

The Norman Wettenhall Foundation

Third Annual Report

1999

Chairman's Report

The last financial year to June 30, 1999 has been one of steady progress. The trustees have met on four occasions, and four of us visited north-eastern Victoria to see the conservation needs of the area and to meet those who were working to restore and improve the situation. Impressive efforts are certainly being made.

Peter Willcox retired as a trustee in November 1998 owing to pressure of other commitments, especially his appointment as Chairman-elect of Lend Lease Corporation. His advice and encouragement have been greatly appreciated and we thank him for his considerable contribution in helping to establish the Foundation. John Landy has been appointed in his place and with his knowledge of agriculture and conservation and his considerable network of informed individuals he is already making his mark.

The total assets of the Foundation were \$1,470,000 on June 30 and income was \$65,000. Both are expected to increase significantly during the coming year. Grants provided reached a total of \$58,900. It is interesting to note that grants distributed since the Foundation was established in 1996 total \$146,540. In the main body of the report there is a summary of the grants made and the results achieved so far. There were other worthy requests, but unfortunately sufficient funds were not available for all of them. Projects are preferred which will produce a long term effect, especially when a grant from our Foundation can be shown to make a significant difference to the effectiveness of the project. Our guidelines have not altered, except to emphasise the desirability of referees.

None of our success could have been achieved without the help of many people. I want to thank especially my fellow trustees, the staff of IPF Secretariat (notably Alexandra Withell and Scott Anderson who have been the executive officers), and all donors and supporters of our fund-raising who have enabled us to achieve our present degree of success.

Report on Distributions made by The Norman Wettenhall Foundation for the year ended June 30, 1999

Australian Science Archives Project, Melbourne, VIC – James Willis Botanic Archival project

A grant of \$9,630 was paid in support of the James Willis Botanic Archives.

James Willis was employed at the National Herbarium and later became Assistant Government Botanist. He played a major role in the writing of the definitive text on Victorian botany (Flora of Victoria). He was also a formidable advocate for conservation of Australia's historical and natural heritage.

The Willis collection is an extensive and significant collection of papers and photographs (approximately 4,200 items) chronicling the education, conservation efforts, botanical research and career of this important figure in Victorian Botany.

(cont'. – Australian Science Archives Project)

Documenting and safeguarding of the records that James Willis collected will ensure that his contribution and legacy to botanical research, conservation and education continues to be recognised and acknowledged.

Birds Australia, Melbourne, VIC – “Birds on Farms” project

A grant of \$7,088 was paid in support of the “Community Monitoring of Birds in Woodland Habitats”. The aim of this project is to utilise community involvement to monitor native bird communities in woodland habitats and to assess the effectiveness of revegetation and land rehabilitation projects in attracting native bird species back to farms where woodland habitats have been modified by human activity.

The work on this project continues as an important section of the new Australian Bird Atlas.

Birds Australia, Melbourne, VIC – “Wingspan” project

A grant of \$4,000 was paid in support of “Wingspan”, the quarterly colour magazine of Birds Australia. This grant will assist with the appointment of a part-time (two days a week) Editorial Assistant to provide editorial and administrative support to the Editor.

In the past few years the magazine has evolved rapidly from a 24 page membership newsletter to a 48 page full colour magazine. This critical grant will enable the staffing levels to be brought in line with the workload.

Murray Rural Land Protection Board, Jerilderie, NSW and Hume Rural Land Protection Board– “Environmental Assessment of Travelling Stock Reserves” project

Grants of \$5,000 and \$7,000 were paid to support the environmental assessment of travelling stock routes and reserves (TSR's) in the areas covered by the Murray and Hume Rural Lands Protection Board (RLP) respectively.

The project is to undertake a flora and fauna survey of all travelling stock reserves in the Murray RLPB and Hume RLPB. It will provide a report to each RLPB along with data sheets and guidelines to ensure good management to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the TSR's.

**Griffith University, QLD. (Australian School of Environmental Studies –
“Conservation priorities for the white bellied sea eagle” project**

A grant of \$4,988 was paid to support a study inspired by the declining sea eagle numbers in coastal regions subject to an ever-increasing degree of human related disturbances.

The project is a proactive approach to the design of management solutions regarding species population maintenance, using genetic analysis and habitat modelling. Ultimately it is hoped the methodology applied in this study will form a model for conservation management of other species in the future.

Molyullah Tatong Tree and Land Protection Group, Euroa, VIC – “Coordinator of the Regent Honeyeater” project

A commitment of \$10,000 was made towards this project. The first instalment of \$4,000 has been paid to allow the continuation of the coordinator in 1999. The major tasks will be to:

- protect and restore habitat areas;
- assist farmers with fencing, ripping, weed spraying, planting; support replanting failed areas;
- establish an indigenous plant nursery, which with the help of local school children propagates the seeds collected;
- enlist wider community participation in activities such as tree planting, collecting local seeds, etc.

Trust for Nature (Victoria), Melbourne, VIC – Flora and Fauna Survey program

A grant of \$5,700 was paid to support this project. It is designed to provide a service for private landholders wishing to know more about plants and animals on their land. The survey identifies local communities of plants and animals and thus the owner is helped to plan appropriate management. If strategies are not put in place much biodiversity and natural heritage will be lost.

University of Melbourne, Parkville, VIC – Watering Point Study by Rhidian Harrington

A grant of \$7,500 was paid in support of this project. Waterpoints are known to have a major controlling influence on animal distribution in semi-arid regions. Most studies have concentrated on the changes in vegetation and in mammal distributions associated with artificial waterpoints, while very little work has been conducted on the relationship between native avifauna and those waterpoints. This study will be conducted on Gluepot Station in the Murray Mallee of South Australia.

(cont'. – University of Melbourne – watering point study)

The objective is to determine which species utilise the waterpoints and under what circumstances. The grant will enable video surveillance equipment to be purchased, and this will be transferred to Birds Australia at the conclusion of this three year project.

A/Professor Stuart Pruett-Jones

A grant of \$4,000 was paid in support of the fieldwork carried out in Dr. Pruett-Jones' studies of the fairy wrens especially the white-winged fairy wren. These occur in mallee areas all over Australia and also on two islands off the coast of Western Australia, namely Barrow and Dirk Hartog islands, where the adult males are black with white wings. The primary objective of the research is to determine the genetic differentiation of the populations of the two islands and how closely each is related to the mainland population. A closely related objective is to initiate behavioural and ecological studies of these wrens, especially their intra-family relationships.

These studies were carried out in September and October 1998, and analysis of the results is continuing.

Progress reports on projects previously supported by the Foundation

Birds Australia – Nest Record Scheme

The data formerly recorded in a card system have all been transferred to a computer basis, the work being completed in December 1998 by Rory Poulter. The information is thus more readily available and has been of considerable help in the production of species accounts in HANZAB.

Field reports are still being received and added to the data base.

Birds Australia – Oral History project

In December, 1998 the National Council for the Centenary of Federation provided a grant to Birds Australia of \$89,649 for "A Centenary History of Ornithology in Australia during the twentieth century".

The grant will be used over a 3 year period to employ a part-time research assistant, for travel and other expenses, and towards editorial costs.

Dr. Libby Robin has been appointed as author and is coordinating the grant expenditure through Birds Australia and the Australian Science Technology Heritage Centre (Austehc, formerly ASAP).

(cont'. Birds Australia – Oral History project)

It was noted that there had been 330 applicants for grants in the Federation History and Education programme, and the grant awarded for the History of Ornithology was one of only 42 which were approved.

Environmental Defenders Office (SA) Inc. – Ms Chris Hales

The Environmental Defenders Office received support for the production of a Fact Sheet on the Protection of Native Animals and their habitat. The fact sheet was officially launched at their EDO's end of year function. It has been widely distributed to community organisations, libraries, education institutions and the general public

Museum of Victoria – Dr. Les Christidis

The protein study on the grasswrens was finalised and a paper is now in press. The pattern of speciation in the grasswrens appears to differ from previous hypotheses. Further DNA studies continue but it appears that instead of 8 we have 10 species of grasswren, as well as a previously undescribed subspecies in the Eyre peninsula.

These findings have important implications on the conservation status of several species of grasswren.

University of Western Australia – Prof. George Seddon

Professor George Seddon's "Landprints" has been highly praised, the coloured cover being particularly notable. Paperback issues are now being produced.