WETTENHALL ENVIRONMENT TRUST
TWENTY-FOURTH **ANNUAL REPORT — 2020**

Dr Norman Wettenhall

WETTENHALL ENVIRONMENT TRUST

An environment organisation and perpetual charitable trust, the Wettenhall Environment Trust's objective is to support projects that enhance or maintain the vitality and diversity of the Australian natural living environment.

Established in 1997, the Wettenhall Environment Trust (then The Norman Wettenhall Foundation) was the culmination of founder Norman Wettenhall's lifelong love of the Australian bush and the birds and plants that inhabit it.

Funds were raised from the sale of Norman's treasured natural history book collection, which was widely regarded as the most complete private collection celebrating the wonder and beauty of Australia's fauna and flora.

Since Norman's death in the year 2000, the Trust has continued his legacy to fund a wide range of conservation projects, significantly increasing distributions and building the corpus.

Wettenhall Environment Trust is a member of Philanthropy Australia and the Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network (AEGN).

Wettenhall
ENVIRONMENT TRUST

CHAIRPERSON REPORT

(L to R) Siblings Helen, Jane and Gib in the Pilbara

The 12 months from July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020 have been filled with some very big influences on our day to day domestic lives and within the environment in which we live.

WET continued its work to achieve our objectives despite some considerable challenges.

We undertook in depth strategic planning as a result of changes in direction by some of our funding partners. By looking carefully at our Small Environmental Grants Scheme (SEGS), we have seen where we could direct some extra finances and encourage new applications.

There have been over 500 small grants, averaging $7,000 each and totalling over $3.5 million. Grantees are asked to provide feedback in the form of a structured report at the end of their project and we now score these to select those that have demonstrated great benefit and warrant additional support. One such grant in 2019 was pandanus work by Joel Fostin (see page 15).

Testimonials from SEGS recipients provided in their report include statements like these:

These small grants are enormously useful in filling gaps in funding for conservation and research projects...

..effectively spreading engagement far and wide with the assistance of a very small amount of money. Big dollars are not needed to achieve this

We have really appreciated the opportunity to pilot this study .... developed such enthusiasm..... paved the way for phase two of the project...

So we will continue to seek out and support exciting grassroots research or monitoring that can benefit from small grants as part of our core business and look to anyone able to help us in this venture with ideas and, hopefully, donations.

And then there were the devastating summer bushfires. WET has been receiving some excellent submissions to research fire prevention management in different vegetation types (Phil Zylstra), and investigate Indigenous cultural burning as a tool that renews, rather than destroys (Wooragee Landcare group). To further research and monitor the application of cultural burning in our patch of the South East corner of Australia, WET is funding another local project at Newstead and is developing an overarching framework with other partners, Burning Country the Right Way (see page 18).

Unfortunately, our supporter event planned for May 2020, focusing on cultural burning and related issues, had to be postponed because of Covid 19. But you can expect to hear more about this in the next 12 months.

There are eight current landscape restoration programs spread across Victoria and at least one representative from each attended the annual workshop, held in Castlemaine in November 2019. Each gave a presentation of their activities, partnerships and plans, demonstrating their diversity and providing the opportunity to 'look over the fence', learn from their peers and connect. Projects include monitoring Brush-tailed Phascogales and birds, water quality and seagrass restoration, wetlands and Brolgas, creating seed orchards and supporting farmers to make sustainable changes.

A new dossier is being prepared to highlight the advances of those participating in these larger funding programs.

The pandemic has meant that our meetings have been on Zoom, not such a bad thing environmentally as it avoids travel and associated carbon emissions. We do, however, thank William Murray solicitors for use of their Board room, to which we hope to return next year.

Thanks to Beth Mellick, our indomitable ED, we have been able to keep the general running of the Trust in order, located in the office in Castlemaine, Thank you to all who have continued to support us and to the many new donors. Our finances are expertly managed pro bono by Richard Addison from Accru+.

I am extremely grateful to my fellow Board members who are passionate, clever and ensure that WET pursues the right causes.

Jane Halliday

At the end of a marvellous trip to see the south WA wildflowers in the spring of 2018

HELEN CONNELL

With immense sadness, we have had to farewell Helen Connell, nee Wettenhall, my sister and also that of Gib and Adam. She died after a brief illness in September, four days before her 65th birthday. We didn't quite get her onto the Board, but, as the youngest in the sibship, she was waiting in the wings. She came along to many of our events and was a true lover of nature in all its forms, extremely knowledgeable about the landscape, having spent the majority of her adult life in the rural world. She had become an avid and excellent birder and together we explored many wild and wonderful Australian spaces, including the Pilbara last year.

We hope that the next generation, including at least one of her three children (Phoebe, Jim and Theia), will begin to take over (some of) the reins of WET one day. She has taught them well the values that we uphold in WET in order to maintain the vitality and diversity of the Australian natural living environment. She is no longer here in mind and body, but is with us forever in spirit.

TRUSTEE FIELD TRIP

Restoring the natural water cycle for wetlands to thrive

Damien Cook has mapped some 7,000 hectares of what he describes as “dead red gum wetlands” within the internationally significant (Ramsar) Kerang Wetlands of North Central Victoria. Once pulsing with life, now graveyards of contorted old stags toppling with increasing rapidity, their doom sealed in the service of agriculture over a century ago.

In their natural state, red gum wetlands enjoyed intermittent flooding in spring. In summer and autumn, the swamps used to dry out. Drainage or year-round irrigation put an end to this natural cycle. The forests of red gums were either starved of water by drainage or drowned by waterlogging.

Rising saline watertables finished off the few red gums left. Wholesale clearing of native vegetation for agriculture brought what was once an inland sea to the surface. The highly saline watertable rose and laid the remnant vegetation waste, leaving at low points only salt pans behind. By the 1990s’ Millennium Drought, the water table was a catastrophic 50 centimetres below the surface.

In 2010, the Victorian Environment Assessment Commission estimated that two-thirds of Victoria’s wetlands or almost 4,000 natural wetlands (191,000 hectares) had vanished, primarily as a result of agricultural drainage.

A combination of the 14 year-long drought and improved water management – for instance, the use of moisture meters – has lowered the water table and reduced the salinity threat. But bringing back the wetlands is not simply a matter of locking them up, blocking drainage channels and reducing grazing pressure.

Wettenhall field trippers at Johnson Swamp (Gib Wettenhall)

The North Central Catchment Management Authority approached Damien and another wetland ecologist Elaine Bayes to assess the status of their wetlands – many of them Ramsar sites critically important as breeding sites for magnificent, threatened birds like brolgas, as well as maintaining the migratory routes of many waterbirds.

Their first task has been to restore the natural water cycle. Release of the Murray-Darling Basin’s environmental water flows is now timed to flood the swamps to a metre deep in spring and autumn. This has had flow-on effects beyond benefiting red gums.

On a WET trustees’ field trip, we’re standing with Damien on the edge of the 200 hectare McDonalds Swamp at the end of winter. He draws our attention to thick lignum bushes and impenetrable swathes of cumbungi and phragmites reeds invading the swamp’s centre.

Allowing the swamps to dry out in summer stops plants from choking the swamps. Open water offers runways for pelicans and playgrounds for ducks. “Habitat is all about edges,” says Damien.

Timing is critical. Summer’s hot, dry ground kills off exotic weeds. Opening irrigation channels then disrupts the natural cycle, with the warm water harming many native beneficial species. In spring, lack of deep watering reduces the moisture profile for bringing on native grasses.

With a work crew from the local Barapa Barapa community, Damien is supervising the planting of thousands of red gums and understorey species. Some argue for controlling invasive weeds and triggering the native seedbank by fire. Unfortunately, says Damien, salinity has destroyed the seedbank.

One plant they are rescuing is a wiry native grass, Stiff Groundsel (*Senecio behrianus*) that was not seen for over 100 years before rediscovery. Only five populations have been found. What drove it to the brink, we asked?

“A combination affecting many species,” responded Damien. “Being palatable to livestock, sensitive to water cycles, a victim of habitat destruction.”

The Barapa Barapa work crew enjoy being together out on Country. This was for millennia their home, as attested by the oven mounds ringing the swamps. Close up, the mounds are littered with clay balls that held the heat when birds, eels, turtles or aquatic delicacies were baking within. You can still see small fingerprints pressed into the clay by the children whose task it was to squeeze the balls into shape.

Damien and the work crew are companion planting the seedlings of once common, traditional food plants like nardoo and water ribbons. An Australian-looking version of clover, nardoo seeds were widely used by Indigenous peoples to make a type of baked bread. If only the slowly starving explorers Bourke and Wills had learnt that nardoo is so toxic it needs to be twice baked.

While there’s no easy route back, the addition of water has a remarkable impact on a graveyard swamp. When water is available at the right time, wetland plants spread rapidly by rhizomes or clonally. Take nardoo – it can grow up to 10 centimetres a day when the water starts flowing in spring.

At the 400 hectare Johnsons Swamp, regular environmental watering is maintaining one of the last strongholds of the brolga, and thousands of freckled ducks gather there in autumn. On the day we were there, a swamp harrier was harassing musk ducks. A reed warbler was calling nearby. Pelicans patrolled. Spoonbills stood stark-white in contrast to the dark lignum.

Some 148 bird species have been recorded in this Ramsar-listed wetland. It’s testimony to what environmental watering can achieve.

Gib Wettenhall

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Supporting conservation causes is one of the best ways to give something back to the earth that sustains us.

I'm really proud of the grants we are giving out, and appreciate the amount of time and effort that Wettenhall's expert board of Trustees put into scoring and assessing applications.

When looking at applications for funding, our Trustees consider: what will actually work; what actions will have an impact on long term conservation of species; and what can be achieved with limited funds in a short amount of time.

> We are a small organisation, but those of us inside it feel like our contribution to the environment is much bigger than the sum of our funds.

We encourage supporters to look at our programs and make a donation to us. Our programs focus on biodiversity conservation, habitat connectivity, conservation leadership, and our new program is about cultural burning. The more support we have from donors, the more grants we can give out.

You probably haven't heard of a lot of the groups we support - that's because we choose to support grassroots, community groups, environment groups in rural areas, or people working on small, focussed projects. The Trustees particularly look for experts in their field with either academic or local knowledge.

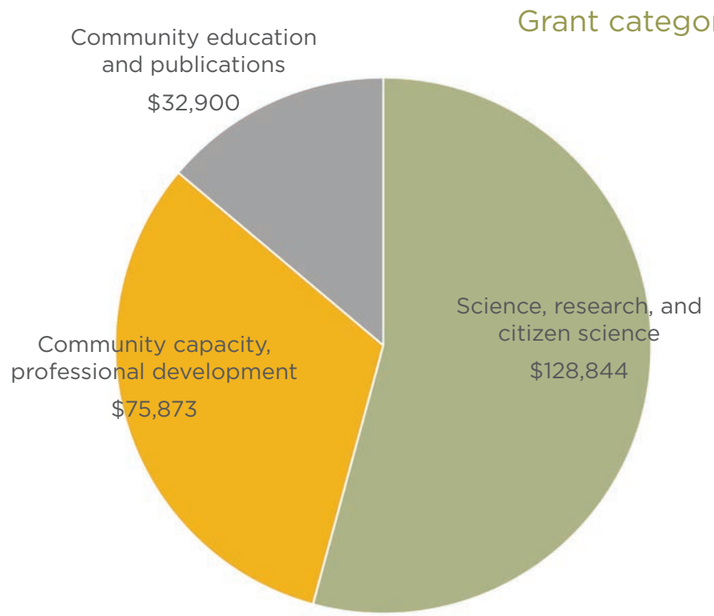
You'd think that after funding in this space for over 20 years there would be no-one new left to support, that we would be funding the same people. Although we do recurrent granting, especially to those people and organisations that are carrying out great work and are able to tell us about it, surprisingly we see new people, and new projects every grant round.

This means that we'll always have something to do! Join us in doing something good.

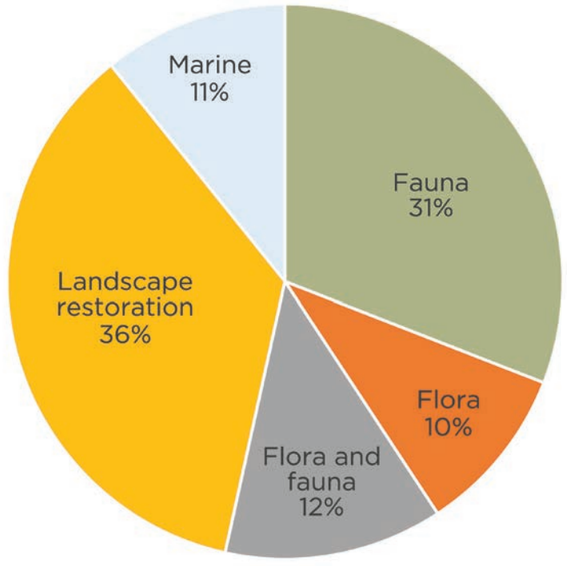
Beth Mellick, Executive Director

GRANT MAKING ACTIVITIES 2019/2020

Grant categories



Grant issues



GRANTS AWARDED 2019/2020

The Small Environmental Grant Scheme (SEGS) provides support for people undertaking projects that will make a positive difference to the natural living environment, in land, sea or air, rural or urban.

Organisation	Project	Source	Awarded
Thorsborne Trust	The Pied Imperial-Pigeon: long-term monitoring of population trends at North Brook Island, North Queensland	PurryBurry	$2,500
Swamps Rivers and Ranges	SRR bird monitoring program	WBF	$1,485
Loddon Plains Landcare Network	Sustainable agriculture across the Loddon Plains	WBF	$10,000
Yarram Yarram Landcare Network	Water quality monitoring to inform future projects in the Jack and Albert River catchments	WBF and Ross	$10,000
Deakin University	Biodiversity assessments using environmental DNA in seagrass ecosystems	WET	$5,000
Australian National University	The hidden costs of rising temperatures and the importance of thermal refugia to an arid-zone bird	WET	$4,957
Denmark Environment Centre Inc.	Red Tingle forest flammability and vegetation research project	WET and Purryburry	$9,967
NT Parks, Wildlife and Heritage	Olive Ridley threat abatement project: Coburg Peninsula	Biophilia	$12,500
Blue Mountains Conservation Society	Monitoring of a maternity colony of White-striped Freetailed Bats	Youngman	$7,600
Philip Zylstra	Drivers of positive feedbacks in alpine ash forests	WET	$10,000
University of Western Australia	Genetic characterisation and behavioural ecology of the Western Grasswren	WET	$5,000
Making a Difference (MAD) for the Merri	Community monitoring program for the recovery of Platypus/Rakali populations in South West Victoria	Youngman	$11,119
Taronga Conservation Society Australia	Tracing origins, resource use and movements of green turtles in NSW	WET	$8,100
YACTAC (Yanco and Tributaries Advisory Council)	Community-based Platypus monitoring in the Yanco Creek	Youngman	$15,000
Mycommunity - Applied Mycology and Learning Lab	Wild fungi DNA	Ross	$12,436

Organisation	Project	Source	Awarded
Friends of the Great South West Walk	Flora, fauna and ecology guide for the Great South West Walk	WET and Biophilia	$10,000
BirdLife Australia	Action plan for Australian birds 2020	WET	$10,000
Connecting Country	Reprinting woodland bird brochure	WET	$1,415
Lithgow and District Community Nursery	Heatbed for bushfire regeneration propagation	WET	$1,573
Ecosystem Management and Biosecurity Solutions	Protecting and regenerating battered threatened Pandanus populations of the Agnes Water region	WET	$9,300
Albury Conservation Company	Threatened arboreal mammal monitoring in Albury Wodonga	Youngman	$9,400
University of Western Australia	The response of reptiles, ants and termites to urbanisation: a case study from Perth	WET	$5,000

Landscape restoration grants to support orgainsations that are in our program of bottom up, grassroots habitat connectivity projects

Organisation	Project	Source	Awarded
Beyond Bolac	Landscape restoration project worker	WET	$30,000
Swamps Rivers and Ranges	Landscape restoration project worker	WET	$30,000

Leadership Development Grants to support professional development of those working in the field of landscape restoration and conservation

Grantee	Project	Source	Awarded
Erin Weir, East Gippsland Landcare Network	Leadership Development Grant	WET	$5,000

DONOR SOURCE: Biophilia (The Biophilia Foundation), Ross (The RE Ross Trust), WET (Wettenhall Environment Trust), WBF (The William Buckland Foundation), Youngman (The George Albert and Nancy Caroline Youngman Trust)

RESEARCH & SCIENCE GRANTS

Deakin University

“Restoring the sediment microbiome for successful seagrass recovery”

PhD Candidate, Yi Mei Tan, has been investigating various methods of seagrass restoration in Western Port. Through field and laboratory trials this study will enable people to better understand how to select the right sites for successful seagrass restoration.

The use of seagrass cores (plugs) was relatively successful in the transplant trials, surviving at most sites and even growing and spreading at some. Germination trials (seedlings emerging from the bag) were less successful, but showed that germination in the field can be achieved, and can be considered when planning large-scale seed-based restoration. Tests were also carried out in the nursery to look at the effects of seagrass origin, sediment type, and sediment microbiome. Overall mortality of plants was very low and most plants showed growth during the course of the trials.

Social media campaigns showed an extremely high interest from the community to participate in seagrass restoration activities, and volunteers were able to collect over 200,000 seeds. Using the right techniques, large-scale restoration seems entirely probable.

CITIZEN SCIENCE GRANTS

Blue Mountains Conservation Society

“Monitoring of a maternity colony of White-striped Freetailed Bats”

Bat ecologist, Margaret Turton, is conducting long term monitoring on a maternity roost of White-striped Freetailed bats — a high flying species, very little is known on their ecology. This work provides information on the seasonal use of the roost, roost fidelity, gender composition, association between individuals, and individual bat longevity.

This project is the only long-term monitoring project of this species, and has potential to expand the existing knowledge. Long term studies of microbats as a whole are very rare, and the voluminous amounts of data received could reveal a great deal of information about this little-known species.

The current monitoring equipment that Margaret uses is now old and very unreliable, so this grant will be used to upgrade the equipment to enable the project to continue.

White-striped freetailed bat (Margaret Turton)

MAD for the Merri

“Community Monitoring for the recovery of Platypus and Rakali populations in south west Victoria”

In partnership with the Australian Platypus Conservancy, MAD for the Merri will support a Platypus and Rakali monitoring program with local volunteers on waterways in the Glenelg and Hopkins Basins. Current data and knowledge about populations is very limited on both species, so this project will focus on data being collected and added to national databases. More information will allow for better conservation planning and on ground activities on waterways.

The grant will: enable volunteers to be trained in monitoring and data collection; be used to create a database for the south west Victorian waterways and; raise awareness of platypus and rakali populations and the threats they face.

Small grants for this type of work enables local groups to have information about species that they can include in large restoration project applications to government.

Rakali (Australian Platypus Conservancy)

Mycommunity - Applied Mycology and Learning Lab

"Wild Fungi DNA"

Very little is known about Australian native fungi. Only 5% percent of the estimated 250,000 species have even been described. In most cases their life-cycle, including generation length and frequency, and triggers of fruiting are not well understood. Yet most of the data about their ecological distribution is based on sightings of fruiting bodies. This makes it extremely difficult to determine which fungi are in need of protection.

One of the key limitations of understanding and conserving fungi is the reliance on observations of fruit bodies to know where fungi are present. This Melbourne-based community lab group will develop protocols and training for citizen scientists to monitor fungi using molecular ecological surveying technologies and eDNA. Data collected will be used to better understand the life-cycles and distribution of fungi, especially rare and endangered fungi, for conservation and management purposes. Data generated will also be used to assess fungi for the IUCN threatened species list.

By undertaking this project the group wants to: raise awareness about endangered fungi and their role in the environment; build collaboration between a variety of community organisations and professional land managers and scientists; provide training in the practical use of DNA technology and learn the science behind it; conduct (when possible) field based events with professional mycologists and; conduct workshops (again, when possible) so volunteers will collaborate with professional scientists to understand as well as process the data that has been collected.

For the layperson, using eDNA will probably be easier than trying to identify fungi in the field with a guide book!

Phaeoclavulina abietina or the Green-staining Coral (Sapphire McMullan-Fisher)

NT Parks, Wildlife & Heritage Division

"Olive Ridley Threat Abatement Project - Cobourg Peninsula"

Olive Ridley turtles occur in Australian waters and are listed as endangered under the EPBC Act, and vulnerable internationally by the IUCN (IUCN 2008). Population declines of Olive Ridley turtles appear to be linked to nest/egg mortality due to erosion, inundation and nest predation as nests are typically located just above the high water mark and are shallower than other species. Active management is required to protect the eggs from predation from monitors, dingoes, and crocodiles.

This project aims to minimise predation of turtle nests on beaches that are classed as 'habitat critical to the survival of a species'. Our grant has enabled the purchase and installation of 50 aluminium nest protection cages to increase hatchling recruitment and contribute to the long term viability of the NT population. Rangers will monitor the turtles' progress to enable this project to make an important research contribution to sea turtle conservation.

Above: Newly hatched Olive Ridley Turtle making its way to the ocean (Jenny Petursson)

Below: PWCNT Ranger Dylan Cooper installing the first cage (Emma Withers)

COMMUNITY EDUCATION GRANTS

BirdLife

"Action Plan for Australian Birds 2020"

The Action Plan 2020 will provide a snapshot of the status of Australia's birds that helps frame conservation efforts by BirdLife Australia and others for the ensuing decade. Action Plans are the benchmarks for threatened species conservation, bringing together all the relevant information in one volume on one date. The new Action Plan follows on from versions in 1992, 2000 and 2010. The book will have short chapters on every threatened Australian bird, a live website, updated maps and taxonomy, and population trend estimate for many taxa.

Crested Shrike-tit (Chris Timewell)

Friends of the Great South West Walk

"Flora, fauna and ecology guide for the Great South West Walk"

The Great South West Walk (GSWW) features four types of landscapes, each relatively intact and protected within the reserve system. The area is culturally significant for the local Gunditjmara people, and there are many signs of their long and continuing occupation, including middens along the coast. The GSWW also passes Australia's only mainland colony of Gannetts and a rare combined colony of Australian and New Zealand Fur Seals.

This grant will help fund the flora, fauna and ecology section of a comprehensive guidebook to the Great South West Walk in south-west Victoria. Travellers and visitors will increase their understanding of the beauty and importance of the local ecology, creating more advocates for the protection of the area, reducing hiking impacts, and encouraging sustainable tourism. The creation of the guide will also engage the local community, building connections and increasing pride in a spectacular landscape. Currently there is no dedicated guide to the flora, fauna and natural values of the region. This guide will become an invaluable resource for locals, visitors and planners, deepening the appreciation of this unique environment.

Authors Yasmin and Warwick on the walk (Yasmin Kelsall)

FIRE GRANTS

Denmark Environment Centre Red Tingle Forest

"Flammability and Vegetation Research Project"

This project will undertake comprehensive ecological field surveys, forest flammability modelling, and analysis of the Red Tingle (*Eucalyptus jacksonii*) forest vegetation in the Walpole Wilderness area in south-western Australia. The goal is to develop a better understanding of its flammability dynamics. Ecologists will assess vegetation structure and plant measurements at numerous sites that have differing fire histories and fire management regimes. Volunteers will also be trained in vegetation survey techniques.

Having a better understanding of the fire dynamics and vegetation of Red Tingle forest vegetation will enable a more accurate basis for the appropriate use of fire for risk management, and long-term conservation of the forest. Land managers and landholders will have the opportunity to develop more effective fire management based on the research findings.

Philip Zylstra

"Drivers of positive feedbacks in alpine ash forests"

Following disturbance, tall forests of the Australian Alps are eight times more flammable than mature forests. Increasing fire frequency may therefore remove landscape controls on fire, precipitating runaway fire regimes and ecosystem collapse. Fire ecologist, Philip Zylstra, will use biophysical fire modelling to quantify the drivers, providing critical guidance to fire managers.

The study will quantify how fire frequency and severity interact with bioclimatic factors to drive the strength and timing of flammability feedbacks in alpine ash forests of the Australian Alps; and then to translate this into a practical, applied format that can be readily used to guide fire management. Fire managers are limited in their capacity to manage increasing fire risk in the ash forests, as the guiding principles for hazard reduction are derived from traditional rules of thumb rather than published science.

Surveying the red tingle forest (Nathan McQuoid, Melissa Howe, Phil Zylstra)

Albury Conservationi Co Ltd

"Threatened arboreal mammal monitoring program in Albury Wodonga"

Following a grant from WET a few years ago, we have again awarded a grant to Albury Conservation Company to expand their mammal monitoring program. We sit alongside the RE Ross Trust who has also supported the program, enabling them to expand into Wodonga.

The grant will enable the group to purchase 40 additional cameras. Having more cameras will reduce the on-going cost of program implementation and also increase alignment of the timing of monitoring across all sites, providing a greater understanding of species' distribution, presence/absence and detection probabilities.

So far the project has generated two years of data about Squirrel Gliders at 60+ sites. This has provided invaluable baseline information with which to determine how wildlife respond over time to increasing urbanisation, or as environmental works are implemented. The expanded program will monitor Squirrel Gliders, Brush-tailed Phascogales and Spotted-tailed Quolls.

"Our threatened arboreal mammal monitoring program is significant because no local or state government organisation or community group was previously conducting strategic landscape-scale monitoring of Squirrel Gliders in Albury's major urban growth area of Thurgoona/Wirlinga – a recognised stronghold of the species in NSW, yet a site that will undergo extensive urbanisation over the next 20-30 years." (Sam Niedra)

This grant, and other threatened mammal projects, have been made possible with a donation from the George Albert and Nancy Caroline Youngman Trust.

Ecosystem Management and Biosecurity Solutions – Joel Fostin

"Protecting and regenerating battered threatened Pandanus

Pandanus trees provide habitat niches and biodiversity hotspots for a long list of native mammals, reptiles, birds, and many host specific and opportunistic insects. Favouring the frontal dune system, they provide important dune stabilisation, protection from salt laden winds for sensitive floral species, and food and habitat.

Pandanus dieback results in loss of canopy, loss of habitat, and loss of shade, leaving opportunities for the establishment of weeds.

The pest (Pandanus Leaf Hopper) has spread across most of south east Queensland in two decades leaving a wake of tens of thousands of dead Pandanus and resulting habitat loss.

Performing regeneration and revegetation works will strengthen existing pandanus populations against Pandanus Leaf Hopper attacks. Long term protection of Pandanus populations from this introduced pest requires knowledge-based monitoring programs, which are currently not understood nor in place.

Joel Fostin undertakes twice yearly preventative works that are required to protect and recoup the damaged populations. This is our second grant to Joel after we witnessed his passion and dedication to the cause. Joel uses the grant to perform mitigation work, to assist him with the dispersal of a biological control, collect and disperse seeds, collaborate with a range of groups, and document all findings.

If you'd like to contribute to what Joel does with Pandanus trees, please contact Wettenhall.

LANDSCAPE RESTORATION GRANTS

Landscape restoration – bottom up, grassroots, community

We have eight projects under our landscape restoration portfolio. All are being driven by the community groups whose members are living and working in that landscape. We are wedded to each of these projects and liaise closely with them to reach targets, to share knowledge, and to provide support.

All of the projects are continuing to carry out restoration activities, both on the land and in the sea, yes restoration in the sea. The JARR project in Gippsland is active with water quality monitoring and seagrass restoration in Corner Inlet. They work with a range of farmers, particularly dairy farmers, to reduce effluent and chemicals in the rivers that eventually end up in the ocean and kill seagrass. Beyond Bolac in the western district is looking at ways to link up large farms, protect wetlands and share information about how to identify frogs. The GOANNA project on the Loddon Plains is working with farmers on sustainable agriculture initiatives, and Swamps Rivers and Ranges up in the north east of Victoria is busy monitoring birds and producing resources on nest boxes. Connecting Country is moving its range of comprehensive monitoring programs up to the next level and using the information to prepare for future habitat protection. Wetland Revival has completed a Blueprint for Action based around protection of wetlands and is ready to now move into action.

We all get together at an annual workshop to share information and discuss issues that groups are facing. This helps us give them the support they need. Donors and co-funders in this program are welcome. https://wettenhall.org.au/grants/landscape-restoration/

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

Our Leadership Development Grants are designed to support people who are playing a key role in projects enhancing and maintaining the natural living environment.

The grants support leadership/professional development activities, so that successful applicants are equipped with skills and knowledge they need to further their conservation work – to either remain or become a leader.

Grants are $5,000 and must be used to: attend courses, workshops, seminars; undertake training that helps with their work eg media, strategic planning, landscape ecology, community development; participate in mentoring opportunities with specialists; undertake other activities that will increase the ability to further conservation work.

> We want to consider both experienced conservationists, and those entering the field and wanting to excel.

We started this program in 2013, with the first grant to Anthony Gallacher, who was then the Facilitator at one of our landscape restoration projects. He bought software, undertook training, and attended a number of courses and workshops. I've followed Anthony's career and know he has been able to use these skills through a number of environment and conservation jobs, here and overseas.

We've awarded eight Leadership Development Grants since then, and they've all been very different – Naomi was from Coastcare, Judith worked in Landcare, Samantha went to Antarctica, Maddie was in the 'young arm' of Landcare, Mirinda skilled up in fauna monitoring, and Graham wanted to become a good leader.

Our grantee for last financial year is Erin who works in Landcare in East Gippsland and wants to do a Diploma in Leadership and Management.

Thanks to Adam Wettenhall for heading up the LDG sub-group to assess the applications and make recommendations to the board of Trustees.

https://wettenhall.org.au/leadership-development-grants/

We welcome donors and co-funders into this program

Left to right: Anthony Gallacher, Samantha Grover, Graham Fifield, Maddie Braddon, Mirinda Thorpe

BURNING COUNTRY PROGRAM

Aboriginal cultural burning refers to Aboriginal fire practices associated with creating healthy Country: typically cultural burns are designed to improve ecological health, protect important sites and species, and provide resources for human use and enjoyment. The purpose of a cultural burn is not 'fuel reduction' per se, although it is, and was pre-settlement, clearly one of the benefits.

Recognising broad community interest in Aboriginal use of fire in many parts of the Australian landscape, WET has initiated a new program to support local community-driven projects that focus on using fire based on Aboriginal cultural knowledge to assist with biodiversity recovery and landscape restoration. This program fits within WET's charter to support projects that enhance or maintain the vitality and diversity of the Australian natural living environment. Underpinning this program is the concept of two-way learning, valuing both Aboriginal and western knowledge to help find new ways to recover degraded landscapes.

The program will examine how and when Aboriginal cultural burning approaches can be used to effect positive ecological change.

The name of our new program, Burning Country the Right Way, reflects the collaborative, grassroots and bottom-up approach that acts as the hallmark of WET's landscape restoration projects. Focusing on landholders themselves is in keeping with WET's objective of building capacity in local communities to effect long-term beneficial change in the natural environment. It differentiates the WET program from other top-down initiatives in this space.

The program will build on small environmental grants WET has already awarded to groups like Wooragee Landcare, where they are undertaking three years of cultural burns combined with biodiversity monitoring in north-eastern Victoria.

WET will play a role to connect, synthesise and share the knowledge that is created by individual burning projects, so that Aboriginal-led and community-driven cultural burning is better understood and valued.

WET is aware of the increasing community interest in the potential role that cultural burning could play restoring degraded landscapes, reducing flammability around assets and contributing to cultural reconcilitation. There are a number of initiatives supporting cultural burning in Australia and internationally which WET seeks to build upon. However, WET recognises that cultural burning should not be seen as a panacea to the increasing fire risk faced by communities that is being exacerbated by climate change, but rather view it as an opportunity for local communities to learn from Aboriginal Elders about cultural burning and its potential application in landscape restoration at a local level.

The program is as much about building the community's cultural and social capitals, as it is about improving landscape management. As such, it's critical that WET ensures both dimensions are monitored (measured), evaluated, reported and discussed.

Uncle Rod Mason conducting cultural burn with Wooragee Landcare (Gib Wettenhall)

DONORS AND SUPPORTERS

Wettenhall Environment Trust is a charitable trust with tax deductible status. Donations that extend the Trust's ability to augment the wellbeing of the Australian natural living environment are gratefully received.

Being a donor to Wettenhall Environment Trust means you are supporting one of its grants programs:

-Small Environmental Grants Scheme
-Leadership Development Grants
-Community-driven landscape restoration
-Burning Country program for Traditional Owner cultural burning.

> We thank this year's donors, both new supporters and our lovely long term donors who I look forward to hearing from every year. Each donation is very much appreciated by us, and every dollar is spent wisely and frugally.

Wettenhall Environment Trust has credit card facilities for accepting donations, or donors are able to donate via direct transfer into the bank account, Donors are also welcome to send a cheque.

Please see the donation form included in your annual report, or donate via the website https://wettenhall.org.au. If you have any problems, just call or email.

It is with great sadness that we acknowledge the passing of Diana Snape last September.

Diana, along with her husband Brian, are long term supporters of Wettenhall, with particular interest in habitat connectivity for biodiversity.

Gib Wettenhall described Diana as a woman of flowers and child of the earth - a beautiful description considering her love of nature.

To see a copy of the full audited financial report for Wettenhall Environment Trust, find us on the ACNC website https://www.acnc.gov.au

DONORS 2019/2020 FINANCIAL YEAR

DONORS A-Z
Up to $500
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Up to $20,000
Biophilia Foundation
Brian Snape

DONORS A-Z
Over $20,000
Lindsay Adams

FINANCE CHAIR REPORT

I have been the Finance Committee Chair for Wettenhall Environment Trust for just over two and a half years and a member of the Australian community for almost six.

Originally from Canada and the US, I grew up playing in the Canadian Rockies and later learned to love backpacking in the backcountry of Kentucky. The feeling you get after hiking 15-20 km days with everything you need on your back is one that cannot be topped in my books. This feeling, in addition to my mom's community activism, led to my passion for protecting the environment we live in.

Growing up in North America, I will admit to knowing little of the incredible biodiversity of the natural life within Australia. Luckily, as a Trustee for WET, I have the opportunity to learn of many species of flora and fauna that are in need of protection through the communities willing to take that action. The grants we provide as Trustees are not only making an immediate difference to the natural environment through specific projects and programs, but are also empowering these communities and future change-makers in Australia to continue fighting the impacts of climate change – and this is what inspires me as a WET Trustee as well as a local volunteer.

The past few months have had an incredible economic and environmental impact on the communities in which we operate. These impacts place an even greater importance on the work that we do providing community-based groups with the economic resources to rebuild biodiversity in Australia.

While we are experiencing and expect to continue experiencing a decline in our incoming support through investments and donations, we are thankful for our current supporters that have provided a substantial base that we are able to pull from in the coming months so as to not decrease our impact.

Our aim for the future is to monitor our cash and equity positions closely, but not to limit our community support and I look forward to doing just this with my fellow Trustees and WET supporters.

Kirsten Hengen

Kirsten is the Manager of Climate Change and Sustainability Services at EY in Melbourne.

FINANCIAL REPORT 2020

Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2020

CURRENT ASSETS	
Cash and cash equivalents	379,218
Trade and other receivables	43,580
Investments	3,790,463
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	4,213,261
NON-CURRENT ASSETS	
Other assets - office equipment	1,057
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS	1,057
TOTAL ASSETS	4,214,318
CURRENT LIABILITIES	
Provisions	89,662
Trade and other payables	7,469
TOTAL LIABILITIES	97,131
NET ASSETS	4,117,187
EQUITY	
Capital gifts	1,679,343
Capital profits	1,064,534
Retained profits	451,445
Asset revaluation reserve	921,865
TOTAL EQUITY	4,117,187

Income Statement for the year ended 30 June 2020

REVENUE	
Income - donations (inc unspent from previous year)	186,455
Income - investments	187,190
Income - interest	4,347
Income - other	15,994
TOTAL INCOME	393,986
EXPENSES	
Operating expenses, publications, events and workshops	136,314
Distributions (project support for landscape restoration)	
Distributions (grants)	237,617
TOTAL EXPENSES	373,931
TOTAL NET PROFIT	20,055

Wettenhall
ENVIRONMENT TRUST

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Front cover photo: Wooragee cultural burning project by Gib Wettenhall

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