

The Norman Wettenhall Foundation

Fourth Annual Report

2000

Chairman's Report

The Norman Wettenhall Foundation's commitment to protecting and enhancing birds and their habitats was, once again, the focus of grants made in the financial year to 30 June, 2000. The trustees consider the status of our birds as a key indicator of a natural living environment, and ensuring their welfare offers a clear organizing principle for the marshalling of the Foundation's resources.

This year the Foundation paid \$44,690 in grants with a commitment of a further \$21,000 to upcoming programs. Total assets continue to grow and were \$1,635,166 as of 30 June, 2000. As expected, income increased significantly from \$65,000 in 1998/99 to \$136,577 in the last financial year. Since its inception four years ago, the Foundation has made grants totaling \$192,230.

The Foundation continued its support for two extremely worthwhile projects that are bolstering habitat protection. The first is the Regent Honeyeater project where the Foundation is supporting project coordinator Ray Thomas in his efforts to engage the local community in restoring essential habitat for the survival of this endangered species. The other project involves funding environmental assessments of the extensive traveling stock routes and reserves across southern New South Wales. Managed by Rural Land Protection Boards, the stock routes in many places constitute the most intact existing habitats for native flora and fauna in the Riverina, which on average has less than five per cent tree cover.

An innovation last financial year involved the provision of emergency funding for Dr. Clive Minton to hire a helicopter to study first hand how another endangered species, the Banded Stilt, was faring in its breeding season at Lake Eyre. The Foundation's ability to respond immediately proved extremely valuable, as Dr. Minton was able to fly in time to dramatically capture on film the predation of breeding Banded Stilts by Silver Gulls.

Other grants provided last financial year are summarized in the following report. The report also follows up on the progress of previously funded projects. The Trustees are increasingly emphasizing the need for grantees to provide the Foundation with regular written progress reports. By monitoring, we want to learn about a project's outcomes as well as ensure the money is well spent.

To spread the word about The Norman Wettenhall Foundation, we have tightened up our insistence that grantees provide suitable attribution and prominence to their funding source. Our concern is to ensure that knowledge of the Foundation's existence is spread throughout Australia, reaching anyone in the field undertaking a project of significance to birds or their habitats.

Donations to help us achieve even more are always gratefully received, and of course all donations to The Norman Wettenhall Foundation are tax deductible. Thank you to all those who have contributed in the past. Your generosity is helping to maintain the health of Australia's environment and especially that of its unique birds and plants.

Finally I would like to thank the support and counsel of my fellow trustees, and the administrative back up so ably provided by the staff of IPF Secretariat, in particular the Foundation's administrator Scott Anderson

Report on Distributions made by The Norman Wettenhall Foundation for the year ended June 30, 2000

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

A grant of \$6,000 was paid towards work being undertaken by Mr. Ray Thomas as coordinator for the Regent Honeyeater project. Mr. Thomas is working to restore habitat by various means, such as, encouraging new landholders to protect and restore vegetation; assisting farmers with fencing, ripping, weed spraying, planting, tree guarding; support replanting the previously restored areas; conducting community tree planting weekends; engaging locals schools in propagation and planting; issuing free Fox-Off baits to help lambing and curlew populations; coordinating kangaroo “culls”; establishing further trials; and undertaking tree thinning to restore understorey regrowth.

Birds Australia, Melbourne, VIC – “Australian Bird Count” project

A grant of \$16,340 was paid to enable the Australian Bird Count (ABC) disseminate results from the major volunteer-based research project in the form of a report and web-site. The ABC assessed seasonal and annual changes in bird numbers at discrete sites or habitats in different parts of the continent. Over 2000 observers participated, making regular counts of birds according to a defined protocol at their selected sites. A supplement to *Wingspan* was produce and widely distributed. For further information please visit the website at www.abc.net.au/birds.

Australasian Raptor Association – Owls 2000 conference

A grant of \$4,000 was paid to support the attendance of Professor Ian Newton at the Owls 2000 conference held at the ANU, Canberra in January, 2000. Professor Newton is a senior scientist with the Natural Environment Research Council in the United Kingdom, and head of research on avian biology. He was invited as the keynote speaker for the conference. 115 delegates attended this four day conference discussing a wide range of subjects and important conservation issues.

Wagga Rural Lands Protection Board & Riverina Lands Protection Board – environmental assessment project

Grants of \$6,000 and \$8,000 respectively were paid to support these two Lands Protection Boards. This money assisted with the preparation of an extensive environmental assessment of travelling stock routes and reserves. As part of this process data sheets and guidelines to ensure good management to enhance biodiversity will be provided to the Boards.

Dr. Clive Minton – “Banded Stilts at Lake Eyre North project

A grant of \$4,000 was paid to support three people plus equipment being flown into Hughes Island, Lake Eyre North by helicopter. The purpose of this five day excursion was to study the breeding habits of the banded stilt (an endemic wading bird), which can only breed under suitable conditions (usually 2 or 3 times a decade) that were in place this year with the high rainfall. The population is very dependent upon high breeding success. This study established a relationship with the SA National Parks and Wildlife Service to control predators, such as the Silver Gulls.

Balhannah Centre – “environment enhancement” project

A grant of \$350 was paid to support purchasing plants for the scrubland surrounding the Balhannah Centre. The Centre is a rural retreat for people who are living with an illness run by volunteers. Various plants will be bought which will support additional bird life on the property.

TOTAL GRANTS \$44,690

Progress reports on projects previously supported by the Foundation

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

The Austehc archivist, Fay Anderson, only has three of the 147 boxes to process. The system is now using a upgraded Austehc Heritage Documentation Management System (HDMS) that allows automated production of a variety of print and electronic guides or finding aids. After the database is complete a draft form will be released to enable extensive proofing and checking. At this point a report on the multimedia potential will be produced.

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

The Birds on Farm survey has been designed to explore the link between farm management, sustainable farming and a healthy bird community. The funds were used to produce a summary booklet to be circulated throughout the farming community. Additional publicity has been received through articles produced in other publications which include *Community Link* magazine (an initiative of the National Australia Bank).

Birds Australia, Melbourne, VIC – “Wingspan” project

Since the Foundation support of this project, a part-time advertising coordinator has been appointed and advertising revenue has increased by 76%. In September 1999 a membership survey confirmed the popularity (and satisfaction) of the magazine. Birds Australia membership continues to grow at a steady pace, with *Wingspan* the first point of contact for many new members. Most recently the publication won an award for “Best Specialist Periodical” category with the Whitley Book Awards 2000.

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

Significant advances have been made with this project since last year, the most significant being able to determine that there is sufficient variation in a sub-set of the samples to warrant additional work. A final analysis should be available shortly.

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

This project aims to provide information for private landholders wishing to learn more about the plant and animal diversity on their land. In 1999 a further twelve covenanted properties and two Trust owned properties around Victoria were surveyed.

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

Further to our grant for video equipment in 1998, Mr. Harrington has made three additional field trips (now making a total of seven) since June 1999. A total of 184 days (approximately 2,600 hours) of video surveillance data has been collected to determine which birds are drinking at water points in Gluepot Reserve. Over 35 bird types have been observed ranging from common magpie and starling through to various honeyeaters.

A/Professor Stuart Pruett-Jones - University of Chicago – study of fairy wrens

Since completing this study the material has been submitted for publication and is now in review by the journal *Emu*. The full title is “Aspects of behaviour and ecology of white-winged fairy-wrens from Barrow Island, Western Australia”. A second paper is being prepared and will be submitted for publication to the *Australian Journal of Zoology*.

Birds Australia – Oral History project

The Oral History continues under the guidance of Libby Robin. The writing will be finished in November, 2000 year and will be subsequently published in November, 2001.