



*Toodyay Naturalists' Club Inc.*

## **THE TNC NEWSLETTER**

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# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

*by Desraé Clarke*

UNFORTUNATELY the proposed September excursion to Penguin Island, as mentioned in the August newsletter, did not come to fruition. It was cancelled at the very last minute because of an expected extremely rough sea. However, at the recent Planning Meeting for 2021 it is included in the year's outings.

Eddy Wajon was the guest for the October 17th meeting giving a thought provoking presentation especially on the clearing of the magnificent Salmon Gums along roads of the wheatbelt. Images were presented on the comparison of the wheatbelt desecration and the beautiful tree-lined roads of the south-west of the state.

Club members were saddened to hear of the passing on Thursday 29th October of one of our three Club Patrons, Professor Stephen Davies. Dr Davies had been ill for quite a long period and, although he was unable to speak on the phone, we kept in touch with him speaking through Mrs Davies and per letter. The presence of Club members at his farewell was greatly appreciated by Mrs Davies and her Family. RIP.

Thank you to Charmian and Andrew for opening their home for the end-of-year get-together. On arrival each family was given three tickets to enter into a draw for the five Christmas surprises that had been generously contributed by members. Those present were honoured to see, at a great distance, the home of a pair of nesting Carnaby Cockatoos.

Members, the Reverent Peggy and Dr and Reverent, Brian, were in the midst of preparation to return home to England at the end of November following a five year stay in Toodyay. They were both vitally interested in Australia's wildlife with Peggy determined to see a Frogmouth! To remind them of Toodyay they were given a guest towel featuring an embroidered Redcap Robin and a beautiful Georgina Steytler wildlife card. Our best wishes go with them on their return home.

The Club web page and app projects by two small groups of IT students at North Metro TAFE have been practically completed and what wonderful work has been accomplished. Wayne and I were invited guests at the graduation of the students of the many projects undertaken. It was an exciting night for all – we were honoured to be present.

The Planning Meeting on Sunday 29th November for 2021 had lively discussion resulting in what should be a great mixture of presentations and excursions. It was also decided to continue to meet at the Anglican Church Hall with reassessment of the venue at the end of a six months period.

Co-patron, John Dell, has recently had extensive surgery, is now home and recovering quite well. We send our good wishes for his recovery to continue.

Best wishes are extended to all Club members and our supporters for a safe and enjoyable Christmas to flow into 2021.

*Cover photo: Collared Sparrowhawk taking a drink on a bird bath. There have been numerous sightings of these birds reported in Toodyay over the past months.*

*Photo: Ginny Barnett*



## VALE DR STEPHEN DAVIES

*Following is the contribution by Dr Davies to the Club's latest publication - 'Exploring Toodyay... naturally'*

MY involvement with the Toodyay Naturalists Club stems from my friendship with Jim Masters of Glen Avon and Lindsay Milhinch of Seabrook, whom I got to know at meetings of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union. They lived in the Avon Valley and were involved in the formation of the Club.

My exploration of the Toodyay Shire stems from my daughters activity of 'pony riding. As they grew older the rides extended farther and farther from Mount Helena, and they began to make overnight stops at Glen Avon, Seabrook, Guy Bowen's farm at Bakers Hill, the CSIRO farm there and eventually to Meckering. I was the baggage wagon for these excursions and so got to know the southern parts of the shire well.



In 1969 I bought a small property on the Upper Avon at Mount Kokeby, where I got to know the importance of the Avon Valley as a fauna corridor much better and have been very pleased by the Club's promotion of its importance to fauna in recent years.

In 1968 I had the privilege of being invited to give the first talk to the Club. Needless to say it was about Magpie Geese, my favourite bird, that I had studied in Darwin in the 1950's.

Subsequently I spoke at a few meetings of the Club and attended many interesting other ones. I also assisted at Bio-Blitz weekends in and near the Shire by providing demonstrations of bird banding.

I was honoured to be elected one of the Patrons of the Club in 2004 and have followed its activities with admiration ever since.

*Above: Dr Davies at the Club's 40th Anniversary Celebrations, where he was a guest speaker.*

*Photo: Vicki Warburton*

# LASTING MEMORIES of Dr STEPHEN DAVIES

by Rob Boase and Greg Warburton

DR DAVIES left a lasting impression on me from all the way back to 1968 with his presentation to the newly formed TNC on Emus and Magpie Geese. He has always amazed me with his vast scientific knowledge and his willingness and ability to pass it on. I have had various contacts with him over the years and he influenced me to take part in the RAOU Bird Atlas in the late 70s and early 80s.

*Rob Boase*

WHEN I was about 10 years of age my Mum must have seen a notice for an open day at the CSIRO Wildlife Research Station at Darlington and took me along.

I think she was hoping to get some expert career guidance for her son and perhaps inspire me to take more of an interest in study.

She got talking to a well-dressed, quietly spoken man who I remember as being very tall because I was craning my neck to look up at him.

I recall the conversation was peppered with words like “study”, “university” and “career”. I never forgot this encounter and learned later the man’s name was Dr Stephen Davies.

Fast forward a few decades and, with my wife Vicki, we made our home in Toodyay in the year 2000.

The first community group we joined was the Toodyay Naturalists’ Club where I was to learn that Stephen Davies was one of the three Club Patrons.

I’d go on to be President of the Club and during the time of its 40th Anniversary and we held a celebration day of presentations and excursions with Stephen a key-note presenter.

During a quiet moment in the proceedings I recounted to Stephen my memory of meeting him all those years ago.

His face lit up and he called his wife, Wendy over to hear the story; I think Stephen was really delighted at the recollection from that time.

It was a sad day when we heard of Stephen’s passing and when Vicki and I attended his funeral we learned so much we didn’t know about his extraordinary life and achievements.

Wildlife conservation and research had certainly lost a great champion.

The throng of mourners showed how Stephen had been a greatly loved and respected man who’d influenced and touched the lives of so many, both professionally and personally.

He certainly did mine and I’m sure all of us in the Toodyay Naturalists’ Club.

*Greg Warburton*



*Left: Greg captured the moment of meeting with Dr Davies when he was ten years old..*



# TOODYAY NATS' CLUB WEBSITE UPGRADE - 2020

*by Wayne Clarke*

IN APRIL 2012, a (heavily discounted) quote was received from Webs Creative Studios (WCS) for the design, development and on-going management of a Website for the TNC. Funding assistance was sought from the Toodyay and Districts Financial Services - Bendigo Bank<sup>®</sup> for the project, and in May it agreed to provide \$1,500 towards this. The TNC then placed an order with WCS for the development and commissioning of a website.

The site was designed by WCS in collaboration with TNC. During development quite a bit of 'twigging' was required to make sure it fitted our ongoing needs. Both Guido Verschoor and Grant Scobie (WCS) were extremely accommodating in making changes requested and in November 2012 the website went live.

I have had full control of the site through a computer programme funded by Wheatbelt NRM, allowing me to add news, photographs, newsletters and other data. This required learning additional skills to operate the programme.

A feature of the site is the ability for members - and the public - to login and record their sightings, verified by the TNC Observations Officer, and the sighting entered into a database that both members and the public can see.

In late February 2020 Guido contacted me to see if the TNC was interested in a group of TAFE students undertaking an upgrade to our website and a second group providing an app – for free! This sounded like a great opportunity to become involved with education of these students while at the same time getting a 'makeover' of our website; the app would be a bonus. I readily agreed and the project commenced on 4th March.

Over the months since then the students have been working on our project - when time permitted. They have not been able to fully concentrate on our project, due to Corona virus restrictions; however, I had two virtual meetings to look at the progress. Mock-up designs were sent and approved subject to checking them at TAFE.

This culminated in Desraé and me attending their Graduation Ceremony on 25th November. Prior to the ceremony we had the opportunity to meet the students to see the results of their hard work. We were invited to give a brief talk on the Club at the ceremony.

On 30th November an 'Agreement to Accept Delivery', a formality as part of their project, was signed.

On behalf of TNC I would like to sincerely thank Guido, Ivone Bennett, the other lecturers and, particularly, Jack Hall, Alexander Crew and Daniel Lincoln - the students, for their dedication to the task and to pass on our best wishes to all the graduates in securing employment.



*Left: Desraé and Wayne Clarke with Joanne Hart from Webs Creative Studios, our website administrator, during the Graduation night. In the background can be seen some of the TAFE students.*



# Naturalist(e) walking (Part 2)

Text Bridget Leggett,

Photos: Bridget Leggett and Anne Harris, May 2020

Day two gave us our first serious stretch of beach walking, a feast of ocean blues, and challenging sand dunes in case we were getting complacent.

With two days left before the arrival of Ex Tropical Cyclone Maanga, we decided to tackle the more remote southern end, optimistically hoping we could complete the middle sections after the storm.

The karri loam and towering canopy of Boranup Forest made for a delightful start to our third day. But with 25 km to go, lingering was not an option.

Then it was sand: hard or soft, pristine or tyre tracked, sculptured and wet.



*Above: Boranup Beach*

*Left: Boranup Forest*

*Below: Spectacular scenery along the way*





## *Naturalist(e) walking (cont)*

Deepdene Beach was the start of our final day's challenge. We'd read in the *Cape to Cape Track Guidebook* (an essential companion, written by Jane Scott and Ray Forma) "*This is a long, difficult section, with no easy vehicle access. You need to be fit and self sufficient for this part of the track.*" Disconcerting! But we were up for the challenge and rewarded by the aura of crashing waves, the company of sea and shore birds, and the encouragement of distant views of the Cape Leeuwin lighthouse. Or at least until it came to wading through a section of putrid seaweed - no photography there – it was all about staying upright and moving on as swiftly as possible. The boots got left outside on return to base that evening.



*Left:  
Walking the track*

Two days later, with the storm waning, we ventured to Margaret Mouth, experienced the gale force wind, marvelled at the erosive powers of the swell, and bade farewell to our end-to-end.



*Right:  
After the storm*

# MY WANDERINGS

*Text and photographs by Lyn Johnson*

JUNE saw cold stormy weather setting in so I thought it time to head north. I followed the coast north to Broome taking 5 weeks to get there. On the way I did many free camps and met a lot of helpful people stopping by rivers if possible. I left Toodyay in the last few days of June and drove to Cervantes via Gingin. It was a wild night in the caravan park and with the wind so high for the second night I asked to be moved away from the trees.

When the weather calmed down I went on my way to 'where-ever' taking me past the pink lake to Port Gregory. The lake was not very pink due to heavy rain we had just had. Port Gregory was a quiet place with a nice beach.

Kalbarri had me sitting on rocks at Rock Island for three hours watching and photographing the dolphins surfing the surf; it was a great day. I went out to the new observation deck just after it had opened. It was lovely, but windy, but still a pleasant walk around with a new café there. I continued on my way calling into all the gorges out to the main road.

The Robe River camp had the Rainbow Bee-eaters there on my way up but they had gone by the time I came back.

I enjoyed Onslow with it being by the sea. The sunrise through the monument for Veterans was spectacular and there was a long, over 1000 metre, board walk out to Salt Mine Jetty.

I did a day boat cruise off Dampier with dolphins following the boat. There were quaint secluded houses on islands that were only accessible by boat. The beautiful waters were crystal clear.

I had a day wandering around Cossack and Roebourne's new museum in the old gaol then left the coast to drive east to call into Marble Bar on the way north as I thought by the time I get back the heat will be arriving.

Returning to the coast I really enjoyed Cape Kerouren, just above Pardoo, with the ocean on one side, which is south tip of the eight mile beach, and on the other side were mangrove flats where I camped away from the wind. Finches, brolgas and a Wedge-tail Eagle were at a water soak. I enjoyed three days there.

On the way back I hadn't got a good Wedge-tail Eagle photo I wanted but, biding my time, I eventually had my opportunity. North of Carnarvon in the middle of the road was a bird on a road-kill kangaroo so, pulling over and walking back for some way, I got close before it just hopped off to the other side of the road as I approached. I then returned to Carnarvon.



*Above: Wedge-Tail Eagle on a road-kill*



## MY WANDERINGS ... cont.

I stayed a few days and went to the nice café at Babbage Island. The mile-long jetty is not walkable but there is a great board walk amongst the mangroves with plenty of bird-life. I spent two hours there capturing these quick flitting little birds.



*Above: White-plumed Honeyeaters*

Barn Hill was the other place where I really had a great time - walked for miles, sat on the rocks with the tide coming in and watching the water holes fill up. There are red cliffs and fantastic rock formations in all colours. I walked over the cliffs and found a rock look-out window – bird-life everywhere. Miles down the beach was a Sea Eagle's nest perched on the top of a free-stand pillar. The parent birds were bringing in fish for the young. I had three great days there.



*Above: White-bellied Sea Eagle*



## *MY WANDERINGS ... cont.*



*Above: The Granites*

On leaving from Geraldton the last few weeks were spent coming through Mt Magnet and the Granites, a 9,000 year old area of Aboriginal art and another nice walking place. I arrived home travelling through wild flower country after nearly 10 weeks away.



*Above: Eremophila sp.*



*Review of 'The Wooleen way: renewing an Australian resource', by David Pollock. Published in 2019 by Scribe Publications, Melbourne, Vic. Paperback, 376p.*

*Illustrated. RRP \$35.00.*

*Review by Bob and Beth Frayne*

*(Kind permission to reproduce the cover of the 'The Wooleen Way' as a watermark given by David's publicist, Tace Kelly, of Scribe Publications.)*

DAVID Pollock and his wife, Frances, hold the lease of the 153,000-hectare pastoral property, Wooleen, in the Southern Rangelands of the Murchison Shire. The property embraces the confluence of the Murchison and Roderick Rivers. On Wooleen, the Roderick River flows through the nationally important wetland, Wooleen Lake.

The early European explorers described this area as being well grassed and suitable for grazing. Subsequent lease holders eagerly embraced the opportunity to stock this vast area with sheep and cattle. By the time the Pollock family came to Wooleen as lease-holders in 1989, the best perennial grasses were long gone. Naive or ignorant pastoralists had grossly overstocked their properties with no thought for the environment.

When David (then aged 27) took over the lease in 2007 from his father Brett Pollock, he took the unorthodox and unpopular decision to de-stock, and to attempt to survive on a fledgling tourist enterprise. To discourage kangaroos, he turned off the water supplies at the windmills, and to reduce the goats, he encouraged the presence of dingoes.

These measures enraged some of his neighbours and brought disapproval from the authorities who gave him no help. Botanists from the Dept. of Agriculture, who came regularly to report on the state of the land, made no recommendations for improvement. Lease holders had a free hand to run sheep or cattle; and dingoes were culled. Many pastoralists farmed goats as a lucrative sideline. Kangaroos thrived and multiplied.

David explains how the native perennial grasses are a resource belonging to the Australian people. He believes that pastoralists should manage their leases in such a way that the grasses can remain and regenerate in perpetuity. He has shown that, by re-introducing limited numbers of cattle for short periods in rotated paddocks, he can allow the grasses to survive and increase.

On the Roderick River, David has constructed baffles to encourage flood waters to spread out and irrigate the land instead of eroding channels. He has a comprehensive photographic record of the improvements he has achieved. In particular, the heritage listed 5,500 hectare Wooleen Lake is now covered in lush perennial pasture. This intermittent lake is sometimes replenished by backflows when the Murchison River floods.

Many people have seen David and Frances on the ABC programme 'Australian Story' and, as a result, more people are taking advantage of the tourist facilities and participating in David's guided tours.

We recommend this book as an essential guide to anyone concerned about over exploitation of land. David writes excellent prose with no concession to modern trends in grammar. His facts are carefully marshalled and easy to follow. This book is explosive in the condemnation of past follies and timely in its advocacy of future practice.

We stayed at Wooleen in April 2012, booking just before the appearance of the first 'Australian Story' programme about Wooleen in March, and arriving just after, so we knew what to expect! We weren't disappointed.

## DID YOU KNOW... ?

... that the **Narrow leaf cotton bush** (*Gomphocarpus fruticosus*) is a member of the family *Asclepiadaceae* which contains many toxic weeds and garden plants. The members of this family have a thick white sap giving rise to the common name of milkweed. It is a declared pest in Western Australia. There are requirements that land owners/occupiers must adhere to in reporting declared plants.

Information on this plant can be found on the Dept. of Primary Industries and Rural Development website '<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/declared-plants/narrow-leaf-cotton-bush-declared-pest>'

The common name of 'cotton bush' comes from the silky white thread-like attachments on its seeds. Narrow leaf cotton bush is also known as 'swan plant' due to the shape of its seed pods. It is native to South Africa and Ethiopia.

It can form dense thickets that cover many hectares of run-down pastures; it also invades riparian vegetation.



# ENVIRONMENT MATTERS



Above: Cotton Bush (*Gomphocarpus fruticosus*) Main photo: Greg Warburton Inset photo: Wayne Clarke  
Cotton Bush is a Declared Pest in Western Australia. Slashing contractors came across a single Cotton Bush behind the library in December, good timing as the seed heads were loaded and ready to pop. It has since been removed but alas - more plants have been found since. An urgent survey of the area is required as this weed has the potential to spread and infest thickly and quickly, creating an environmental headache.

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