

Native wildlife in drastic decline

Susie sounds a warning

If you were to evaluate the status of Australian native species would you think we were doing a good job? If your answer is yes, then you will be in for a shocking surprise. Our very own Department of the Environment, under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act), has listed many species as Critically Endangered: 7 fish, 5 frogs, 8 reptiles, 11 birds, 6 mammals — the Leadbeater's possum and Christmas Island potoroo being the most well known of this group — and 24 'other' animals including a native bee, several native snails and even a lobster and two crayfish.

The state of decline in native wildlife is now at the point, according to the latest figures from the Federal Government's own website, where we have 61 species on the Critically Endangered list. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) puts the figure as high as 90 at the time of writing.

What should not surprise you, however, is the major cause of this decline: human impact. We know this impact is due to loss of habitat from land clearing, changes to the administration of burn-off and water flow, predation from invasive species, unsustainable management of resources, and climate change.

A recent study conducted by Berkeley, Princeton and Stanford Universities states "the earth has entered a new period of extinction (with) vertebrates disappearing at a rate 114 times faster than normal". The BBC Science and Environment report states "more than 400 vertebrates have disappeared since 1900 and such loss would normally be seen over a 10,000 year period". It quotes Gerardo Ceballos, the lead author, saying, "If it is allowed to continue, life would take many millions of years to recover and our species itself would likely disappear early on".

A 2014 report by Stuart Pimm, of Duke University, goes further: it states that the current extinction rate is more than 1,000 times faster than in the past, not the 114 times of the other report.

Prof. Hugh Possingham, an ARC Laureate Fellow in the Mathematical Department and School of Biological Sciences at the University of Queensland, said in 2012: "due to minimal resources, we will have to choose which species we save". This idea seems to me to already be reflected in Section 178 of the EPBC Act, where the list has the following categories:

- extinct
- critically endangered
- vulnerable
- extinct in the wild
- endangered
- conservation dependent

So how does one choose and who will do the choosing? It usually comes down to what we value as a society. Sadly, this often means only the cute and cuddly, but it need not.



We already recognise the massive decline in koala populations throughout Australia. What of insects such as bees or butterflies? Would you save a bee and let the butterflies die out? Or perhaps save a hammerhead shark but let the white pointer go? These are not easy choices, yet these decisions are already being made every day by our government, and by us.

What of our local region? A quick 'Google' of endangered species in the Braidwood region found eight birds including the Glossy Black Cockatoo, six marsupials including the Spotted Quoll, three reptiles including the Rosenberg's Goanna, three bats, and the Green and Golden Bell Frog, all listed as vulnerable. We have been recording the savage decline in both the northern and southern hairy-nosed wombats, with the northern wombat now in the Critical Endangered category. One surprise for most people will be the decline in bared-nosed wombats, previously known as the common wombat.

Many people have the belief that we have a plague of wombats. This is wrong on two counts. Firstly, our region is in what is commonly known as a 'hot spot', meaning we live in a productive wombat area. Secondly, these wombats are in the decline due to the same habitat loss as other species; however, wombats also suffer a painful and debilitating disease known as Sarcoptic Mange.

A new website, WOMSAT, generously supported by The Emirates, has begun an excellent initiative to map the whereabouts of wombats on the eastern seaboard. Here you can participate in the recording of wombats: where they are, burrows located nearby, and their mange status. This is an important program that needs your help.

Another way you may wish to assist native animals is to join your local native animal group. All manner of courses are available, from basic rescue to full-time caring of animals. Basic rescue assists with information about the correct thing to do when you come across an injured or orphaned animal, and how to check a pouch for babies should the mother have been killed.

Many animals die a slow, painful death after a vehicle

Who do you think you are?

Never one to be shy with words, Judit wrote the story and the headline

I think that everybody's character is influenced by the environment and their experiences, and I am no different.

I have memories of the Second World War and I don't like war movies. I can still taste the fear I felt as a child during the Cold War and I feel the same when the news is about North Korea. I lived under rampant communism, experienced its might first hand — as did my parents and grandparents who were punished for being teachers (so I became a teacher) — and escaped it James Bond style with my family. The youngest was only three.

We lived in a refugee camp and went through all the checks before Australia accepted us. We arrived with \$2.70 to our name — so I support justice and equity and reject oppression and discrimination.

I have no religious hangups but prefer forgiveness to revenge. I worked as a house keeper and on an assembly line while I learned English. We were in Darwin during Cyclone Tracey, where I taught art and PE in a school. We stayed there as volunteers for cleaning up until we transferred to Canberra in 1975.

Then followed a career in teaching art, design and technology, and a career in the public service, working my way to the SES, running sections of Departments, leading task forces, representing Australia in the International Labour Organisation and the public service as an employer in the indus-



trial courts. And little things like writing the employment legislation for a country, being part of the team and writing the first ever enterprise agreement, collecting public service medals — things of the past.

I have only happy memories of the last five years of formal employment at the Sydney Catchment Authority — commuted on Mondays and Fridays so I can drive the road with my eyes closed — and a lot of people there are still friends.

We are very proud of our three children; published poet, ballet teacher and artist/manager and, of course, our six very smart grandchildren, some in

collision and babies are often put through the excruciating pain of being eaten alive by maggots, or dying slowly from starvation, or from the cold or heat. You can assist these animals by phoning your local group as soon as possible. A volunteer will get to the animal and if it is a female with a baby, the little one may be saved.

There is so much you can do even on a local level to help stop the decline of all native animals. Have the number of your local wildlife rescue group already in your phone: then all you need do is press a button. It's that simple.

Braidwood but well on their way to becoming games developers, scientists and mathematicians. Others are at the moment far away, dancing with a ballet company in Romania.

Braidwood

We came to here by choice. We wanted to leave urban life behind and fell in love with 'Clocker's Old House' in 15 minutes. Made new friends and have the best neighbours one can.

My secrets

I admit to one — if I am asked to help, I do. If I see there is something I could do for a cause, be it the arts, heritage, tourism or the community — I put my hand up and try to do my best. I have been involved with BRAG for a long time in various capacities, from creating calendars to annual exhibitions in the National Theatre to working with Gilly Burke and getting the grant to purchase the Arts Centre. Cheryl called for volunteers for Braidwood And Villages Tourism Inc — I ended up redesigning and running the website (has been replaced by the current one), volunteering in the Visitor Information Centre and creating the 2007 Heritage calendar among other things. Dennis Dempsey asked for volunteers to help with celebrating our 175th birthday. I had the fortune to work with a bunch of wonderful people — Bronwyn, Maryanne, Michelle and Chris, Yvonne, Richard, Merrie and Mary Mathias. I am proud of the heritage path. I created the Araluen calendars — as a volunteer.

Today

I am still a member of BRAG; I am the President of Southern Tablelands ARTS; I am on the Boards of the Goulburn Regional Conservatorium and Palerang Council's Business Advisory Board. I design and run the website braidwoodnsw.com to promote Braidwood.

I design websites, make graphics and do them for Braidwoodians at very special Braidwood prices. I am told that I am a good cook. And there is just no time for photography or painting — one day, when I retire ...

Susie Edmonds is the Communications Officer for the Native Animal Rescue Group in the Braidwood region. www.narg.asn.au 02 48461900

