



*Toodyay Naturalists' Club Inc.*  
**THE TNC NEWSLETTER**  
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is indebted to the Wheatbelt NRM  
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**wheatbelt**  
natural resource  
management

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

**14 December 2012**

## **Planning Meeting**

A good representation of Nat's members enjoyed a working evening mixed with socialisation as we planned for the forthcoming year's programme at the home of Beth and Bob Frayne. It was a fruitful evening with a great many ideas for approaching a range of speakers that would interest our members with their wide range of topics. Wayne and I were due to leave within a few days an eight week holiday, six of the weeks wandering both islands of New Zealand. There was work to do prior to leaving to organise the programme, as far as possible, before our departure.

**February 2013**

## **Feral Focus, Part 1: The Camel.**

We had not returned by the first meeting of 2013 but Vice-president, Dr Robyn Taylor, and Committee Member, Greg Warburton, organised an excellent evening entitled, Feral Focus, Part 1: The Camel.

By all reports it was a fantastic presentation! It was described as 'a thrilling, well-illustrated power-point presentation covering everything 'camelish'. Robyn, an historian, spoke on the 19th century arrival in Australia of the camel and its use, so critical for exploration and the hauling of goods in the arid areas. With the introduction of the motor vehicle the use of the camel was overtaken and the animals released.

Greg described the various species of camel, its history from millions of years ago to the present and its domestication. Spectacular photography, that of his wife, Vicki, was shown of the trips they have made on camels they have trained, to cross from Coolgardie via the Gibson Desert and parts of the Canning Stock route to Halls Creek following the footsteps of 1896 explorer, David Carnegie. They have also travelled in Mongolia across the Gobi Desert, once again, with camels they trained, with wonderful footage taken by Vicki. The presentation was thoroughly enjoyed by members and many friends.

**March 2013**

## **Community Reference Group (CRG)**

Two members of the Toodyay Nat's Club travelled to Southern Cross for the first of the twice yearly Community Reference Group (CRG) meetings. It is understood that mining is an invasion on a landscape that can result in ugly scarring. However, working with the mining company, Cliffs Mining, the CRG at least has a voice. This particular mining company has a large contingent of environmentalists on staff. There are many aspects of the mine operation that the CRG have had a voice to which the company has listened. There has been continuous work over many years with the research and monitoring of the three rare plants of the area, *Tetratheca paynterae*, *Tetratheca harperi* and *Recinocarpos brevicolus*, very strict rulings on dust suppression, revegetation, research on how to derive the best results from rapidly using top-soil and not stock-piling it for long periods, feral animal control including fox, wild dogs, cat, rabbits, wild cattle, and monitoring of Mallee-fowl.

## **Proposed Bird Hide**

The members are delighted to have, at long last, received the plans from the design architect, of a proposed Bird Hide along the Toodyay section of the Avon in an area that has a summer pool. The area attracts diverse species of water birds that search the shallow, muddy areas to feed on the macro-invertebrates found in the damp areas. The Northam Office of the Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management (Wheatbelt NRM) provided the funding for the plans and the Nat's Club was recently successful in its funding application, again to the Wheatbelt NRM, to build the Hide. The structure, to be known as the John Masters Bird Hide, is planned to be built in the vicinity of the proposed Bilya Walk Track along the river's edge which will greatly add to a walker's enjoyment of natural history. Signage, with descriptions of both water and land birds, is to be erected which will add to the ambience of the area.

*Continued on Page 10*

*Cover photograph: A robber fly (Asilidae), most likely *Chrysopogon albopunctatus*, which is reasonably common around the south-west of WA. These flies are predatory, and seem to mimic pompilid/sphecid wasps.*

[Researched by Patron John Dell. Brian Hanich from the WA Museum kindly provided the information ].

*Photo by Sharon Richards*

# The John Masters Bird Hide

It is extremely exciting to see the beginnings of the building of the bird hide taking place along the Bilya Walk Track. It is also of significance to name it the John Masters Bird Hide as John's contribution to those interested in ornithology is greatly appreciated. Surveys along the river are extremely important and it is wonderful to be able to show our gratitude for the part he has played in gathering that information.

The bird hide is an interesting plan. A number of members have searched out quite a few bird hide styles both in Western Australia and overseas and the Toodyay hide will be one of the best. It will fit into the environment in its style and toning, which is extremely important, and will be comfortable in which to spend time. The location is ideal for observing the water, wading and land birds and also, as it is along the Walk Track, a restful area for walkers.

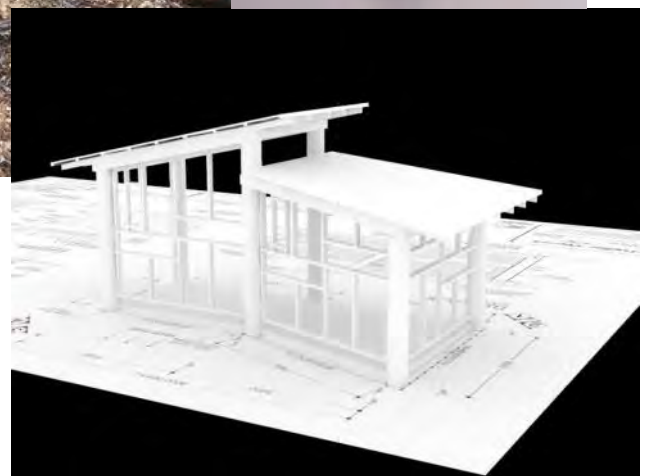
The building of the bird hide is being undertaken by local craftsman, Michael Shepherd, himself a keen 'birdo'. Funding has been provided by Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management (Wheatbelt NRM) for which the Club members are extremely grateful as it was Wheatbelt NRM that also provided funding for the original plans of the hide.

There will be some need for assistance by the members to provide an 'in kind' contribution to its erection; this will be work such as painting and helping with the laying of the pad and later, finishing the base. The hide has a tight 'building time frame' as the funding requirement has a completion date of May 31st. This will happen; I am sure members will be only too willing to assist with 'in kind' help as it is required.



*Above: Michael Shepherd placing the pegs for the John Masters Bird Hide on 21 April 2013, a project of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club, and funded by Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management (NRM). The hide, located next to Redbank Pool, will be the first purpose-built hide on the Avon River.*

*Photo Vicki Warburton*



Above right: A computer-generated initial outline of the proposed bird hide.

Courtesy Michael Shepherd



## Wedge-tailed Eagle presentation by Simon Cherriman

Simon began his presentation giving an overview of birds of prey, commonly known as BOP's, stating that we exist with the largest bird nesting in forest areas so close to our city. We have twenty four species of birds of prey being eighteen hawks, six falcons and two eagles, the latter two being the Wedge-tail and the Little Eagle. The Wedge-tail Eagle's scientific name is *Aquila audox* which means 'tenacious and bold' as it is well-adapted in all areas. The Noongar name is 'Walitz'

Since a very young lad, Simon has had an incredible interest in birds. He grew up in Parkeville and was supported by his Mum and Dad in all his interests including that of climbing very tall trees; at the age of twelve, his parents gave him a set of ropes. Simon frequented the John Forrest National Park and Darlington and has developed into an extremely competent climber which aids him in looking down over high nesting birds such as the Wedge-tail.

Simon's superb photography, from hides built high in the forest, show the large, gentle, caring parents of the fluffy, white nestlings tearing tiny scraps of meat from a kill to delicately give it to the youngster.

The Wedge-tail has more than one nest in a territory which may be up to eight kilometres square. The nests are added to each year and lined with green leaves to take two eggs; normally, only one chick survives. The chick fledges at twelve weeks of age and stays close to the parents for several months. The young are more golden than the adults and will darken in colour as they age. The Wedge-tail has sexual dimorphism, the female being larger than the male, which is common in birds of prey. It has a twenty year life span in the wild but can live to fifty years in captivity.

Simon completed his Honors in Environmental Science in 2006/07 studying the diet of the Wedge-tail Eagle. The prey remains and pellets, in and around nesting areas, were checked on five study sites in Whiteman Park and Karakamia. Remains were pulled apart, separated and analyzed, checking hair and fur types under the microscope to ascertain origin; also skeletal remains were collected and reconstructed. Simon's studies ultimately resulted in ascertaining the health of that particular eco-system.

Although the Wedge-tailed Eagle has been hunted mercilessly in the past and a bounty paid for a dead bird by the government authorities it is now an offence under the Wildlife Act to kill this bird. Hopefully, this magnificent creature will build its numbers to a sustainable level and be appreciated as a magnificent *Bird of Prey!*



Check out Simon's website - iNSiGHT Ornithology - for some truly amazing data and bird photography on Wedgetails and other birds!

[www.simoncherryman.com/Simon\\_Cherriman/Home.html](http://www.simoncherryman.com/Simon_Cherriman/Home.html)

## Photographic highlights



*Left: Three baby Southern Boobook (or Mokepoke) owls.  
Photo by Julie Lewis*

*Right: A carpet python -in-waiting? Or is it just having a bath?  
It does look well-fed!  
Photo by Paula and David Markwell*



*Above: Wood ducks (Maned ducks) taken by Les Hammill.*



*Above; Children playing with simple toys in the dirt in Africa No 'gameboy' here.*

## *Member Profile—Sharon Richards*

### *A Full Circle*

In 2012 I moved to Toodyay. It was the culmination of a long term plan which has taken a number of twists and turns.

I arrived in Perth from the United Kingdom (UK) in 1991. I was fortunate to have parents who instilled in me a sense to appreciate my surroundings...outdoors was better than in and walking through the fields better than the roads; partly because of this I think my living in the country side of Australia was inevitable.

Originally I moved to the Middle East, working as a paediatric nurse. It was a fascinating place and gave me the opportunity to fulfil a childhood dream of learning to SCUBA dive in the beautiful Red Sea; (actually I wanted to marry Jacques Cousteau but he was already taken!) Watching his underwater adventures on Sunday afternoon TV with my Mum had fascinated me and has since had a huge influence on how I have lived my life and the choices made. Around me I could see the tiny nudibranchs and shrimps in the ocean and understand that their stories made them as fascinating as the awe inspiring mega-fauna of sharks and massive manta rays. For four years I studied to become a SCUBA Instructor which later gave me the opportunity to spend many more hours underwater and eventually change my occupation.

Perth was a different city in 1991 when I arrived; quieter where you could still have the beach to yourself. I found Mundaring, York and Toodyay as places I could relate to, places with space. I had friends who ran a SCUBA diving business in Exmouth and I went to my dream job, theoretically, for six months which actually ran to five years! Of course, dream jobs have a price. They are great fun, rewarding, hard work, you love getting up each morning but they almost always pay next to nothing...however, it was a fabulous five years.

Exmouth allowed me to build on my education and appreciation of nature. I spent a lot of time underwater enjoying the reefs and magnificent fish life, joined the local conservation group and learned more about the Nor West Cape. I became a turtle monitor...identifying turtle tracks on the beach, finding their nests and occasionally, if very lucky, watch the hatchlings run the gauntlet down the beach at dawn - something I will truly never forget! 'Down times' at work meant opportunity for bush walks; my introduction to nesting osprey, black footed rock wallabies and sighting my first echidna. The variety of birds and flowers was amazing but, maybe not obvious to a cursory glance, as you had to take the time to look. I began taking photographs with the opportunity to sit around for hours waiting for an osprey to go fishing or a humpback whale to sound and show its magnificent flukes. It was a hard decision to leave Exmouth.

I headed to East Africa for a three month trip and returned to Perth a year later. 2006 was definitely the most exciting year and, despite being in Africa, a big step closer to Toodyay. The experience of very different cultures gave me the opportunity to learn more about myself, what I really wanted in life and change my perspective on what is important...I've never been hungry or poor yet, sadly, have often found something to complain about. In East Africa so many people were smiling and happy when they did not have even the basics of life. I learned to slow down and look around and see what was happening. After spending time with gorillas in Uganda, the Big Five in the Maasai Mara, flying over Victoria Falls in a microlight and 'cage diving' with Great Whites in South Africa I worked as a SCUBA instructor in Tanzania.

In a large village of approximately fifteen thousand people there were only about ten houses with access to running water and electricity (when it was working!) It was beautiful, clean, friendly and so honest in comparison to many other places in the world. I lived twenty metres from the bay we dived in and, with no glass in the windows, it meant I slept and woke with the sound of the waves. We dived according to the running of the tides and I always knew the state of the moon, the times of the sunrise and sunset. It was a very simple life.

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## *Member Profile—Sharon Richards (continued from page 6)*

My boss was a zoologist who insisted we learn as much about the ocean as possible and try to pass on that knowledge to the local people. It's really easy to espouse 'no fishing' or 'reef gleaning' when you aren't hungry but, when faced with large families who have no reliable source of income, you cannot take away their only source of dietary protein. For about seven months I took rich European tourists diving and in the quiet times introduced the local kids to swimming and snorkelling.

The young men who drove and maintained our dive boat were my first targets. I wanted them to begin to see the ocean as something to protect rather than pillage and abuse. Trying to explain the idea of 'sustainable fishing' was interesting to people who had never planned beyond a day or two. My boat crew were highly regarded in the village because they could speak some English and had comparatively well paying jobs. Younger ones listened to them so they were in a position to influence the behaviour of at least some of their contemporaries.

Not far from the village a cattle farm combined with the beginnings of a nature reserve. The manager was slowly developing it to enable the native animals to return and, hopefully, be protected. He was passionate about recreating the balance that was needed if the local people and the wildlife were to coexist; with hungry villagers, leopard and black mamba on the property it was not an easy task. It was this place, Cabisera, which really cemented my desire to have my own piece of heaven in Australia.

On returning to Perth I was fortunate enough to find a house next to a bush park. However, with houses close by either side gave me a sense of being hemmed in. I planted native bushes and my bird bath was well used but I knew that this was a stop gap as I was travelling to Toodyay and Northam to work.

I walked around many different blocks of Toodyay land looking for a property that offered space for me and the local wildlife, peace and privacy, lots of trees but mostly one on which I felt comfortable. I happened across my block in Wandoo Circle by chance. I had written off the area as being 'too hilly' but when I walked down the gravel track and saw the view and the wild flowers I was totally hooked. It was autumn and the place was green and alive, the wandoo trunks were white with many surrounded by blue leschenaultia. On the only really flat spot there was a magnificent view across the valley looking directly north - a perfect place for a house.

A badly fractured leg in January 2011 meant that I have not explored or achieved as much as I would have liked on the property but, each time I walk around, I find something different. A swarm of bees hanging on a branch and then moving into a hollow tree trunk or, finding orchids growing happily without any interference from me has been a highlight. Watching the birdlife come to the bird baths, from little Robins and Splendid Wrens to noisy Ring-necked Parrots and Galahs has taken many hours of my time. Learning that Galahs and Ring-necks cannot share the bird table, that the Common Bronze-winged Pigeon is dominant to the Galah and raises its wing to scare it away and a solitary Magpie will always win the battle! Fleeting glimpses of Kangaroos and, on one occasion, a Brush Wallaby, has encouraged me to keep on with my walks and always have my camera handy. I can't identify many of the plants yet but, over time, I will. The flowers have such detail that I've been compelled to buy better lenses for the camera.

I've tried to minimise my impact on the environment but there has been some damage. The rainwater now runs down a different path and the storms, just before Christmas, have gouged a deep track. I restrict my dogs to a large pen so that the wildlife can live without interference for most of the eight acres but the roos don't come close to the house. I hope that over the next years the land and I can settle together, that where I have done damage regenerates and that the Bobtails and the 'roos eventually feel comfortable enough to share it with me.

*Sharon Richards*

## *An introduction to the Shire of Toodyay Environmental Officer*

Karla Hooper grew up in the Perth hills of Roleystone where she lived on several bush properties. She loved the bush, her playground of many years, where she would take her dog as her companion to explore in the hills.

Leaving school, Karla completed a traineeship in office administration then went into the retail sector. When she was 21 a work colleague asked her along to a presentation on chemicals in the home, and that night was to change her life and set her in a new direction.

Tracking down the presenter, Dr Peter Dingle ([www.dr-dingle.com/about-dr-dingle](http://www.dr-dingle.com/about-dr-dingle)), from Murdoch University, the question was posed 'What do I need to do to learn more about this topic?' He advised he'd be the coordinator of a newly developed course and encouraged her to apply. Within a few weeks she was enrolled as a mature age student at Murdoch University and completed her degree in BSc Health and Environment four years later. On degree completion she undertook honours in Environmental Science; however, it wasn't completed as a job, too good to refuse, landed in her lap.

Half way through honours, whilst holidaying in Broome, Karla was advised by a friend of a position available in Darwin, as an Industrial Hygiene Specialist, with a major oil and gas company. Having had experience in this field from vacation work during a university break she applied for the position and was relocated to Darwin one week following return from her holiday. The role was based both on and off-shore and involved evaluating workers exposures to a range of chemical and physical stressors.



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## *Introduction to the Shire of Toodyay Environmental Officer (continued from page 8)*

Karla loved her time in Darwin and, while there, was a Wildlife Carer, mainly looking after joeys. She spent a lot of her spare time developing her permaculture designed garden or camping and visiting many of the natural wonders of the Northern Territory (NT). Her love for the outdoors led her to complete a course in Tour Guiding where she learnt much about NT flora, fauna, bush tucker and medicinal uses of plants.

Working in the mining, oil and gas industry gave Karla an inside perspective of the damaging environmental and social consequences involved and the toll it takes on families and Mother Nature. Being very aware that '*supply and demand*' are the drivers behind industry it was time to try and find a more sustainable way of living. Deciding travel was on the cards she packed up her life and dog and hit the road in search of a sustainable form of transport.



Travelling around Australia, with camels as a focus, led to a very fulfilling time in Karla's life and many adventures were had – from catching her own camels from the wild, working as a tour guide taking tourists on camel rides and living by herself on a remote cattle station in outback Queensland.

In February 2012 Karla returned to Perth deciding to settle down close to family and friends. Fulfilling her dream she built a gypsy wagon with her father and obtained two trained camels which some may have been lucky enough to see living near Lovers Lane on Toodyay Road.

Karla began her position with the Shire of Toodyay as the Environmental Officer in November 2012 and feels this position greatly compliments her interest in sustainability. She is currently writing the Shire's Environmental Strategy and would like to work closely with the community to make the Shire a more environmentally friendly place to live. She has interaction with the environmental groups, Toodyay Friends of the River and Toodyay Naturalists' Club, but would love to hear from other members of the community to '*workshop*' ideas and generally assist with her role. Karla currently works three days a week and can be contacted on 9574 9322 or [eo@toodyay.wa.gov.au](mailto:eo@toodyay.wa.gov.au)

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT *(continued from page 2)*

### Drs Mandy and Mike Bamford

Mandy and Mike Bamford gave individual presentations at the March General Meeting with Mandy speaking on the hybridisation of domestic and wild ducks and Mike speaking on his favourite topic, Bobtails. Mandy spent a year studying the domestic duck interbreeding with the native Black Duck. She discovered that the hybrid offspring were fertile!

Mike gave a great overview of the Bobbie - what it ate (just about anything!), how many babies does a Bobbie have, how big are the newly born, how long does a Bobbie live?

### April

#### Serventy Memorial Lecture

It was a great thrill to be part of the audience at the Serventy Memorial Lecture at UWA given by Professor Stephen Hopper on 'Bird Pollination of Eucalypts on Old Landscapes'. The Serventy Memorial Fund was created to acknowledge the contribution by the Serventy family to the Western Australian Naturalists' Club (established in 1924), with the aim of assisting and encouraging young people in their study of natural history. The Serventy Memorial Lecture is the main source of funding for the Serventy Memorial Prizes for students awarded annually at the four Western Australian universities.

#### Simon Cherriman and Wedge-tailed Eagles

Saturday 20 April was a wonderful evening of a well prepared presentation on Simon's years of experience in researching the habits and lifestyle of the majestic Wedge-tailed Eagle.

Simon's superb photography from hides built high in the forest showing the large, caring parents of the fluffy, white nestlings captivated the large audience of members and friends. It was excellent evening of both learning and enjoyment with the Club members extremely grateful to have this busy young man take time out to visit the Toodyay Naturalists' Club. *Thank you Simon!*



*Left: Simon Cherriman climbing a tree—or is it shinnying up a very LARGE tree.*

## DID YOU KNOW...

...that members of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club (TNC) - and any member of the community - are now able to enter their sightings directly onto the TNC website?

The Toodyay Naturalists' Club's new website has a 'Quick Link' to sightings (or a link under the 'News' tab), where you can record an unusual sighting, or add a list of recent sightings. This can be either fauna or flora.

It is simple to use. Members will be asked to *Register* on the site, and non-members can continue to log a sighting from this page.

Hearing or seeing your first pallid cuckoo of the year, your first white spider orchids, a python that has taken up residence in your fruit trees, or an unusual quirk of nature - all of these sightings are valuable, particularly in our changing environment.

'Australian Lizards – A Natural History', authored by Steve K Wilson and published by CSIRO, was released 2012. This superb publication grasps the reader from Steve's opening paragraph of his forward, "There is something magical about lizards. When I was a toddler a blue-tongue turned up in a neighbour's garden. It left me spellbound, permanently triggering some spark in the wiring of my brain. Since that formative moment I have been driven to delve into woodheaps, probe burrows, plunge my hands into spiny *Spinifex* hummocks and rummage under rubbish piles".

The text, throughout, is of personal experiences of Steve's love of natural history with the sites of the photographs telling the tales of his pursuit and the travel undertaken both in Australia and overseas.

Steve has used scientific names throughout but, if an animal has a common name, he has used it. However, there can be variations of common names geographically. Examples of these variations are the *Underwoodisaurus milii* which is known as the Barking Gecko in Western Australia, whereas in Queensland, it is known as the Thick-tailed Gecko, *Varanus gouldii* is known as both the Sand Monitor and Gould's Monitor. With these different common names it is helpful to have the scientific name included. I also noted the different scale appearance of the Bobtail from the Western Australian specie to that in Queensland both with the scientific name of *Tiliqua rugosa*.

The clarity of the photographs is extraordinary. The cover is a head study of the Black Palm Monitor taken from the photograph, of the complete animal, on page forty. The dramatic blue of the sky is a great lesson in obtaining the striking result.

I am most impressed with the individuality of the photographs. The animals are pictured with their prey, youngsters just emerging from the female or the egg, feeding, mating, a show of aggression, fighting, changing colour for protection. Steve has included a number of photographic contributors including several Western Australian wildlife photographers such as Brad Maryan, Mike Griffiths and Greg Harold. The photograph that I think is so unusual, spectacular and uncanny is one taken by our own Brad Marian on page forty five. It is a *Pletholax gracialis*, Keeled Legless Lizard, an extremely long, thin specie that was photographed gracefully supported on a native plant, Tinsel Bush, at the Perth airport.



'Australian Lizards – A Natural History' is a magnificent publication with a wealth of information to read and learn about these interesting creatures or to spend time enjoying the exquisite photography. It would be a special addition to the home, school or community library.

The Toodyay Naturalists' Club is most appreciative to be given permission by CSIRO Publishing to print a copy of the front cover of 'Australian Lizards' – A Natural history' in the Naturalists' Newsletter No 10. The publication is available at A\$49.95, plus \$8 p & p, by contacting the CSIRO Office email: [publishing.sales@csiro.au](mailto:publishing.sales@csiro.au) or telephone 03 9662 7666 or 1300 788 000. The ISBN number is 9780643106406

# ENVIRONMENT MATTERS



*Above & far right:  
The birds prior to  
release  
Right: All lined up  
for a feed - after  
their release.*



## **Experiment to save magpies affected by throat-worm**

An experiment is underway to save magpies affected by a throat-worm. The very young birds were taken to Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre to be treated for the worm which affects the mouth and the throat.

As the birds had originated from a number of areas, their release into the wild was an issue. They needed to recover fully, and be released as a group - without being attacked by the local magpie population. A very large aviary was required, where the birds could take at least three flaps of their wings in flight. The answer... the Clarke's empty fowl run. It is fully enclosed, and the birds can fly for some distance around the internal hen houses.

Five birds arrived in November 2012, only to be returned before the Clarke's holiday, as they were nowhere near ready for release. On the 4th of April, nine birds were returned to the Clarke's.

The feeding regime was a feed each, three times a day. The special mince mixture was provided by Kanyana, and rolled into bite-sized balls by Desraé. This was fed directly into the mouth of each bird. On the 25th of April, the birds were released, but allowed to return the first evening. From then on they were on their own, with access to the aviary, but still being fed three times a day. Both making the meatballs and feeding the birds is time consuming and labourious, but it looks - at this point in time - to be successful. They have been accepted by the local magpies, as long as they keep their place or know when to curtsy to the older and established birds.

### ***THE TOODYAY NATURALISTS' CLUB INC.***

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