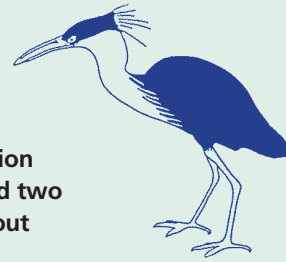


Waterbird Conservation Group By Ruth Clark



Initially formed 26 years ago to rehabilitate waterfowl, the Waterbird Conservation Group later shifted its attention to habitat conservation. The Group has managed two wetlands in Baldvis for the past 17 years and with renewed energy has carried out major conservation work in recent years.

The Waterbird Conservation Group formed in 1984 in response to a severe outbreak of botulism in waterbirds at Thomsons Lake in Munster. Hundreds of sick and dying birds including pelicans, swans, ducks and wading birds were rescued during the outbreak. The group's initial focus was on the rescue and rehabilitation of sick, injured and orphaned waterbirds. During the past 15 years, the group has moved its attention to addressing the causes of waterbird deaths, such as the loss of wetlands, their degradation, pollution and poor management, rather than the symptoms.

Since 1993 two wetlands in Baldvis – Folly and Maramanup pools – have been vested in the Group. Both wetlands are located along the Peel Main Drain which flows into the Serpentine River. They are important conservation areas, and provide homes for wildlife in the area, as well as a stopover point for birds migrating along the Beelir Wetland Chain. To assist in managing the wetlands and improving habitat, the group has been very successful in receiving a number of grants during the past four years.

In 2009–10, an Australian Government Coastcare grant enabled the Group to resolve the incorrect alignment of fencing on the eastern side of the wetland reserves. This was a major task and our largest undertaking to date.

It took more than six months of letters, phone calls and negotiations with adjacent landowners. The resulting installation of nearly two kilometres of new fencing now provides protection from grazing cattle, sheep and horses. The Department of Regional Development and Lands, the City of Rockingham and the Water Corporation provided valuable assistance for surveying, firebreaks, crossovers and rubbish collection. Many members and friends helped remove and clean up the old dilapidated fencing.

In July 2010, Group members, family and friends began revegetating one of the newly protected areas at Maramanup Pool. Prior to planting, the area was ripped and disced to loosen the soil and make it easier to use pottiputikis (planting tubes). The pottiputikis were kindly loaned by the City of Rockingham and the South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare. Even though the ground had been softened, we abandoned hammers and took to inventing special tools for getting the stakes in the hard ground. Tree guards are needed to protect the vulnerable seedlings from hungry rabbits, curious swamp-hens and other local inhabitants.

We successfully planted more than 4,700 seedlings during 10 planting days including:

Juncus pallidus, *Melaleuca teretifolia*, *M. lateritia*, *M. preissiana*, *M. raphiophylla*, *Astartea fascicularis*, *M. viminea*, *Acacia saligna*, *Viminea juncea*, *A. cyclops*, *Gahnia trifida* and *Eucalyptus rudis*. Volunteers will return in late October to plant 2,000 rushes along the water's edge.

Planting volunteers were treated to freshly baked scones with jam and cream for morning tea and a hot sausage sizzle for lunch. While sitting and resting and enjoying the food, helpers took pleasure in watching the bird life. Of the many delights, a family of wrens flew around and a rufous whistler sang a song.

This year the Group has received funding from an Australian Government's Caring for our Country Community Action Grant and a DEC Environmental Community Grant, to rehabilitate newly protected areas. Further funding will be sought to complete rehabilitation of the eastern side of the wetlands.

The Group is appreciative of all the work members, friends, family and state agencies have contributed in helping to achieve success at these wetlands. For more information or to get involved call Ruth on 9339 5501 or email waterbirds@mac.com.



Left: Group members get creative in dismantling the old fence at the wetlands in readiness for the new fence and gate. Right: Volunteers boost biodiversity at Maramanup Pool, Baldvis by planting thousands of native seedlings. Photos – Ruth Clark