

Great Victoria Desert Biodiversity Trust Newsletter

December 2016 Edition
Issue 4

Busy year for Trust

2016 has seen the development of the Adaptive Management Partnership culminating in two Conservation Action Planning workshops in Kalgoorlie and the acceptance of the Trust's Management Panel of four proposals put forward by the Partnership.

The Trust has also welcomed to the Management Panel Nigel Wessel, the Goldfields Regional Manager for the Department of Parks and Wildlife. Nigel brings with him a wealth of experience having spent many years in the Goldfields as well as working across the state in various roles with the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

In this edition we have a story from Nerilee Rockman, one of the Management Panel members of the Trust and the Vice President Legal, Commercial and Supply Chain for AngloGold Ashanti Australia. She shares her perspectives on the Trust's establishment, being Management Panel member and the direction the Trust is taking. Finally, Sam Doudle from Spinifex Land Management, shares a story on some of the work undertaken by the Rangers this year.

Wishing you a happy and safe Christmas and New Year.

Kathryn Sinclair



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Adaptive Management Partnership

The Adaptive Management Partnership has rapidly developed in the last six months of 2016.



A collaborative Malleefowl Survey will be undertaken in 2017.

The Partnership has brought together diverse groups: Rangelands NRM, Spinifex Land Management, Yilka Aboriginal Corporation, Central Desert Native Title Services, Greening Australia, the Department of Parks and Wildlife, Conservation Management and the Trust. The aim of the Partnership is to work together, utilising the skills and strengths of each organisation to achieve positive outcomes for biodiversity and Traditional Owners living in the Great Victoria Desert. The core value of the Partnership is putting Traditional Owners at the centre, as the long-term, sustainable land managers in the region.

The groups have met twice in Kalgoorlie and planning is well underway for the 'Adaptive Management Implementation Plan'. This document has developed substantially in the last six months of 2016. The Plan is action and activity focussed with the aim of getting on-ground results. After the initial workshop, several projects were put forward to the Trust for funding. The Trust's Technical Advisory Panel and Management Panel considered the proposals and have agreed to fund several exciting initiatives including:

- 1) A collaborative Malleefowl survey – with Yilka Traditional Owners and Spinifex Rangers using long walks and national Malleefowl mound monitoring. The aim of the project is to increase knowledge of Malleefowl across the region and expand Traditional Owners existing skills for detecting and monitoring Malleefowl.
- 2) The collation of Blue Streak Rocket data from the 1960's over the GVD. This aerial imagery is thought to be some of the earliest available images of the region and will show the fire mosaic of the landscape at a time, or a time as close as possible to, when Traditional Owners implemented their traditional burning patterns. The collation of these records will allow the Partnership to establish a target for burn patch size, to best mimic the traditional regimes.

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Nerilee Rockman - Perspective from the Board

Having worked in the corporate law sector for 25 years, the formation of the Trust represented something different for me.

AngloGold Ashanti Australia established the Trust as a way to meet and exceed its environmental obligations under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) in a remote region of the world, where no other mines had been established and very little was known about biodiversity in the region. I worked closely with the Tropicana Environmental Team, led by Belinda Bastow, to ensure that creation of the Trust would not only meet AGAA's environmental conditions under the EPBC Act but would have a sound legal structure. Establishing the Trust structure, obtaining charitable status for it, and having the Public Trustee of Western Australia agree to act as the Trustee were key to the efficacy of the Trust.

I've greatly enjoyed the challenges associated with setting up the Trust and then being part of the decision-making as a Management Panel member, to ensure the Trust continues to meet its environmental and legal obligations as defined in the Trust Deed. The Trust has taken initiatives to establish clear pathways for knowledge acquisition in a logical, well defined process. The formation of the Adaptive Management Partnership with several



Nerilee Rockman

stakeholders in the region has also enriched the Trust, especially with the involvement of Traditional Owners as the key land managers in the region.

I am confident that the activities of the Trust will continue to build biodiversity knowledge of the region and increase the protection of threatened species and biodiversity of the region.

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- 3) Cultural and biodiversity asset mapping. This project recognises the vast distances and inaccessibility of the region, which has prevented Traditional Owners visiting many of the key cultural and biodiversity assets in the region. This project will fund Traditional Owners and Rangers to visit key cultural assets and map their biodiversity values. This project aims to facilitate appropriate burning regimes and gain cultural authority for burns in areas potentially near cultural assets.
- 4) Extension of the Northern Australia Rangelands Fire Information systems. The Trust previously contributed to the extension of the

Northern Australia Fire Information system to the Rangelands of Western Australia. This site provides current information on fires as well as historic fire scar information. The fire scar mapping currently goes back to 2003. The Trust has agreed to fund collation of fire scars dating back to 2000 to allow a full 15 year fire history. For more information visit: <http://www.firenorth.org.au/nafi3/>



Fire management

In August 2016 I was lucky enough to participate in a fire management activity in the Great Victoria Desert with the Spinifex Rangers and the Department of Parks and Wildlife.



The fire burning activity was undertaken by Parks & Wildlife and Spinifex Rangers who were accompanied by an Elder and Senior Cultural Advisor.

The fire burning activity took place near Ilkulka community and roadhouse. The plan was to conduct hand burning close to the roadhouse, both to protect the asset and to encourage biodiversity. In addition this would be the first time the Spinifex Rangers participated in aerial burns, to create mosaic fire scars in the landscape and reduce the scale of large, uncontrolled, hot wildfires in the summer months. The Spinifex Rangers were accompanied by an Elder and Senior Cultural Advisor to ensure the burning was conducted in a culturally appropriate manner with appropriate buffers around culturally significant places. The Department of Parks and Wildlife supplied a plane, pilot, fire truck, equipment and several experienced staff members to participate both in the aerial and ground based burning. The Parks and Wildlife and the Rangers worked together, discussing each morning where the aerial burning should take place, taking into account weather and wind speed and direction as well as the location of culturally significant sites. The two teams used a large, laminated map of the region to draw out sites, buffers and the expected burn size and location, allowing everyone to gain a good understanding to where the burns would occur. I really appreciated the time Senior Ranger, Ethan, took to explain to me the decision making process for selecting burn areas and how the Ranger team operated.

Some days these discussions went smoothly and agreement was reached on the ideal locations for the burns to occur. On other days, concerns of the Elder and Cultural Advisor about the proposed location of the burn in the vicinity of a cultural site led to the postponement of aerial burning. One of these days allowed the group to travel to an important cultural kapi (waterhole). Along the journey Rangers used the Fulcrum app on their tablets to record key biodiversity information and ideal sites for future burns. Keen sighted Ranger Bernard Nixon also managed to identify Nganamara (Malleefowl) tracks crossing the road. The team recorded the information that noted that the tracks were from a pair of Nganamara and the number of tracks indicated that this may be a nest area for the pair.

Overall, the program was deemed very successful. As this was first exposure of the Spinifex people to aerial burning as well as concerns over historic prescribed burning which became larger than planned it was expected that aerial burning would be an iterative process. In the future, it is aimed that Spinifex Elders / Traditional Owners will have greater access to significant cultural assets. This would facilitate the knowledge of biodiversity in the vicinity of the sites and could increase the cultural authority for conducting prescribed burns in areas adjacent to these significant sites.

In our region

Seed collection a win-win for Spinifex Rangers and AGAA

In November 2016 the Spinifex Rangers took part in seed collection training at Tropicana Gold Mine (TGM) with Jack Shiner from Red Dirt Seeds. This training was facilitated by Tropicana's Rosemarie Lane and Jane Dunne and is part of AngloGold Ashanti's Community Investment and Operational Rehabilitation Project.



From left: Anne Stevens and Sam Doudle with some Acacia seed.

This training represents a win-win for both TGM and the Rangers. Spinifex Ranger Co-ordinator Sam Doudle participated in the training and highlighted how “this training was really valuable for the Ranger teams as it provided skills that will be used not just for the mine but also back home on Spinifex Lands”. From TGM’s perspective, Tropicana Environmental Superintendent Rosemarie Lane, the seed collection is a necessary component of Tropicana’s rehabilitation “we estimate that \$7-8 million will be spent on seed collection over the life of Tropicana alone (based

on rehabilitating the cleared Tropicana footprint of 3,600 hectares at \$2,000/hectare for seed and seeding)”.

Rose also acknowledges “that as TGM is currently the only operational mine in the WA Great Victoria Desert and there are a lot of species we are going to want to collect that no one has before on a commercial basis, so we don’t know what it is going to cost.

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We are obligated to return 70% of the baseline species so we are going to have to work on that as well. By working with Traditional Owners and experts like Jack Shiner we will not only meet our obligations but leave a lasting, sustainable, economic benefit to Traditional Owners living on country.”

The seed collecting took place over three days with Jack providing training to ensure seed collection was conducted in a sustainable manner and to meet industry standards. The training also utilised traditional knowledge in locating and identifying species, both at Tropicana but more widely in the Great Victoria Desert, and also drew from a long tradition of seed collection as a food source. Technology also plays a part through the use of a mobile data collection tool called the Fulcrum App which captures all the salient information from the field. This tool allows Rangers to capture the field information as they go, which is then automatically uploaded and integrated into the Spinifex Land Management data capture

systems.

Six Rangers: Scott Baird, Delwyn Franks, Anne Stevens, Ursula Bingham, Anton Currie and Marilyn Walker (plus Co-ordinators Shane and Sam Doudle) took part in the training. This included three women Rangers. Spinifex Land Management have introduced women Rangers into the work force in 2016 and seed collection is proving a great activity for the women to participate in.

The visit to Tropicana was a first for the Community Rangers.

According to Sam “being part of a mining team and camp for a few days was an exciting experience for the Ranger team. It was really useful learning about how to work safely through the mine induction process.”

It is hoped the initiative will leave a lasting legacy at the Tjuntjuntjara Community by ensuring a regular income stream through the sale of seeds to AngloGold Ashanti Australia and to independent merchants such as Jack beyond the life of Tropicana. Depending on the species, seeds may fetch anything from \$80/kg up to \$1,400/kg.

Employment Opportunity - Operations Manager - maternity leave cover

The Trust is currently seeking an Operation's Manager to cover the maternity leave of the current Operations Manager. If you're interested in finding out more about the role, please visit the Trust's website: gvdbiodiversitytrust.org.au. Applications close on Wednesday 11 January 2017 at 5pm.



In our region is about keeping up-to-date with projects happening in the region is important to understanding the growing knowledge of biodiversity in the region. If you have some activities taking place in the GVD and you would like to share your story, please contact: kathryn.sinclair@gvdbiodiversitytrust.org.au.