

NORTHERN exposure

spring 2011



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Endangered Grey Goshawk— Photo: Melissa Lewarn

From the CEO

Legs on the chair or spokes in the wheel?

At our AGM in September, we showcased a range of community-based activities in which NRM North is just legs and spokes, part of helping our communities look after their natural resources - and we love supporting you to do just that.

Each year we use our AGM to take stock of what has been achieved in natural resource management across the region for the past year. We put it all together in a Yearbook which you can download from our website or request a copy from us.

This year we have also put together a five year summary of activities and outcomes. You will see again that while as an organisation we have been busy, we are a spoke and a leg in the amazing work our whole community does.

When it comes to biodiversity, you all do far more than we can collate and report on, but in the past year through NRM North investment and partnerships we have achieved these results:

More than 900 hectares of remnant vegetation has been protected or improved through incentives provided under the Property Management Planning Program;

A further 271 hectares of riparian vegetation has been protected and 40 hectares of farm shelter belts and corridors established or improved to enhance connectivity and habitat condition for our region's biodiversity assets;

Property management planning activities conducted throughout the year have incorporated planning for more than 40,000 hectares of land with significant habitat values and 2,300 hectares of threatened vegetation communities on private holdings; and

Around 550 hectares has been treated for invasive weed species, including 320 hectares of 'Weeds of National Significance' and 120 hectares of regional weeds.

Continuing support for the management of the pest fish Gambusia in the Tamar estuary and adjacent land is helping to reduce the potential devastating impact the spread of this invasive fish species will have on the region's aquatic biodiversity.

This is just a small snapshot. There have been many more activities across the region funded and supported by NRM North in partnerships with all levels of government and the broader community.



While it is true we may well struggle to maintain biodiversity as we know it, especially in the face of significant climate variation, it is important that we continue to work to do what we can to adapt and mitigate the impacts on biodiversity, it is after all one of the building blocks of life.

Carbon is the topic of the moment and we are still working through what it will and won't mean for us and the region. There will be significant opportunities including further investment in biodiversity.

The biodiversity fund is expected to have a focus on private land and will help develop significant corridors and connectivity across our landscapes.

There is expected to be opportunities for agriculture under the Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI) which will support farming which maintains and improves carbon stores, and of course, carbon planting in the right place will only help secure a range of benefits. NRM North will be undertaking a planning process under the CFI to support carbon plantings in the region which maximise co-benefits and minimise potential negatives outcomes.

There is a lot happening in NRM and we appreciate your support and input as we seek to help you care for the natural resources and biodiversity of our island home.



James McKee
CEO NRM NORTH

Endangered Grey Goshawk



“In the 1980s, the Tasmanian Grey Goshawk population was estimated to comprise only around 300 adults...”

These spectacular creatures are causing quite a stir in northern Tasmania. Many people have reported seeing these birds in their backyards but don't realise how special they are.

While from a distance, they could be mistaken as common white cockatoos, when viewed up close, it is apparent they are quite different.

The Grey Goshawk, also called the White Goshawk, is a medium-sized bird of prey. All Tasmanian specimens are pure white with yellow legs and a black beak.

Its breeding appears to be confined to wet, old growth forests, with nest sites almost always associated with watercourses or swamps. However, it is rare to find a Grey Goshawk nest site, so we need to learn more about this.

Similarly, it is often said that their core habitat is blackwood forest in the northwest but they have been observed throughout Tasmania, with a large number of observations in the south and northeast in addition to the northwest coast.

Forestry prescriptions include protection of any known nests and areas of blackwood swamp forest.

Senior Zoologist with the Threatened Species Unit at the Department of Primary, Industries, Parks, Water and the Environment, Clare Hawkins, said there were estimated to be less than 100 breeding pairs in Tasmania.

“In the 1980s, the Tasmanian Grey Goshawk population was estimated to comprise only around 300 adults. Habitat considered to be best for this species is primarily in forestry areas rather than in reserve.

“For these two reasons they are listed as Endangered under Tasmania's Threatened Species Protection Act 1995.” Ms Hawkins said.

“It is a very difficult species to study and we don't have an updated estimate. It will be a special challenge for a brave researcher, but I suspect to work with such a beautiful species could be very rewarding.”

While many residents are excited about the possibility of a Grey Goshawk visiting their home, they can be a source of conflict for those who keep chickens.

Grey Goshawks have a taste for fresh chicken so people who keep these birds are urged to plan in advance.

“If you are thinking of setting up chooks in an area where Grey Goshawks might visit, it's best to build them a roofed pen.” Ms Hawkins said.

“It can be a rather more stressful experience, which does nothing for anyone's appreciation of threatened species, if you set your chickens up an inadequately protected area which then has to be redone after some sad or sometimes expensive losses.”

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Wombat Walk

As part of NRM North’s School Environmental Grants Program, South George Town Primary School received funding for a multi-pronged project focusing on ‘Wombat Walk’ - a bush area adjacent to the school grounds, and the installation of a ‘bush tucker’ garden on the school grounds.

‘Wombat Walk’ off Franklin Street in George Town is a wonderful resource for the students who attend South George Town Primary School. The area is used regularly by the school and the wider community for fitness, recreation and environmental studies, but has become degraded due to its proximity to town.

A natural frog pond in the southern corner of ‘Wombat Walk’ has suffered serious degradation. The school set about removing rubbish and planting more bush to increase the natural values of the area which is known to be home to the ‘vulnerable’ listed Green and Gold Frog.

Weed species were identified at the site and are in the process of being removed. The students are also researching the vegetation and fauna of the area so they can install interpretive signage along the walking track. The final part of the project has been the planting of a ‘bush tucker’ garden in the school grounds.

NRM North’s Education Officer, Michael Black, said engaging students in hands-on activities concerning the natural environment would lead to greater understanding of the need to protect our natural resources.

“NRM North was happy to partner South George Town Primary School in this project as it aligns nicely with the organisation’s strategy objectives while engaging a school population in hands-on activities to promote environmental learning.

“Aside from learning about the local plants and animals, the students gain a sense of ownership over the area, and the wider community will become less likely to litter and dump garden waste as their children take the messages home with them.” Mr Black said.

School students are fantastically enthusiastic when it comes to rolling up the sleeves and getting their hands dirty. This is no different for South George Town Primary students.

They bring a wonderfully fresh attitude to projects like this and are sponges when it comes to absorbing pertinent information.



The principal of South George Town Primary School, Bev Shadbolt, said the activity was important for a number of reasons.

“It engages the students in native planting activities, offers them a chance to hear about traditional uses of local plants and provides a focal point for the celebration of Aboriginal culture within the school community.

“They relish the opportunity to practically contribute to the improvement of their school and wider environment.” Ms Shadbolt said.

Both the school and NRM North can see the advantage of projects that offer outdoor, hands-on activities instead of solely being confined to the classroom.

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Serrated Tussock Awareness

NRM North recently held a field day near Cressy to focus on one of the region's worst weeds, Serrated Tussock (*Nassella trichotoma*).

Serrated Tussock is a 'Declared Weed' under the Weed Management Act 1999 and is also listed as a Weed of National Significance (WoNS).

Around 20 people attended the field day to learn how to identify and control the worst weed of grazing land in Australia.

NRM North's Weeds Coordinator Greg Stewart and DPIPW's David Lane started with a detailed run-down along with personal experiences from individuals who have been involved in works to control Serrated Tussock.

Following the indoors session, participants braved the cold, venturing into a nearby paddock to see Serrated Tussock and get identification practice in the field.

This field day forms part of NRM North's ongoing program to raise awareness of best-practice weed management.

Mr Stewart said Serrated Tussock was known to occur at a number of sites within the region, those being near Westbury, Cressy, St Helens and the Tamar valley.

"NRM North is currently working with the individual landowners and DPIPW to implement a program to undertake control at all sites within the region with the view to eradication.

"As part of this overall project, media articles have been produced and field days conducted to help raise awareness about this insidious weed." Mr Stewart said.



Serrated Tussock is considered to be Australia's worst pasture weed. Originating from South America, it is an aggressive, invasive perennial grass with the ability to thrive in dry conditions.

As it is unpalatable, it has no value as a fodder species. Stock will not graze the plants unless forced due to starvation and then may die as a result of ingesting the leaves.

Serrated Tussock is similar in appearance to some native grasses but when in full flower has a distinctly purple appearance.

In autumn when most other grasses have dried off to a straw-colour, the Serrated Tussock plants still retain their bright green colour, except for the tips which are bleached.

New Grass Species Discovered

During a recent trip to the Fingal Valley, NRM North's Weeds Coordinator Greg Stewart noticed an unusual looking grass. The drooping seed heads were conspicuous amongst the surrounding species.

A sample of the grass was collected and sent to the Herbarium for identification. The sample was subsequently forwarded to a grass specialist in Canberra for a second opinion. The grass was identified as Weeping Lovegrass (*Eragrostis parviflora*).

Weeping Lovegrass is native to all of the mainland states but does not occur naturally in Tasmania. It is an annual or short-lived perennial which can grow to nearly a metre tall.

The seed-heads (panicles) are often open and drooping; hence the common name. This the first time that Weeping Lovegrass has been found growing in Tasmania.

This outcome has demonstrated the importance of having plants identified if they are unknown or appear to be out of place in the environment.

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News in brief...

School Environmental Grants

Five schools in northern Tasmania will receive grants from NRM North to assist in landcare and natural resource management activities.

The School Environmental Grants program provides funding from between one hundred dollars to a maximum of five thousand dollars to primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities in the NRM North region.

This is the second round of School Environmental Grants to be offered this year.

The funding has been made available through the Australian Government's Caring for our Country Program.

The successful projects are:

- Beaconsfield Primary School – Wetlands and Habitat Restoration.
- Launceston Church Grammar School – School Bank weed control, revegetation and plant propagation.
- Rocherlea Primary School – The Vege Patch.
- St. Anthony's Catholic Primary School – Sustainability Garden/ Kitchen Program.
- St. Patricks College – Bush Block Protection Project.

Interpretation Centre

A new Tasmanian Devil interpretation centre, sponsored by NRM North, was opened at Tasmania Zoo at Riverside during Threatened Species Day celebrations in September.

The Devil's Heaven Interpretation Centre was opened by Environment Minister Brian Wightman, NRM North's CEO James McKee and Tasmania Zoo's Robert Warren.

The new centre includes information on the life cycles and history of Tasmanian Devils and up to date information on the Devil Facial Tumour Disease.

It is the entry point for the zoo's Devil's Heaven exhibition which leads visitors to several devil enclosures including a breeding enclosure also funded by NRM North.

NRM North believes it is important Tasmanians and tourists alike continue to be made aware of this unique creature and the devastating disease which threatens its survival.



Leaders' Luncheon



The popular Northern Tasmania Leaders' Luncheon Series has been re-launched thanks to a new partnership between NRM North, Northern Tasmania Development and the Launceston Chamber of Commerce.

The event is also supported by Hotel Grand Chancellor, Walker Designs, UTAS, TCCI and Regional Development Australia.

More than 80 business leaders attended the first luncheon of the series at the Hotel Grand Chancellor in September.

It included a panel discussion on the topic: 'How can the university work collaboratively with Tasmanian leaders to help drive business opportunities and regional economic development?'

Another Leaders' Luncheon is planned for December.



Out & About

Northern Midlands Sub-Region

Gorse Field Day

NRM North and the Tasmanian Landcare Association recently ran a field day on Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) at the 'Patterdale' property near Deddington.

The Northern Midlands region was chosen for the field day location as it contains substantial areas of Gorse infested land and land-holders regularly request information and advice on effective Gorse management.

The event was generously hosted by farmers, Rod and Carol Westmore.

Gorse is a 'Declared Weed' under the Weed Management Act 1999 and is also a Weed of National Significance (WoNS).

Gorse is relatively widespread across most of the northern NRM region but only occurs in limited amounts in the north-east.

This field day forms part of NRM North's ongoing program to raise awareness of best-practice weed management.



Out & About

Break O'Day Sub-Region

Velvet Worm Award

The North East Understorey Network and the Bird Observers North East (Birds Tasmania) were the winners of this year's Velvet Worm Awards.

The annual award recognises the outstanding achievement in the protection and enhancement of the environment in the Break O'Day region and is jointly funded by NRM North and the Break O'Day Council.

Each group received \$500 in recognition of their achievements.

Understorey Network President, Janet Drummond, said it was an honour to accept the award on behalf of the group.

"The prize money will be used to further the work of the network in promoting the protection of existing native vegetation, and the use of locally sourced native understorey in revegetation projects."

Liz Znidersic from Birds Tasmania said the award was wonderful recognition for the birding group.





Natural Resource Management
in Northern Tasmania

NRM North is responsible for planning, delivery and implementation of integrated natural resource management (NRM) in northern Tasmania. We take a holistic approach to managing the environment through identifying regional priorities and developing integrated NRM plans that are based on sound scientific data. NRM North was established in 2003 through a community-driven process in response to the Tasmanian Government's Natural Resource Management Framework and its enabling legislation, the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Act, 2002.

Our role is to:

- Develop programs that recognise the need to balance the environmental, economic and social needs of the community.
- Provide leadership to ensure that sound management of the region's natural resources continues.
- Promote partnerships with all stakeholders to determine appropriate investment and cost sharing strategies.

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Working with you to care for the natural resources of our island home.