

The David G. Stead Memorial
Wild Life Research Foundation of Australia

NEWSLETTER

June 2009



New President for Stead Foundation

It is with great pride that I accepted the position of President, endorsed by the Stead Board, after the resignation of Dennis Dutton at the Stead Foundation Board meeting in March 2009. My sincere thanks to Dennis for his role as past president and the enormous contribution he has made to the Stead Foundation and Wirrimbirra.

I feel honoured and humbled to be elected as president – particularly as I am also a director on the Board of the National Trust (NSW). David G. Stead was a great friend to Annie F. Wyatt OBE, the founder of the National Trust. He supported Annie's motion to form the National Trust at the Australian Forest League's Conference in 1944. Further, Ivor Wyatt, the son of Annie, was a friend to Thistle Harris. Thistle asked him to join the Stead Board as a founding member because of her high esteem for him and the National Trust. One of Ivor's first actions, in 1965, was to assist the transfer of Wirrimbirra's land, purchased by Thistle, to the National Trust – in perpetuity – so that Wirrimbirra would have a secure friend in the future.

Ivor Wyatt OAM, served on both the National Trust and Stead Foundation Boards for many years and was a President of both the National Trust and the Stead Foundation.

I am indebted to Dr Joan Webb's fascinating and inspiring biography of Thistle Harris. Please read the book if you haven't yet. We have copies available for sale at Wirrimbirra.

Recently I had the opportunity to listen to James Thornton, named by the *New Statesman* in 2009 as one of the 10 people who could change the world. He is the CEO of *ClientEarth*, a non-profit environment law organisation that fearlessly takes governments and companies to court to defend its client – Earth. Recently *ClientEarth* has tested a new British law to block a coal-fired power plant. James Thornton believes that we need to find new stories to inspire us into action for the environment. I couldn't help feeling that Wirrimbirra is such an iconic story that involves so many of Australia's early visionary pioneers for the environment – particularly David G. Stead and Thistle Harris.

As the new president, I wish to reinvigorate the Stead Foundation's vision towards acting to conserve Australia's unique natural heritage. I hope to expand the newsletter so that it includes more about research and education. I look forward to an exciting future for the Stead Foundation and Wirrimbirra. Please contact me if you wish to discuss any issue with Wirrimbirra.

Best wishes

Janine Kitson

BA, Dip Ed, M Ed, Dip TEFL, MA, M Ed (Hons)

Email: janine_kitson@tpg.com.au

Barbecue to thank Volunteers

Thank you to all the volunteers and their families who attended the Wirrimbirra volunteers' barbecue on Sunday 21 June. It was an excellent opportunity for the Board to meet and thank the volunteers. Everyone brought along their baby or childhood photos, and it was great fun to match them up with who they've grown into.

We still need members to assist by:

- Offering to fill in as Duty Manager, particularly on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. The Duty Manager is the only volunteer who has to commit to a full day, because they basically keep Wirrimbirra open. However, if the job is shared between a few people, it doesn't have to be an overwhelming commitment. Are you available for one Sunday a month, for example?
- Helping with catered functions. We are getting more and more bus groups booking in for Devonshire teas or light lunches.
- Helping at Wirrimbirra's evening functions, of which there are usually four in the year.
- Writing and performing puppet plays for our event days.
- Helping with off-site stalls at local festivals, e.g. Warragamba Damfest in October.
- Joining a committee to plan education programs.
- Joining a committee to plan and support research into the environment.

Please ring Wirrimbirra and let us know how you can help.

WIRIMBIRRA SANCTUARY – A National Trust (NSW) property

3105 Remembrance Drive, Bargo NSW 2574

Postal address: PO Box 8, Tahmoor NSW 2573

Phone: (02) 4684 1112 Fax: (02) 4684 3120 Email: enquiries@wirrimbirra.com.au Web: www.wirrimbirra.com.au

**Don't forget Wirrimbirra's
HUGE PLANT SALE
Saturday 5 September, 9.30 – 4.30**

Board News

As the new President, I wish to thank all the Board Directors – Rae Dutton (Secretary), John Mackie, Jenny Birnie, Tony Bastow, Dean Love, and John Cantrell (*ex officio* as Company Secretary & also Treasurer) – for their support and commitment to the Stead Foundation.

In particular I would like to thank Rae Dutton, who is an invaluable volunteer who works tirelessly for Wirrimbirra including being the Duty Manager for many days each week, media liaison and our events organiser. Without her efforts, many things would simply not happen.

As mentioned earlier, Dennis Dutton has resigned as President and Board Director. The Board wishes to thank Dennis for his leadership of the Stead Foundation, not only as President, but as a Board Director since 2001, and as a hardworking volunteer who has contributed literally thousands of hours to Wirrimbirra.

In our last Newsletter, the Stead Board welcomed Tony Bastow as a new Director. Tony works as a senior officer for the NSW Department of Housing. He has been an active member of the National Trust since the 1970s, when he first joined as a member of the Young Trust. He has a love of architectural history and Australia's natural environment.

The Stead Board also welcomes Dean Love as a new Director, filling a casual vacancy. Dean has been a volunteer at Wirrimbirra for the past 2 years, and took on the role of Fauna Team Leader at the beginning of 2008. He is a qualified zookeeper, having gained his Certificate III in Captive Animal Management. We very much look forward to Dean's involvement on the Board – and it's great to have a young face at meetings!

Margo Press resigned at the March Board meeting. We thank for her contribution to the Board.

Wildnight Walkabout

Response to our Wildnight Walkabout in April was so overwhelming, that we decided to hold a second one in May, just for those people who were on the waiting list. Both evenings were wonderful, although once again our elusive nocturnal creatures lived up to their elusive natures. Nevertheless, all visitors reported having an excellent meal and a great time. A huge **THANK-YOU** to the volunteers who came to help on both occasions.

Wildlife Fair

Held on 17 May, this year's Wildlife Fair was a small event on the most perfect of Autumn days.

Australian Wildlife Displays entertained the visitors throughout the day with their hands-on shows, while the Wallaby Playgroup Mums had children busily creating amazing wildlife masks all day.

The Rural Fire Service, WIRES and Sydney Wildlife set up information displays and stalls. These groups are always wonderful supporters of Wirrimbirra's event days.

Financially, the day was successful, despite a crowd of only around 270. Once again, we couldn't have held the event without our fantastic volunteers, so **THANK-YOU** to everyone who helped in any way.

Operating a Wildlife Sanctuary

The Stead Foundation wishes to thank Chris Lloyd, from Wiyanga Consultancy, who led a training day for Wirrimbirra's volunteers on animal husbandry and bird care on 24 May, 2009. He was also able to share his experience and expertise with the Board on the complex issues of operating a wildlife sanctuary.

Chris remembers Thistle Harris when he would go down to Wirrimbirra with the Australian Museum's Australian Wildlife Club in the late 60's and early 70's to do volunteer work. He says:

Thistle was always in attendance and she and my sister became good friends up until her death. Both of her books sit on my shelf as we speak – very battered and worn. Thistle was a remarkable person in many ways. Her work on teacher education was perhaps less well known in some circles but had a major impact. Many of my friends in the teaching profession credit Thistle with their life path – often with a peculiar mix of pedagogies and botany!

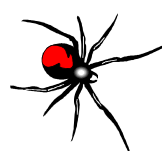
Chris values Wirrimbirra's uniqueness because its primary objective is conservation and education. He raised issues that the Board may wish to consider such as strategic directions for the Sanctuary. He also raised issues as to whether the Fauna Protection Area should specialise in fauna unique to the NSW Southern Highlands, or iconic animals, or even whether Wirrimbirra should consider undertaking selective captive breeding programs to release endangered species back into the wild.

Chris also raised practical operational issues to do with husbandry, hygiene, housing, quarantine, diet, food preparation areas, breeding programs, occupational health and safety, and importantly the systematic and continuous training for all volunteers. The Stead Foundation thanks Chris for the valued time and expertise he provided for the Board's consideration.

Wildlife News

The new free-flight aviary is now home to an amazing variety of native birds, some of which came from Symbio Wildlife Park. Part of the arrangement with Symbio was that they also sent over their male Tammar wallaby to hopefully mate with our females, with resulting joeys to go back to Symbio if they eventuate.

Other native birds have been donated by the Parrot Society and the Budgerigar Society. The larger of these birds are in the free-flight aviary, while lorikeets and budgies are now the chirpy residents of the smaller David Hanney Memorial aviary near the Nursery. This small aviary was originally donated to Wirrimbirra to house small native parrots, so it's good to see it being used for its intended purpose.



Birds'n'Bugs at Wirrimbirra

Sunday 2 August

Bug shows with "Bugman",
hands-on displays, activities, plenty of food available.

ENTRY BY DONATION



Dingo Sanctuary update

Many will want to know what is happening with the Dingo Sanctuary. Regrettably, the ongoing dispute between the Australian Native Dog Conservation Society (ANDCS) and their Fencing Contractor remains unresolved and the dingo sanctuary is still not complete or open to the public. Some achievements have been made, however. Both the ANDCS and the fencing contractor are working to complete most of the dingo enclosures (10 pens), which the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has directed to be completed to exhibit standards. The DPI has directed these runs, that mostly house dingoes, be completed satisfactorily or the Stead Foundation as Licence holder, and having ultimate responsibility, will face prosecution.

If you are free to help the ANDCS on their workshops to complete their obligations under the MOU, and to meet DPI directives in the dingo enclosures, please watch your emails. The ANDCS will let Warrimbirra know when they are planning working days and we will email Stead Foundation members and Warrimbirra volunteers as soon as we hear when these will be.

Despite the goodwill of many involved, the Stead Board recently came to the conclusion that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Stead Foundation and the ANDCS was not fulfilling its goals for the joint management of all the operations that encompass Warrimbirra Sanctuary and was simply not working.

The Stead Foundation has sought assistance from the Community Justice Centre (CJC), a free mediation service offered by the NSW Attorney Generals Department. We now have a facilitator from the CJC between both Boards. With the CJC's expertise, experience and appreciation of each organisation's specialist knowledge, we feel optimistic that we can work together and resolve the many and complex issues. We thank the ANDCS for its cooperation and goodwill in participating with the facilitation. The next mediated Board-to-Board meeting on Saturday 27 June will focus on the Memorandum of Understanding between the two organisations.

What we hope to achieve from this facilitated meeting is an agreement to continue to talk on a new structure and agreement for operating Warrimbirra Sanctuary. As it is likely to involve significant differences from the current arrangement, it is envisaged that this will be put to an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) or the AGM, depending upon the time it takes to resolve matters.

The Stead Board remains committed to mediation. With the guidance of an independent, professional facilitator, we believe we can renegotiate an amicable future relationship with the ANDCS that will enhance both Warrimbirra Sanctuary and the Dingo Sanctuary.

STOP PRESS

It is tremendously disappointing that, just as this newsletter was ready to print, the Stead Foundation received a letter from the ANDCS' solicitor issuing what the Stead Board believes is an erroneous Breach of Agreement Notice and giving us 30 days to respond. Whilst we need to obtain legal advice, we hope that the ANDCS will withdraw their threatened legal action against the Stead Foundation.

There continues to remain confusion about the role of the Stead Foundation in the contractual dispute mentioned above. From the time the MOU was signed, the ANDCS has been fully responsible for completing the dingo sanctuary and for the construction contract they independently awarded. It is the ANDCS' responsibility to resolve the dispute with **their** Contractor. The Stead Foundation believes it has no legal authority to intervene between the ANDCS and their construction contractor, but has recently demanded that both parties complete their obligations to meet DPI requirements. If not completed, the Stead Foundation has been threatened with prosecution.

The contractor has provided limited access to the area identified in the DPI Report that directs the completion of the 10 pens. Access is far from ideal, but it still permits the ANDCS to enter and complete their obligations.

At the end of May, the Stead Foundation again suggested independent mediation between the ANDCS and their contractor, but this was formally rejected by the ANDCS Board.

Again, we will be strongly urging the ANDCS to withdraw their threat of legal action against the Stead Foundation.

The Board will continue to keep you informed. To this end, we are planning an informal meeting of Stead Foundation members at 10am on **Saturday 25 July** (TBC). This meeting will provide a forum to discuss the latest developments, opportunities to ask questions, and to gain members' input on directions for MOU discussions.

Centenary Congratulations

The Stead Foundation wishes to congratulate the Wildlife Preservation Society on its Centenary (1909-2009).

The Wildlife Preservation Society is one of Australia's earlier conservation groups. The Stead Foundation and the Wildlife Preservation Society share a proud history through their mutual founders and leaders – David G. Stead, Thistle Y. Harris and Vincent Serventy.

The Stead Foundation looks forward to collaborating with the Wildlife Preservation Society in the future.



Photo: The Stead Foundation's Janine Kitson, with Patrick Medway, President of the Wildlife Preservation Society, at the Wildlife Preservation Society's Centenary function at Sydney Town Hall on 11 February, 2009.

Tax Deductible Donations – Electric BBQ

The Stead Foundation received a grant from Wollondilly Shire Council to help purchase a coin-operated electric BBQ, and donations from the Beswick Family Trust and the Tahmoor Gentle Exercise Group were also used for this purpose. This BBQ will be placed near the visitors centre and will be a significant new improvement over our older gas BBQ's. **However it needs further funds to install and brick it in.** If you are thinking of making a tax deductible donation – it would be most appreciated for this electric BBQ.



(Left) the Barbecue as purchased, and
(right) hopefully as it will look!

**Remember, donations over \$2
to Wirrimbirra Sanctuary or the Stead Foundation
are tax deductible – CFN12076**



Failures, Flaws and Gaps in Environmental Legislation

Janet Harwood, a Stead Foundation member, is the founder of *Our Future is the Natural World*, a community think tank that aims to raise awareness of biodiversity loss. Janet was moved to start *Our Future is the Natural World* after reading Professor David Lindenmayer's book, 'On Borrowed Time', which claims biodiversity loss is the most significant environmental problem facing Australia.

Janet is currently researching systemic failures, flaws and gaps in environmental legislation at both State and Federal level, with maps, photos, letters, documents and case studies. Her research focuses on the environmental destruction currently occurring to the remnant Blue Gum High Forest in Sydney's northern suburbs. She fears that this ecologically sensitive area will be wiped out by government targets for more intense residential development. She is concerned that current and future rezonings will shatter critical wildlife corridors between surrounding National Parks.

Janet's research challenges the effectiveness of State and Federal environmental legislation, and argues that they are in fact accelerating the destruction of critical habitat. One of her most profound insights is government failure to measure the cumulative impacts of multiple rezoning in ecologically sensitive areas. The Ku-ring-gai local government area, an area of high conservation values, may never recover from a 2004 rezoning that put 5-storey apartment blocks throughout critically endangered Blue Gum High Forest areas. Now it is being overlaid with 9-storeys.

If you would like to contact Janet Harwood about her research, her contact details are: phone – 9449 1448, email – janetsh@optusnet.com.au

Stop the Commercialisation of National Parks

The National Parks Association (NPA) is deeply concerned that the NSW Government is planning legislation to weaken National Park protection laws, to allow for more intense commercial tourism developments inside our National Parks. If approved, this will threaten habitat and conservation values, and undermine equality of access to NSW's parks. The NPA is asking people to write letters to politicians expressing their concerns. Visit www.npansw.org.au

Climate change: our future, our choices

Australian Museum, College Street, Sydney, until 16 August

If you are in Sydney visit this exhibition at the Australian Museum. It provides the latest information on climate change and even shows which parts of Sydney will be flooded by rising sea levels. A frightening, but important exhibition that every citizen and politician should view.

For more information, phone 9320 6000, or visit www.australianmuseum.net.au



Animal Sponsorships Due Now

Are you a Wirrimbirra animal sponsor? Would you like to be? An annual Animal Sponsorship is one way you can greatly assist Wirrimbirra without actually having to be here.

Annual Sponsorships are due in July. If you have paid in the last couple of months, you don't need to pay again – check the date on your Sponsorship Certificate. (As well as having their name on our Sponsor board, sponsors now receive a beautiful certificate, complete with a photo of their animal, thanks to our new colour printer).

If you are receiving this Newsletter by mail, a Sponsorship Form is enclosed. If you are receiving the Newsletter by email, please go to our website www.wirrimbirra.com.au and print a Sponsorship Form from there. With the new birds at Wirrimbirra now, our Sponsorship Form with all its photos is unfortunately too large a file to email.

Thinking of joining the National Trust?

Remember – the National Trust waives its one-off \$30 joining fee on Wirrimbirra Sanctuary's Event Days. So, if you are thinking of joining the National Trust, or purchasing a gift membership for a friend or family member, join at one of Wirrimbirra's Event Days and enjoy the benefits of membership. In addition, all new members go into the draw for a holiday for two to Ireland, valued at \$12,000. For details please visit www.nationaltrust.com.au