

Wildlife Matters

AWC TO SAVE THREATENED WILDERNESS AND ITS WILDLIFE

MT ZERO, NORTH QUEENSLAND

AWC: Protecting Australian Wildlife

Welcome to the first newsletter from Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC).

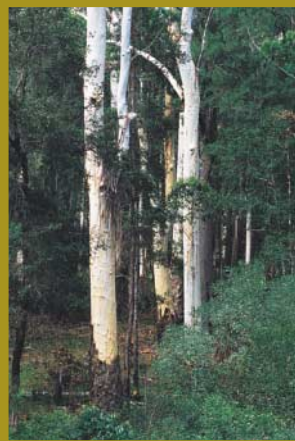
We trust you will enjoy reading *Wildlife Matters*, which we hope to fill with good news about the wildlife in AWC's sanctuaries.

Unfortunately, for most of the last 200 years the news regarding Australia's wildlife has not been good. The Toolache Wallaby, widely regarded as the most beautiful and graceful member of the kangaroo family, is gone forever. The Thylacine, the Paradise Parrot and the enigmatic Lesser Bilby are just some of the other animals that Australia has lost.

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Northern Bettong Photo: OPWS

Eastern Pebble-mound Mouse

Wet Sclerophyll Forest

Australian Wildlife Conservancy is proposing to acquire a remarkable wilderness area in north Queensland that is home to more than 35 native mammal species. Located approximately 65 kilometres north-west of Townsville, Mt Zero is a biodiversity-rich property covering nearly 40,000 hectares adjacent to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Sadly, Mt Zero and its wildlife are threatened by logging and grazing.

AWC discovered Mt Zero, deep in the Coane Mountain Range, when our scientists visited north Queensland last year. They were delighted to find a property rich in native mammals - a real 'hotspot' for Australia's threatened mammal fauna. Northern Bettongs, Spotted-tailed Quolls and Yellow-bellied Gliders - all listed as nationally threatened - find refuge in the tall eucalypt forests of Mt Zero. *continued on page 2*



australian wildlife conservancy
 PO Box 1897 West Perth WA 6872
 Ph: 08 9226 0340
www.australianwildlife.org

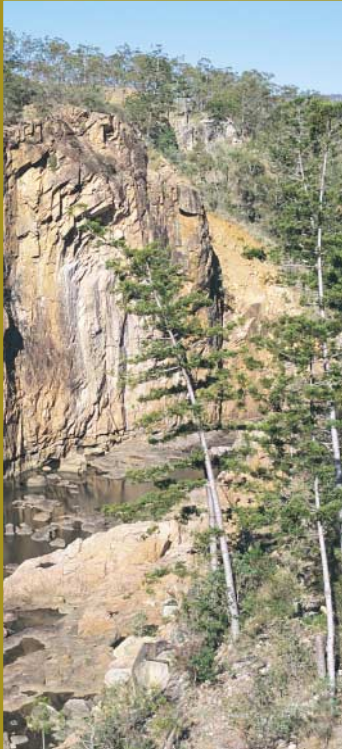
The other mammals resident at Mt Zero include the Whiptail Wallaby, the Long-nosed Bandicoot and the Eastern Pebble-mound Mouse. However, it is not just the mammals that make Mt Zero such an important place. Mt Zero is also home to an impressive number of birds, including rare species such as the Rufous Owl and the Grey Goshawk.

However, this beautiful place and its wildlife are threatened by logging. Grazing of sensitive habitats is also beginning to have an impact. AWC is particularly concerned that logging of the wet sclerophyll forests, if allowed to continue, may have tragic consequences for critically endangered species such as the Northern Bettong (see page 3). With its astonishing line-up of fauna and with its key habitats under threat, the acquisition of Mt Zero is a high priority for AWC.

If we can raise the necessary funds to complete the purchase of Mt Zero and to provide for effective management of the property, we will ensure it is protected in perpetuity as part of our national network of wildlife sanctuaries.

AWC needs at least \$1.5 million to acquire and provide for the management of Mt Zero. Support from the Commonwealth government, through the Natural Heritage Trust, and a generous gift from a committed major donor, means we have already raised more than half of the required amount. We have recently launched a campaign to raise the balance of the funding necessary to secure the future of Mt Zero and its wildlife. We hope to add Mt Zero to the AWC network of sanctuaries by mid-2002.

Thank you to all AWC supporters who have already contributed to our Mt Zero campaign.



Mt Zero



Rufous Owl

AWC: Protecting Australian Wildlife Continued from page 1...

Altogether, 20 Australian mammals are now extinct - the worst record in the world. Another 50 mammal species are listed as nationally threatened. Our native birds are also under siege as habitat destruction, notably land clearing, continues at an unsustainable rate.

AWC's mission is to fight this extinction crisis and deliver some good news for Australian wildlife. In this edition of *Wildlife Matters*, the good news includes our proposed acquisition of Mt Zero and our plans to re-establish populations of five endangered species on our Faure Island sanctuary.

Many of you will have become AWC supporters over the last few months. With your generous support, AWC has commenced a national program to protect Australia's threatened wildlife.

Our objective is to establish a national network of AWC sanctuaries protecting a diversity of native species and their habitats. Your continued support will be important in helping us realise this goal.

AWC currently has five sanctuaries covering over 450,000 hectares (more than 1.1 million acres) in the Kimberley, Shark Bay, the mid-west of WA and the forests of south-western Australia. In terms of area managed for conservation, Australian Wildlife Conservancy is probably the largest non-government environmental organisation in Australia.

Mt Zero in north Queensland is set to become AWC's sixth sanctuary. It is a place of exceptional biodiversity, including more than 35 mammal species. However, Mt Zero and its inhabitants are under threat and AWC must act quickly to save it.

Purchasing important areas of habitat is only one element of the AWC strategy. Within these areas, we also aim to eradicate or control feral predators such as the fox and the feral cat. Such predators have already been eradicated or controlled in three of our sanctuaries - Karakamia, Paruna and Faure

Island. Once these predators are controlled, native wildlife can be reintroduced. AWC has successfully translocated several species into its sanctuaries. Further reintroductions are planned, starting with the translocation of the Shark Bay Mouse to Faure Island in mid-2002.

AWC has already achieved a great deal - however, there is so much more to do. While we cannot undo the past, there are many practical steps that we can now take to ensure history is not repeated for species such as the Northern Bettong, the Gouldian Finch and the Black-flanked Rock Wallaby. We hope you will join us in taking these steps to provide a more secure future for Australia's wildlife.



Above: Hoop Pine

Below: Spotted-tailed Quoll

Is Mt Zero the Last Chance for the Northern Bettong?

The Northern Bettong is one of Australia's most endangered mammals. Scientists believe the total population of Northern Bettong could now be as low as 750 animals. The future of the Northern Bettong is so precarious that the loss of the Mt Zero population could mean the difference between survival and extinction for the species.



Photo: CPWS

Distribution of the Northern Bettong

Windsor Tablelands ?
population

Mount Carbine
population

Lamb Range
population

Mt Zero
population

CAIRNS

TOWNSVILLE

The Northern Bettong is restricted to three or four small areas in northern Queensland. One of these four areas includes Mt Zero. Recent surveys have confirmed that the Northern Bettong still survives in the wet and dry sclerophyll forests that cover part of the property. Unfortunately, logging threatens the very heart of the Northern Bettong habitat on Mt Zero. We need to act urgently to acquire Mt Zero and prevent logging of its tall eucalypt forests.

- Closely related to the Woylie (Brush-tailed Bettong) and the Boodie (Burrowing Bettong), little is known about the Northern Bettong.
- Underground truffles form the basis of the Northern Bettong's diet. Active only at night, their feeding behaviour helps keep the forest ecosystem healthy by spreading truffle spores throughout the forest.
- If this endangered marsupial disappears, the forest ecosystem will suffer.
- The decline of the Northern Bettong can be attributed primarily to loss of habitat, particularly the degradation and loss of sclerophyll forests in Queensland as a result of timber harvesting, clearing for agriculture and altered fire regimes.
- Predation by foxes and cats may also have taken its toll.

You can help save the Northern Bettong by contributing to the purchase and management of Mt Zero.

- Become a monthly supporter by making a tax deductible donation to AWC each month from your credit card or by direct debit from your bank account.
- If you are unable to support AWC with a monthly pledge at present, you can help by making a single tax deductible donation toward the purchase and management of Mt Zero.
- Introduce a friend to AWC and help expand our supporter base.

A donation form is included with this newsletter.

Thank you to all AWC supporters who have already helped with the purchase of Mt Zero.



Photo: CPWS

"Please help save Mt Zero"

"Mt Zero is an important refuge for some of Australia's endangered mammals. Unless we can protect it, animals like the Northern Bettong, which is making a final stand at Mt Zero, will be lost forever."

Dr Tim Flannery, one of Australia's leading mammal experts and a Director of AWC.





Sanctuary

Ningaloo

AWC has a 25% interest in the Ningaloo Pastoral Lease, a 50,000 hectare property adjacent to Ningaloo Reef on the north-west coast of WA. Remnant populations of native mammal species survive on the Ningaloo Lease but feral predators have caused the disappearance of other species. AWC's objective, which will require the support of our lease partners and the WA government, is to manage an area within the Ningaloo property as a wildlife sanctuary and to reintroduce key species.

In conserving the pastoral lease we will also be protecting the offshore Ningaloo Reef, one of the world's most pristine coral reef systems. Ningaloo Reef is home to an incredible diversity of marine fauna including the Whale Shark (the world's largest fish), Loggerhead, Green and Hawksbill Turtles, Dugong and over 500 species of fish.

Unfortunately, Ningaloo Reef is threatened by a proposal to build a massive resort and marina complex. AWC has joined with other groups in opposing this development. Further details can be found at www.save-ningaloo.org



Faure Island - Protecting World Heritage

Faure Island is a 6,000 hectare island in the Shark Bay World Heritage Area. When AWC acquired Faure Island in 1999, we became custodian of one of Australia's largest non-government owned world heritage sites.

AWC has commenced a mammal reintroduction program at Faure Island which is of national significance. With the assistance of the WA Department of Conservation and Land Management, cats have been eradicated, an extraordinary achievement given the size of the island.



Western Barred Bandicoot

Under a proposed agreement with the WA Government, AWC will translocate five nationally threatened mammals to Faure Island: - Boodie (Burrowing Bettong), Shark Bay Mouse, Western Barred Bandicoot, Banded Hare Wallaby and Greater Stick-nest Rat. Under stage 1 of the program, AWC aims to have populations of the Shark Bay Mouse and possibly the Burrowing Bettong resident on Faure by mid-2002 (see story on page 7). Our intention is that the remaining species will be reintroduced during 2002-2003.

Karakamia - Restoring the Jarrah Forest Ecosystem

Karakamia Sanctuary is located in the northern Jarrah forest less than one hour from Perth. A specially constructed fence ensures that Karakamia, which comprises 250 hectares, is predator free. The fauna at Karakamia, including the reintroduced species, continues to thrive as AWC seeks to restore the diversity of the Jarrah forest ecosystem.

Karakamia is now home to a diverse range of mammal fauna including Woylie, Tamar Wallaby, Quenda (Southern Brown Bandicoot), Western Ringtail Possum, Brushtail Possum, Numbat and mainland Quokka. Around 100 bird species have also been recorded at Karakamia, including the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo for which the sanctuary is named (Karakamia means home of the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo).



Juvenile Numbat



Visitors Centre at Karakamia



Gouldian Finches



Mornington landscape

Mornington - Gouldian Finches and Spectacular Kimberley Wilderness

In 2001, AWC acquired more than 310,000 hectares in the Central Kimberley. Mornington Station is probably one of the world's largest non-government wildlife sanctuaries. It is certainly one of the most beautiful, with the spectacular Fitzroy River and the rugged King Leopold range dominating a wilderness of immense biological significance.

As a priority, AWC will be working to survey the mammal and bird fauna of Mornington. The bird list for Mornington is impressive - already around 170 species have been identified including nationally threatened species such as the elusive Gouldian Finch and the Purple-crowned Fairy-wren. Mornington could be a stronghold for several threatened bird species.

The Old Mornington Bushcamp continues to operate on the property, providing a comfortable facility for the Kimberley traveller and a base from which to explore AWC's largest wildlife sanctuary.

Mt Zero ▲

ralia



Gibson Hills



Lake Moore

Biological Survey Reveals Rich Biodiversity on Mount Gibson

Mt Gibson sanctuary is a 130,000 hectare property on the strategic 'eucalypt-mulga' line in the mid-west of WA. In a landscape savaged by vegetation clearance and salinity, it contains an outstanding example of remnant eucalypt woodland. AWC has recently completed a biological survey of the sanctuary which revealed a high diversity of reptiles, birds and invertebrates (especially native bees!). Highlights of the species list for Mt Gibson now include 117 birds, including the nationally threatened Malleefowl and the Peregrine Falcon, 39 reptiles, and small mammals such as the Mitchell's Hopping Mouse and the Little Long-tailed Dunnart. Several rare flora species have also been recorded at Mt Gibson.

However, as is the case in much of Australia, foxes and cats have wiped out the medium-sized mammals that once inhabited Mt Gibson. We found no recent trace of the Bilby, the Boodie or the Numbat during our survey. With assistance from our supporters, AWC's strategy is to control the feral predators on Mt Gibson and reintroduce the mammal fauna that existed prior to the invasion of cats and foxes.

Our Black-flanked Rock Wallabies Breed at Paruna

Paruna Sanctuary covers 2000 hectares of pristine bushland. Scenic jarrah, wandoo and powderbark forest combine with heathland and riparian habitat to form a critical environmental corridor linking the Walyunga and Avon Valley National Parks. A 16.5 kilometre predator proof fence, and a control program carried out in conjunction with the WA Government, protect the native fauna in Paruna.

The beautiful Black-flanked Rock Wallaby, a nationally threatened species, was reintroduced to Paruna in 2001. This species has declined drastically in WA and SA as a result of fox predation. Ten animals were released in 2001 into Paruna. In April 2002 we were delighted to record our first baby Black-flanked Rock Wallaby. Further releases are planned, hopefully in 2002, as AWC works to ensure Paruna and its adjacent National Parks provide new hope for this graceful little Rock Wallaby.

Black-flanked Rock Wallaby



The Evolution of AWC



Martin Copley

Australian Wildlife Conservancy had its origins in 1991 when businessman Martin Copley acquired 180 hectares of remnant bushland outside of Perth.

The bushland was in good condition and contained a diversity of habitats including Jarrah and Marri forests and Wandoo woodland. Surveys revealed hundreds of species of plants and a rich bird and reptile fauna. However, as is the case in most areas on the Australian mainland, there was one missing ingredient: medium-sized ground-dwelling mammals had largely been exterminated by feral cats and foxes.

Martin Copley and his wife, Lorraine, named this bushland "Karakamia". Inspired partly by Dr John Wamsley's efforts in South Australia, they set out to create a sanctuary free of feral predators. Andre Schmitz, employed as manager of the sanctuary, oversaw the construction of a 6.5 kilometre feral proof fence and the eradication of foxes and cats. Efforts then turned to the reintroduction of mammal species formerly resident in the Karakamia region. The achievements of Andre and his team have been spectacular, with successful reintroductions of Quenda (Southern Brown Bandicoots), Numbats, Woylies and several other species.

By the late 1990's, Martin had withdrawn from his successful insurance business in the United Kingdom and settled permanently back in Perth (for over 120 years Martin's family has had strong ties to Australia). Buoyed by the conservation successes at Karakamia, Martin and his team began to expand with the acquisition of the 2,000 hectare Paruna sanctuary. Within a few years, their portfolio of high conservation value properties included 5 sanctuaries covering over 450,000 hectares. The team had also expanded to include eminent scientists Dr Tim Flannery, author of *The Future Eaters* and Director of the South Australian Museum, and Dr Barry Wilson, former head of Nature Conservation at the Department of Conservation and Land Management.

All of the acquisitions to this point in time had been funded by Martin but now the organisation had reached a pivotal stage in its development. Martin and his team believed that, with public support, it was possible to establish a truly national non-government organisation dedicated to the purchase and management of high conservation value land and thereby secure a better future for Australia's wildlife. While government initiatives would always be important, it was widely acknowledged that with the majority of land in Australia in private ownership the private sector had to play a greater role in conserving our biodiversity.

The Nature Conservancy, based in the US, provided a useful model – it has over 1 million supporters donating in excess of A\$500 million each year and owns over 1200 sanctuaries (covering 12 million acres) across the United States. A similar body in Australia could help mobilise significant private sector support for conservation of our native species and their habitats. Martin and his team had created the starting point for such an organisation. With broad community support and additional major donors, their fledgling organisation could grow into an effective national body dedicated to wildlife conservation.

In 2001, with this objective in mind, the organisation officially became the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. All of the sanctuaries are now owned by AWC, which is registered as an independent, non-profit organisation under Federal legislation. This means that donations to AWC of money and property are tax deductible and that AWC accounts are independently

audited and reported annually to the Federal Department of the Environment and Heritage.

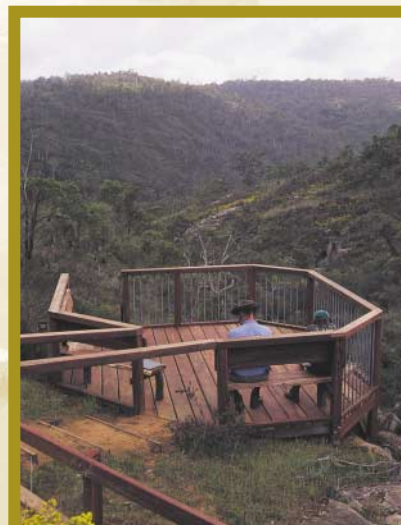
In late 2001, AWC also announced the engagement of its first Chief Executive, Atticus Fleming. Between 1996 and 2001, Atticus had been advisor to the Federal Minister for the Environment, Senator the Hon Robert Hill, where he had played a key role in developing and implementing Australia's first national biodiversity legislation. The AWC team, led by Atticus, reports to a Board of Directors that includes Dr Tim Flannery and Dr Barry Wilson and which is chaired by Martin Copley.

AWC will shortly acquire its next sanctuary. Mt Zero will be the first AWC sanctuary in Queensland. A successful Perth businessman has stepped forward and will provide a major donation to assist with this acquisition.

The success of recent public fund-raising and the assistance of additional major donors mean AWC has emerged as a truly national body with a broad base of community support. With ongoing support, we are well placed to realise our mission of establishing a national network of non-government sanctuaries protecting a range of native species and their habitats.



Feral-proof fence at Karakamia



Visitor lookout at Paruna

AWC Provides New Hope for Five Threatened Species

It is not everyday that the opportunity arises to help save five species from extinction. With your support, we have the opportunity to do just that at our Faure Island sanctuary in the Shark Bay World Heritage Area.



AWC Director, Dr Barry Wilson, and Georgina Wall from Perth Zoo with a Shark Bay Mouse destined for Faure Island.

Many AWC supporters responded to our Faure Island campaign in late 2001 with generous donations. Thank you for your contributions, which have helped make it possible to now press ahead with our planned reintroductions. Planning for the Faure Island program first began in 2000 under the guidance of AWC Director, Dr Barry Wilson (former Head of Nature Conservation at CALM), and AWC Sanctuaries Manager, Andre Schmitz. Our first task was to remove feral cats and feral goats - a major challenge on such a large island. Undaunted by this challenge, AWC staff and officers of CALM have performed a minor miracle by removing all feral cats. At the date of this article, there had been no sign of a cat on Faure Island for more than twelve months.

In addition, more than 2000 goats have been removed from the island. Perhaps a handful of cunning goats remain - but their days are numbered. Faure Island will soon be free of feral predators and competitors.

In the absence of feral invaders, we expect the ecosystem on Faure will begin to recover, particularly the vegetation. Surveys of the island's vegetation and other flora and fauna have been conducted in conjunction with the WA Department of Conservation and Land Management and the museums of South Australia and Western Australia. The translocations can now begin.

The first species to be released on Faure Island will be the Shark Bay Mouse (*Pseudomys fieldi*). In preparation for this release, AWC has funded the establishment of a breeding colony of Shark Bay Mice, also called Djoongari, at Perth Zoo. The colony now numbers more than 100 mice, all destined for a new home on Faure Island in mid-2002. AWC also hopes to establish a population of Boodie (*Bettongia lesueur*) on Faure Island later this year, subject to the Island receiving reasonable rainfall.

We will keep you updated on progress at Faure Island in future newsletters. Your continuing support is vital if we are to be successful in our quest to provide new hope for five of Australia's most endangered species. With your support, we are confident that visitors to Faure Island will in future see a diverse and healthy mammal fauna including Boodies, Banded Hare Wallabies, Western Barred Bandicoots and (with some patience and keen eye sight) Greater Stick-nest Rats and Shark Bay Mice.

AWC thanks the staff at CALM who have assisted in the planning and implementation of the Faure Island project.



Faure Island

The Boodie (or Burrowing Bettong), the Western Barred Bandicoot, the Banded Hare Wallaby, the Greater Stick-nest Rat and the Shark Bay Mouse are all nationally threatened species. Each of these species was formerly widespread across parts of the Australian mainland. However, predation by cats and foxes, competition with introduced species and the destruction of habitat has had a disastrous impact. By the middle of this century, all five species had been exterminated from mainland Australia.

Fortunately, small populations survived on offshore islands in Shark Bay and off the north-western coast of Australia and, in the case of the Greater Stick-nest Rat, on an island off the coast of South Australia. These species, however, remain at risk of extinction while they cling to a precarious existence on a limited number of offshore islands. It is critically important for the future of each species that secure new populations are re-established on additional islands and on the mainland. Government agencies in Western Australia and South Australia have commenced this process but more needs to be done.

AWC has accepted the challenge of seeking to establish new populations of these species. The site for our ambitious reintroduction program is AWC's Faure Island sanctuary, a 6,000 hectare island in the Shark Bay World Heritage Area. Under the AWC proposal, Faure Island will become home to new populations of the Boodie, the Western Barred Bandicoot, the Banded Hare Wallaby, the Greater Stick-nest Rat and the Shark Bay Mouse.

