becomes a monoculture and out-competes the *Juncus kraussii* and *Samphire* spp that comprise the Saltmarsh community which belongs on this foreshore. Hence permission has been obtained with this grant and with previous grants under the Coastwest and NRM Community Stewardship programs for the removal of these large areas of *Typha* along the foreshore, with this grant enabling us to complete the last section. The contrast between the rehabilitated areas and that left to be done is readily evident from these photos.



2015 - Section of *Typha* before removal



2017 - The same foreshore after rehabilitation following *Typha* removal



2022 - Section of remaining *Typha* monoculture

Secondly, attacking the weed species *Carex divisa* which has spread significantly along the Attadale foreshore and seems to have particularly enjoyed last winter's rain. *Carex divisa* is a low growing sedge native to Europe, Asia and North America which out-competes the local sedge, *Juncus kraussii*. It has become naturalised in certain parts of Australia, but following a successful trial last year, SERAG will be commissioning herbicide treatment of this invasive species and then undertaking extensive replanting with native sedges.

The third part of the grant is aimed at a continuation of the general weed control, replanting and erosion mitigation funded by previous grants, including the just completed Community Rivercare Grant covering the foreshore at Attadale and Alfred Cove. The area to be managed under the new grant takes in approximately 3.5 kilometres of river foreshore extending from Roberts Road in Attadale to the Cunningham Street car park in Applecross.

## NOT TOO HOT FOR SMAC VOLUNTEERS!



The forecast was for a 40° day but it takes more than a hot day to stop volunteers getting out for a Saturday morning at the Cove! (SMAC)

Armed with coir rolls, stakes and wire as well as drills, wire cutters and sledge hammers the group got stuck into erosion mitigation at the river's edge near Haig Road in Attadale. A slightly different method of securing the coir rolls is being trialled in the hope that the coir rolls may survive more than one winter. Planting large sedge hedges over the next few years with funding from the new Community Rivercare Grant should also assist in providing a long-term solution. The success that has been achieved so far is clearly demonstrated by the survival of the casuarinas at this site notwithstanding the impact of high winter storm surges.

After all the hard work, the group enjoyed morning tea and cold watermelon under the casuarinas and experienced first-hand the importance of trees. As highlighted in an earlier newsletter, the temperature under the trees felt about 10° cooler than in the middle of the grassed dog-walking area at the Attadale Reserve.

A special thank you to the Melville City Rotaract volunteers who helped out and made the morning such a success.



*Before and after coir roll installation*

*Article - R Peek Photographs - P Seebeck*

## THANKS FOR THE DRINK !



If you think the summer has been hot, be grateful you are not a young plant on the foreshore - even the usual Fremantle Doctor air-conditioning has been missing!

It has been a tough job keeping our young plants alive this summer with even those that are more than 2 years old suffering. But dedicated teams at Pelican Point and Attadale are doing their best to ensure the losses are minimised.

Watering at the Attadale foreshore occurs about once a month from November through to May using a watering trailer kindly made available by the City of Melville. Plants receive three good soakings when they are watered to ensure the water penetrates down to the roots.

Observing the plants the day after they have been watered is rewarding – the difference in some of them, especially the fleshy leafed *Scaevola crassifolia*, is clearly visible.

Thanks to the teams that give up time at the weekends to water – we, and the plants, certainly appreciate your efforts.



*In the Noongar seasonal calendar  
Bunuru is the  
Second summer: February-March*

*Article and Photograph - R Peek*

# MONTHLY MONDAYS AT MILYU

Hi, I live at Milyu Nature Reserve.

Milyu is the Aboriginal name for samphire. It's a narrow, but important strip of land (adjacent to the Kwinana Freeway) and is part of the Swan Estuary Marine Park.

This small area provides good feeding and resting areas for my family and for my friends - the stilts, sandpipers, red-capped plovers, various ducks and numerous swans who love feeding on the seagrass in this area. Occasionally an osprey will swoop down over the water in an amazing acrobatic display which delights us all. Exciting news is that a new family of Purple-backed Fairywrens have moved into the bush area!

Me? I prefer to plod along the water's edge searching the sand for worms or small crabs.

But this article isn't about me. It's about a small group of people I see once a month walking along the shoreline and into the wooded areas. They have yellow bags, a bit like a pelican's bill and have long, silver beak-like things which they use to pick up rubbish.

I heard them explaining to someone walking by that they belong to SERAG and they regularly pick up kilos of rubbish in and around the water's edge and in the bushes....mostly washed in from the river or dropped by people walking or cycling along the reserve.

These volunteers don't talk to us as they keep their distance but I notice that they often stand (sometimes on one leg) just looking and smiling at the various birds that are flying by, paddling or who, like me, are fossicking for their breakfast along the beach.

The birds here at Milyu appreciate the time these people put in to look after our area...they certainly make a difference and they certainly make the beach area safer for us! No more fishing line around our legs or plastic bits in our food.

Seeing these SERAG people laughing and talking, making a difference as they walk along, cleaning up and getting so excited when they see us and our chicks makes me think that they're quite enjoying themselves.... and I think we make a difference to them too.



Article - C Gillam and R Weir

Photographs - G Webster



## FOR YOUR MARCH CALENDAR



- 01 TREEmendous Tuesday Weeding Alfred Cove 6.30am - 8.30am
- 06 (Sun) UWA@PP Clean Up Australia Day 8.30am - 10.30am
- 08 TREEmendous Tuesday Weeding Alfred Cove 6.30am - 8.30am
- 12 (Sat) Monthly Bird Count 7.00am - 9.15am
- 14 Monthly Monday at Milyu 7.00am - 9.00am
- 15 TREEmendous Tuesday Weeding Alfred Cove 6.30am - 8.30am
- 17 (Thur) CV! Pelican Point 9.00am - 12.00noon
- 22 TREEmendous Tuesday Weeding Alfred Cove 6.30am - 8.30am
- 26 Saturday Morning at the Cove 7.30am - 9.30am
- 31 (Thur) CV! Alfred Cove 9.00am - 12.30am
- Watering at Alfred Cove and Pelican Point

Please contact SERAG to register your interest in any event.

## SERAG WEBSITE REDESIGNED!

We think everyone will enjoy our new-look website  
<https://swanestuaryreserves.org>

We extend our sincere thanks to Maddi McGowan of *Social Scheming* for her creativity and assistance with its design and commissioning. Due to privacy rules, we were unable to link our old website to the new, so please note that there is no 'au' in our new address.



Swan Estuary Reserves Action Group Inc.

Mail: PO Box 258 MELVILLE WA 6956

Phone: 08 9330 1791

Email: [admin@swanestuaryreserves.org](mailto:admin@swanestuaryreserves.org)

Website: <https://swanestuaryreserves.org>