



# A league of their OWN

Originally founded to protect birds and their eggs, the Gould League is now one of Australia's most respected and influential nature conservation education groups. More than a million young Australians have joined the Gould League since it was founded in 1909, and countless members have gone on to pursue distinguished careers in conservation. *by Rhianna Mooney*





The 200th anniversary of John Gould's birth will take place next year. Born in England, Gould visited Australia in 1838 with his family. Fascinated by what he saw, he returned to England and published many illustrated books, including *Birds of Australia* and *The Mammals of Australia*, about native Australian wildlife. His wife, Elizabeth, was a skilled botanical artist and illustrated Australian birds and mammals for the books, which are still used as a valuable reference. During his career, John Gould was elected Fellow of the Royal Society and wrote more than 40 volumes and numerous scientific papers, mostly detailing new species. He also

produced 3,000 coloured plates of species and is perhaps best known today for his folios.

In 1909, 20 years after his death, John Gould's conservation work was honoured by the formation of the Victorian Gould League. Originally set up to protect birds by preventing their eggs from being collected, the league is now an Australia-wide independent environmental education organisation that encourages people—especially young people—to understand, appreciate and protect the environment. Alfred Deakin, the then Australian Prime Minister, was the first national Gould League President.

The Western Australian branch of

the Gould League was formed in 1939 with Charles Hadley, the then Director of Education, as its first President. By 1955, more than 18,000 students were members of the Western Australian chapter and had received the inaugural membership card sporting the Gould League pledge: "I promise I will protect all birds, other animals and plants, except those that are harmful, and I will not collect birds' eggs".

As a non-profit organisation, the Gould League has continued to maintain a strong association with schools. Each year, more than 7,500 students take part in educational activities provided by the Western Australian league. Surplus funds accrued after costs are reinvested in the league's facilities.

The WA Gould League maintains contact with other interstate leagues through the Australian Council of Gould Leagues, which meets to discuss matters of national interest and priority.

Countless members of the Gould League have gone on to pursue careers in environment-related professions. Members of the Western Australian faction include prominent naturalists and conservationists Harry Butler, Eric McCrum and Andrew Thomson, and long-time Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) botanist Kevin Kenneally (also President of the Gould League for the last 19 years). Other CALM staff who were members as children include botanist Andrew Brown and regular writers for *LANDSCOPE* John Hunter and Carolyn Thomson-Dans.



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**Main** Early morning scoop netting at Herdsman Lake.

**Insets** A selection of Gould League membership badges.

**Above left** Naturalist Kevn Griffiths instructing students in wildlife handling.

**Left** Harry Butler with students at Bickley science camp school.

*Photos - Kevin Kenneally*



**Above** Coming face to face with a bobtail skink.

Photo - Kevin Kenneally

## A wild education

Harry Butler hosted the groundbreaking 1970s ABC-TV program 'In the Wild with Harry Butler' and was one of the Gould League's original members. He has had a celebrated career in natural history and nature conservation. Harry's involvement with the league has spanned more than 60 years, as a member, an educational organiser and a patron.

Olive Seymour—long-time Gould League secretary and author of *Birds for Beginners*—was one of Harry's primary school teachers and gained him membership to the league. Harry remembers that the written material produced by the league—the Gould League magazine *Wildlife* and the *Gould League Notes*—appealed to him because they were child friendly.

"This material reached me as a child and made me feel like I could be part of the natural history of Western Australia," Harry said.

This contributed to the development of a career dedicated to helping children learn about and become inspired by the State's natural history.

As the Gould League 'organiser' in the WA Education Department from 1954 to 1962, Harry built the WA membership of schoolchildren to 150,000, brought the Wildlife Show to the Perth Town Hall and started the

mobile Wildlife Show that travelled into regional WA. On average, Harry reached 100,000 children each year and visited each Western Australian school every three years.

His career in education also reflected his desire to extend learning opportunities to all children, despite physical, economic or social limitations. The Harry Butler Scholarship was set up to help economically disadvantaged children attend Gould League camps and activities. This scholarship reflected Harry's own childhood experiences of having his activities restricted by his parents' financial position.

Harry also spent some of his career as a special needs teacher, and had excellent results with children who were deemed 'unteachable'.

"Natural history interprets all aspects of life and the environment in which we live. Many children who passed through the Gould League developed the same fire in the belly for natural history that I carried with me throughout my career," Harry said.

## Nature for everyone

Eric McCrum's career as a teacher and naturalist, kindled the interest of countless children in natural history. Eric attended many Gould League camps at Bickley as a trainee teacher and, in 1984, became the CEO when

the league moved from the Perth Zoo education centre to Herdsman Lake. Now retired from teaching, Eric maintains his involvement with the league as a council member. His distinguished career in natural history also earned him an Order of Australia.

Eric's passion for natural history developed in his early childhood and translated into a teaching career which integrated natural history into all areas of the curriculum. Eric maintains that natural history is a 'leveller' that binds all children in a common interest, offering an interesting and enjoyable subject for students to learn from and carry with them into later life.

Eric enjoys meeting former students who remember the animated and interesting lessons that focused on natural history. He said that he liked to focus on the relationship between people and their natural environment and instil a sense of ownership and responsibility into children for their 'natural neighbours'.

"Children are crazy to find out as much as they can about natural history and it makes such a difference to their





**Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre**

The WA Gould League manages and operates the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre within the CALM-managed Herdsman Lake Regional Park. The park is one of eight regional parks and the largest wetland area in the Perth metropolitan region (see 'Parks for people', *LANDSCOPE*, Summer 2000-01). The Wildlife Centre was opened in 1984, funded by the World Wildlife Foundation and the then Department of Education.

All Gould League activities are held at the centre. It hosts various activities and excursions for school-aged children and community activities designed to increase awareness about the natural environment. The community activities include bird walks, information and sleepover nights, wildlife excursions and festivals. They are designed to provide people with direct interaction with natural ecosystems, develop community interest and involvement in the natural environment and wildlife conservation, and raise awareness of the State's plants and animals.

Herdsman Lake provides a case study for many students (particularly those at tertiary level) about the relationship between urban wetlands, its wildlife residents and its human neighbours. Harry Butler said the Gould League's setting in an urban wetland enabled the league to teach students about environmental values in a way that they could relate to. "After all, most Australians live in urban areas," Harry said.

As a non-profit organisation the Gould League's Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre relies on the work of volunteers. Thirty volunteers donate their time to the centre to enable public access on the weekends and community and education activities. Donations and volunteers are always welcome.



lives. The Gould League encourages children to view the world through nature's eyes," Eric said.

### Interaction with nature

Gane Doyle is a self-proclaimed testament to the impression that the Gould League makes on young people. Now owner and operator of the Western Australian Reptile Park in Henley Brook, Gane attended the second-ever Gould League camp as a youngster in 1953. Two children from 15 metropolitan and eight country schools were invited to attend the two-week camp at Bickley.

Gane has fond memories of the camp and his experiences as a member of the Gould League. He says the league nurtured his interest and passion for natural history and provided him with a forum to learn about and experience nature first hand. Gane and

**Above left** A school group studying freshwater life at Herdsman Lake Regional Park.

**Above** Gould League badges are highly prized collector's items with schoolchildren.

**Far left** The raised boardwalk at Herdsman Lake enables children to access the lake in winter.

**Left** The Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, headquarters of the WA Gould League.  
*Photos - Kevin Kenneally*





his wife June encouraged their children's and grandchildren's interests in natural history. Their son Gane Doyle junior and their granddaughter Elizabeth Doyle are also members of the Gould League, making three generations of Doyle members.

Gane attributes his pursuit of a career in natural history to the encouragement and information he received as a student from the Gould League. His Western Australian Reptile Farm—based on eight hectares of bushland—is designed to enable the public to learn more about, and have first hand experiences with, Western Australian reptiles. The reptile farm is modelled on the Gould League's principles of encouraging interaction with nature.

### Sowing seeds

CALM's *LANDSCOPE* Expeditions' Scientific Coordinator and Gould League President Kevin Kenneally has been involved with the Gould League since childhood. His interest was fostered by Dominic Serventy, one of the State's most outstanding and influential naturalists and ornithologists. Kevin maintains that the natural world is fascinating to most children and this



innate interest needs to be nurtured and focused.

"Conservation is an attitude as much as an act, and this attitude is learned in the formative years. If children do not appreciate the natural world, they may not value it as adults. The Gould League plays a seminal role in Australian society by sowing these attitudinal seeds," Kevin said.

Opportunities for children to connect with nature and learn from experts through activities and resource material are provided by the League. Kevin regularly meets former Gould Leaguers who have long finished school but affectionately recount stories about their involvement in the field study camps and activity days.

The Gould League is an important adjunct to classroom education. Children discover that learning can take place outside traditional school hours and in unexpected places. For example, sleepovers at the Gould League's Wildlife Centre at Herdsman Lake enable children to discover the natural world at night, when frogs, moths, bats and birds emerge from their hiding places under the night sky. Children learn to look at and listen to the sights and sounds of nature.

**Top left** The sighting of a tawny frogmouth at the Bickley science camp was rewarded with a golden wing badge.  
*Photo – Sally Anne Cousans*

**Above left** Studying the parts of a flower at Bickley camp school.

**Above** CALM volunteer Daphne Edinger showing students how to press plants.  
*Photos – Kevin Kenneally*

Kevin believes the Gould League provides a training ground in the natural sciences. Although many members later become professionals, working in areas from science to ecotourism, some take up the interest again in their retirement years, as volunteers. Laying the foundations for a lifelong interest in nature is one of the most important roles the Gould League performs. But opening eyes to nature's wonders isn't only for the young.

### Natural classrooms

The Gould League runs regular activities, designed to educate both school-aged children and the wider



**Above** A close encounter with a motorbike frog.

**Above right** Gould League council member Alma de Rebeira with students studying the freshwater life in Bickley Brook.  
*Photos – Kevin Kenneally*



community about waste management, wildlife and environment conservation and developing sustainable lifestyles. The activities encourage people to understand, appreciate and protect the natural environment.

There are 63 Western Australian schools involved in the current range of educational programs. The schools attend activity days and excursions at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre and almost 3,000 students are members of the league.

The centre houses displays of plants and animals and has been set up to accommodate schoolchildren in classes as well as to conduct community activities. About 200 school excursions and 8,000 students, ranging from pre-primary to university, come through the centre each year.

The Gould League is a partnership with the WA Department of Education

and Training. Centre Manager Roger Harris and Administrative Officer Jennifer Newhill are employed by the department to run and promote the centre and its range of education and community activities. Roger also develops the curriculum program to accommodate different education levels and stages of development, and produce outcome-based results.

Roger has developed techniques to integrate environmental values into the league's learning and teaching programs. He believes that providing students with information and hands-on experience in the unique wetland environment is more likely to change their attitude and values and, therefore, their behaviour. This is based on an education model that integrates planning, acting, reflecting and describing into the student's experiences at the centre.

### **Extra-curricular activities**

The centre also runs stimulating educational and fun activities during its week-long holiday programs designed for school-aged children. These have proved extremely popular, attracting an average of 250 students each session. Roger says these programs provide a valuable service to the community and enable students to enjoy fun and worthwhile activities on their holidays.

Ninety-four years after its formation, the Gould League continues to inspire and nurture the interests of children and adults in natural history. The legacy of John Gould's fascination with plants and animals is evident in the faces of all those who attend the activities at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre.

Schools and community members wanting to become involved in the Western Australian Gould League or find out more about the activities can contact the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre on (08) 9387 0679, email the Centre Manager Roger Harris ([roger@wagouldleague.com.au](mailto:roger@wagouldleague.com.au)) or visit the Western Australian Gould League website ([www.wagouldleague.com.au](http://www.wagouldleague.com.au)).



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