

NORTHERN exposure

Spring 2010



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Forty-spotted Pardalote – Photo: Penny Geard

From the CEO

Welcome to the Spring edition of Northern Exposure. We have just had our AGM and we used that opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved across the region. In this, the International Year of Biodiversity, it is particularly appropriate to have this issue devoted to reflecting on what is being done in the biodiversity space.

Diversity is not only the spice of life; it underpins life as we know it. Biodiversity is not just some word for environmentalists to bandy around; it describes the diversity of the natural environment which underpins life itself and so much of what we enjoy, from productive agriculture through to visual enjoyment of the landscape.

Without the huge diversity of our natural systems we would be completely reliant on chemicals and other synthetic substances for everything from pest control to pollination and we would live in a very boring place.

So it is important the diversity of our biological life is maintained and enhanced. It is in all of our interests. 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:

- Removed Willows and Gorse to protect 80 hectares of the endangered South Esk Pine on the St Paul's River.
- Increased Eucalyptus ovata - Calitris oblonga Forests (an Endangered Ecological Community) by over 200 hectares.
- Completed first stages of eradication of Gorse from the Flinders and Dorset municipalities.
- Completed an initial eradication of Bridal Creeper from the region and providing ongoing follow up as required.
- Protected a further 200 hectares of riparian vegetation and established and improved farm shelter belts and vegetation corridors to enhance connectivity and habitat condition for threatened species such as the Burrowing Crayfish and Green and Gold Frog.



- Continued supporting the control and management of the pest fish Gambusia in the Tamar estuary to reduce the potential devastating impact the spread of this invasive fish species will have on the region's marine 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 as well as activities we have had very little to do with.

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.

Threats to our biodiversity are real and so we continue to work to understand these through activities such as the Forty-spotted Pardalote surveys on Flinders Island and supporting activities like the State Government's Fox Eradication Program.

An important part of the biodiversity picture is traditional knowledge, particularly that of Aboriginal people. The launch of Aboriginal Land Management documentary was an important part of that process.



And so we continue to work with you to care for the biodiversity and natural resources of our island home.

James McKee
CEO NRM NORTH

Forty-Spotted Pardalote Surveys - Flinders Island



Forty-spotted Pardalote –
Photo: Elaine McDonald

“...the long term future of the Forty-spotted Pardalote looks bleak and without intervention, extinction maybe just a matter of time.”

A recent survey of the nationally endangered Forty-spotted Pardalote served as a reminder of just how quickly a species can disappear. The Forty-spotted Pardalote (*Pardalotus quadragintus*) is a tiny bird that occurs down the east coast of Tasmania. While never common, the species has continued to decline since European settlement and it now survives in small colonies on islands, headlands and peninsulas.

A conservation assessment undertaken in 2009-2010 on Maria Island, Bruny Island, Lime Bay and several sites south of Hobart, had alarming results. An overall population decline of 60 per cent had occurred in the 17 years since the last assessment, and in some colonies the decline was as high as 95 per cent. Several decades of drought has taken its toll on the pardalote's critical habitat tree, white gum *Eucalyptus viminalis*, so that dieback, disturbance and habitat fragmentation were a major cause of the bird's decline.

Forty-spotted Pardalote were first reported on Flinders Island in 1902 by the ornithologist LeSouf. Although he recorded seeing the species, he did not publish where. In 1970, David Milledge reported a small number of birds in Bob Smith's Gully near the Strezlecki Ranges, but subsequent searches failed to re-find this colony or any others in suitable habitat.

In 1986, Peter Brown found 10 to 15 pairs of birds in a single gully between Walkers Hill and Lucks Hill in the Darling Range, totally isolated from the previously known southern sites. He also checked reports of birds being on the Big Hill Run on Cape Barren Island, but was unable to locate the species there.

In 1994, two new colonies were found on Broughams Sugarloaf, quite separate from Walkers Hill, bringing the total Flinders population to 70 birds in three colonies covering 300 hectares. In 2003, severe wildfires swept across eastern Flinders Island. Post-fire surveys did not locate any pardalote but it was hoped that they may have survived in isolated pockets.

After the alarming results of the 2009-2010 survey, Dr Sally Bryant, Fiona Hume and Matt Webb spent five days in August searching the previously known areas. Despite repeated surveys, they had no luck detecting birds in the Darling Range or at Broughams Sugarloaf.

NRM Facilitator Michael Sherriff showed the group a large patch of magnificent white gum forest on Mulligans Hill which was briefly surveyed but deserves further effort. Sites at Bob Smiths Gully and on the Wallanippi property were checked and although the white gum forest was in beautiful condition, no birds were found.

Thanks to Wayne Dick and Wayne Warren from the Parks & Wildlife Service, the group surveyed the Strezlecki Ranges via the southern fire trail. At Costers Gully, several birds could be heard calling from the slopes. The white gum woodland in this area appears contiguous with Bob Smith's Gully, so it may be the birds have a large natural corridor for movement. It was all that was needed to confirm the species continued existence on Flinders Island and a reason to return and search some more.

Forty-spotted Pardalote on Flinders Island have been isolated for thousands of years. Geneticists argue that a long-term viable population should be in excess of 500 individuals whereas small isolated populations that are unable to increase are doomed to extinction. Sadly, the long-term future of the Forty-spotted Pardalote across its entire range looks bleak and without intervention, extinction maybe just a matter of time.

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Fox Eradication Program

The last 200 years has seen 22 mammal species become extinct in Australia with over 100 more on the threatened and endangered species list. Such a rate of extinction is exceptional and relates specifically to our history, from colonisation to the modern day.

While the landscape has been significantly altered, it is the introduction of feral animals that have been directly responsible for many extinctions while accelerating the demise of many others. The European Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) is the most devastating of these feral invaders and has been directly implicated as the contributor to the majority of extinctions.

Tasmania is one of the last bastions of natural wealth in Australia and is the last stronghold for many species already extinct or in decline on the mainland. If foxes were to become established in Tasmania the direct economic costs would be significant through the agricultural sector but it is the impact on Tasmania's wildlife and the associated tourism industry that is of greatest concern.

It is estimated that foxes will impact on the populations of at least 78 Tasmanian native animals. Their extreme adaptability in prey type, from insects to animals around 5.5 kilograms in weight, will place many natives at risk through direct predation and also competition. Extinctions will be inevitable.

The fox is present in Tasmania. The physical evidence indicates a low density population is active within the state. Eradication of the fox from Tasmania is the key to ensuring the survival of our iconic endemic species and the protection of our agricultural and tourism industries. The Fox Eradication Program (FEP) is working towards that goal.

Experts indicate eradication can be achieved through application of a strategic baiting program targeting all areas of core fox habitat. Under such a program, all foxes in the state will be placed at risk from a fox bait.

Application of the strategic baiting program has begun with operations under way in the south of the state, currently located in the Glen Huon region, and soon to begin in the north west.

The success of the strategic baiting program and the ultimate eradication of the fox from Tasmania is dependent upon the support of the whole community. International experience shows that without community support, eradication will not be achieved. You can support the eradication effort by, when contacted, allowing access to property for the strategic baiting program and for the post bait monitoring activities which will follow.

The greatest support you can provide is to remain vigilant and report all fox sightings and any possible evidence of fox activity to the 24 hour hotline 1300 FOX OUT (1300 369 688). Further information on the fox eradication effort can be found on the FEP website at www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/fox

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Fox Eradication Program

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CVA Partnership

Late last year, NRM North entered into a partnership with Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) as a means to provide additional resources for priority on-ground projects across the region.

Many of the weed management projects undertaken by NRM North are completed by commercial contractors but there are often projects that require the services of a group of hands-on workers to complete the tasks.

These projects involve works such as weed control, revegetation with native plants, coastal protection, wetland rehabilitation and general maintenance.

Through the partnership, NRM North has access to the services of CVA teams to complete works anywhere within the northern NRM region. The teams come complete with transport, supervisor, tools and the necessary insurances.

The teams usually consist of overseas volunteers but can also include local volunteers. The CVA teams are able to travel anywhere throughout the region and being relatively self-sufficient, they are able to undertake allotted project tasks and achieve the desired outcomes.

While weed control is not generally recognised as one of the most exciting project tasks for a team, it is widely accepted that weeds do grow in beautiful places which can result in the CVA teams visiting some scenic locations.

Projects completed by CVA teams include serrated tussock control in the Northern Midlands, gorse control at the Narawntapu National Park and general weed control at the Mole Creek Karst National Park, Liffey River, Falmouth foreshore and Bridport.

Mole Creek Karst, April 2010

A few kilometres west of Mole Creek is the Mole Creek Karst National Park. The area is dotted with numerous caves and sinkholes. Within the National Park at a site near Sensation Gorge is an old quarry where english broom had become the dominant species. Parks & Wildlife Service staff had identified the treatment of the broom at this site as a priority and due to the rugged terrain, it was decided to use a CVA team to complete the works. The team spent a total of seven days at the site controlling english broom where plants were either pulled or 'cut & painted' using a glyphosate product registered for aquatic use.

George Town Foreshore, July 2010

As part of a larger project, a CVA team completed some removal of environmental weeds at a site on the foreshore adjacent to Low Head Road at George Town. Weeds controlled included boneseed, gorse and a large patch of climbing groundsel (*Senecio angulatus*), that was pulled out and stacked, ready for collection and removal by the George Town Council. The works were completed as a lead-up to a commemorative tree planting day, that was planned at the site by Girl Guides Tasmania as part of activities to celebrate 100 years of Guiding in Australia.

CVA-USA Narawntapu, September 2010

A project that has been implemented in stages over the last year has been the removal of gorse from within the Narawntapu National Park. The Parks & Wildlife Service has been developing a plan to manage the gorse and decided to use the CVA teams to control isolated plants that have escaped from large infestations on the cleared areas into the adjacent bushland.

During September, a team of Californian Conservation Corps workers in Tasmania as part of a CVA exchange program worked at Narawntapu for a full week. Apart from gorse control, the team also completed some park maintenance works. As the work in the bush areas is completed, the larger infestations on the firebreaks and old grazing land will be controlled using conventional methods such as mechanical removal or herbicide treatment.

The partnership with CVA is another example of where NRM North is working with stakeholder organisations to provide additional resources for weed management activities across the region.

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News in brief...

Backyard Biodiversity Toolkit

NRM North, in partnership with the Launceston Environment Centre and Tamar NRM, has launched a new flora and fauna information package to help residents enhance their own backyards.

The Backyard Biodiversity Toolkit contains a number of brochures and booklets on native flora and fauna that have been produced specifically for the greater Launceston area.

The package includes:

- Gardening for Native Biodiversity (a native planting guide for the Tamar region)
- Gardens for Wildlife brochure (scheme that supports people to make their property friendly for local wildlife and the environment)
- Land for Wildlife (Scheme to assist landowners to conserve, manage and protect habitat for flora and fauna on their property)
- Leave logs for frogs (identifying critical habitat for native frogs)
- George Town, Launceston and West Tamar plant species list (identifying some common plants within each of the municipalities).

For copies of the toolkit, contact NRM North.

Documentary Launch

A new documentary promoting Aboriginal land management in northern Tasmania was launched by the Community Development Minister Nick McKim in August.

The documentary was developed in partnership with NRM North and the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania (ALCT).

It was filmed and edited by local cameraman Ashley Dunn who was recently nominated for an Emmy Award.

The documentary aims to encourage young Aboriginal people to consider a career in the natural resource management field, especially in the Furneaux Group of islands.

The documentary is being distributed to the Aboriginal community, general community, schools and various land management groups.

NRM North and the ALCT also worked together on a photographic exhibition of Aboriginal land management for NAIDOC week.

See Change Festival



More than 800 people attended the inaugural east coast See Change Sustainability Festival in September.

The festival included trade fairs, climate change films and sustainable living bus tours.

It aimed to help local communities explore sustainable living options and respond to the challenges of climate change.

NRM North and NRM South joined together to bring Melbourne act The Connies to the festival.

Dressed as Melbourne tram conductors, The Connies raised awareness about Tasmania's flora and fauna by handing out collectable swap-cards featuring important wildlife.

After the success of the inaugural festival, the Break O'Day and Glamorgan Spring Bay councils will seek community input to decide what shape the festival should take in future years.



Out & About



Break O'Day Sub-Region

National Tree Day

A group of students from the St Helens primary school participated in an excursion to Jeanerett Beach, Bay of Fires, as part of Planet Ark's National Tree Day in August.

The students planted more than 100 native species, many of them grown by local Understorey Network members.

The plantings have been an important activity in assisting with the revegetation of the camping areas and local penguin habitat.



Students also had the opportunity to learn about the importance of shorebird habitats from local Ornithologist, Liz Znidersic.

Students observed shorebirds through a telescope, built hooded plover nests and investigated penguin rookeries.

Sustainable Garden Workshop

A sustainable garden workshop in St Helens in September proved to be a big hit with residents.

Guest speaker Steve Solomon, author of Gardening Vegetables South of Australia, highlighted the important link between good soil health and high nutrition vegetable crops.

Local botanical expert, Katriona Hopkins, spoke about how to design and utilise gardens to best suit the changing needs and climate.

Out & About



Northern Midlands Sub-Region

Westpac Devil Day

Westpac Bank employees got up close and personal with a Tasmanian devil as part of a volunteer day in August.

Westpac staff were keen to do something to help the devil in light of the devastating Devil Facial Tumour Disease and contacted NRM North for some suggestions.

We had the perfect plan - a day out in the fresh air, planting native species to enhance devil habitat.

The event was held at 'Blenheim' at Longford, owned by Stephen and Jenny Casswell.

Robert Warren from Tasmania Zoo brought along a feisty Tasmanian devil who won the hearts of Westpac staff.

Mr Warren gave a presentation on the devil including an update on the impact of the Devil Facial Tumour Disease.





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 develop 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, economical 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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Supported by the Australian and State Governments.



Australian Government



Tasmania
Explore the possibilities

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

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