

## News from the Australasian Section of the Society of Conservation Biology

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**HELLO** to all SCB members. Please remember that this is your newsletter. The Section Board does not just want to report to the membership on our activities, but would like to see the News and Views section used as a sounding board for our members. Given that we are lucky enough to live or work in one of the nicest regions in the world, with its unique flora and fauna and, unfortunately, a host of conservation problems, we are convinced there must be many interesting issues, stories and dilemmas out there. We are also fortunate enough to have this superb forum for disseminating conservation research, policy, or management ideas . . . and it is all yours! We invite you to take advantage of this unique opportunity and send any articles, information, requests . . . in fact, just about anything that you would like to see aired in this newsletter.

Have a look below at some of the activities the Section has been up to. Of particular note, elections for the Board of Directors have been held and some new members elected.

### Section Elections

We were fortunate in having six outstanding candidates with a variety of interests and expertise relevant to conservation in our region for the 2005 Australasian section elections. Unfortunately, there were only four vacancies to fill, so two very good candidates, Ian McLean and Paige West, missed out this time around. By way of introduction, the successful candidate's profiles are below:

**Dr Brendan Mackey, Reader, School of Resources, Environment and Society/Faculty of Science The Australian National University, [brendan.mackey@anu.edu.au](mailto:brendan.mackey@anu.edu.au)**

I was appointed to the Board earlier in the year to fill a casual vacancy and sought reappointment for the 2005 elections. I am involved

in conservation assessment and planning projects in Australia, Papua New Guinea, Canada and Russia, working collaboratively with colleagues at other universities, government agencies, indigenous organisations, and environmental non-government organisations. I am CI for a major ARC Linkage research project which is investigating, among other things, the conservation of dispersive fauna in Northern Australia and the Western Australian woodlands. I am associate editor for the international journal "Environmental Conservation" published by Cambridge University Press, and I am on the advisory board for "Pacific Conservation Biology".

I am particularly interested in serving as the Policy Committee Chair. The SCB has a vital role to play in the coming years in advancing the scientific basis to conservation assessment and planning across land tenures. For example, opportunities exist for conservation science to: (a) better inform the development of a conservation economy on Aboriginal land; (b) assist the unfolding NRM agenda to deliver better biodiversity outcomes on pastoral land; and (c) help design and implement an ecologically effective reserve system. We must also be mindful of the need to forge links and assist our neighbours and colleagues in the Pacific, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia.

He is actively engaged in fostering educational links between Western institutions and students and conservation practitioners from Papua New Guinea. A passionate conservationist and a critical thinker, he will provide a unique and innovative perspective for our section.

**Craig Morley, PhD, Department of Biology, The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji**

My first real foray in conservation occurred when visiting Africa and

India in the late 1980s. What I saw on my travels was both beautiful and tragic and it changed my life. Until this point I was in finance and management, an inherited occupation! I returned to New Zealand to study zoology at Massey and Canterbury where I obtained my PhD. I moved to Fiji 4 years ago to teach conservation biology and have not looked back. With the help of several NGOs we are trying to conserve Fiji's two most endangered vertebrates, the crested iguana and ground frog from the impact of invasive alien species. Last year I established the Fiji Invasives Network (FIN) and am involved in the Pacific Invasives Learning Network (PILN). Recently, I began a "Bula Column" in Pacific Conservation Biology to promote our work in Fiji and we have already written about the issues facing conservation in Fiji today. Conservation biology is a relatively new concept in the Pacific but with a voice on the board we will in a better position to advance many of the goals and objectives of the SCB. Particular areas that I would like to address are networking, education, and government commitment.

**Menna Jones, Research Fellow, School of Zoology, University of Tasmania, and Nature Conservation Branch, Tasmanian Department of Environment**

I have been a board member and Acting President of the SCB Australasian section since 2002 and sought re-election to the Board. I am involved in landscape-scale wildlife conservation projects, focusing on the requirements of the highly dispersive top-order predators (devils, quolls, raptors). I hold a joint position between the government conservation agency and the university. This enables me to set the conservation management directions, carry out adaptive management trials, implement

management actions, and meet the research needs of the conservation management. In this capacity I work with landholders, conservation non-government organizations, several government departments, other conservation biologists and students.

Among my contributions on the inaugural Board, I set up the student award programme and organized a workshop on talking to government and the media at the 2003 Ecological Society of Australia conference. If elected, my particular interest is to enhance the process by which the results of conservation science results translate into real outcomes. Ways by which this process might be advanced include inter-disciplinary workshops and symposia (at our first regional conference and those of other societies), and publications that serve to establish links between people, and provide awareness and training for both established and early career conservation biologists. By providing a service for members, these activities may also make SCB attractive to new members.

**Richard Kingsford, Professor of Environmental Science, School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW 2052 Australia**

Conservation of ecosystems and their species is becoming increasingly important as we humans appropriate more and more resources. My background of about 18 years in river, wetland and waterbird ecology within a government conservation agency has been challenging, particularly given the current state of many of Australia's rivers. It has also made me think hard about the role of science and its interaction with policy and management. As most of us know, it is not necessarily through lack of knowledge that conservation of ecosystems is failing but generally through lack of political will. Our science is often not making the difference that perhaps we would like it to. Solutions are hard to come by and perhaps most of us practicing scientists continue to be happy publishing our work in the appropriate journals. This is a necessary step. But perhaps there are other ways

of helping our governments and communities. The Australasian Section of the International Society for Conservation Biology could provide some impetus through its conferences and publications or possibly policy statements. I would like to help the society in such endeavours.

Membership of the Board is now: Andy Mack (Papua New Guinea), Conservation committee chair (amack@global.net.pg); Karen Firestone (Australia), Secretary and Treasurer (kfirestone@zoo.nsw.gov.au); Robert Davis (Australia), Programme committee chair (rob@graduate.uwa.edu.au); Nicola Nelson (New Zealand), Communications/web site (nicola.nelson@vuw.ac.nz); Jean-Marc Hero (Australia), Education Chair (hero@mailbox.gu.edu.au); Craig Morely (Fiji) (morley\_c@usp.ac.fj); Brendan Mackay (Australia) (Brendan.Mackay@anu.edu.au); Menna Jones (Australia) (menna.jones@utas.edu.au); Richard Kingsford (Australia) (richard.kingsford@unsw.edu.au); Dick Frankham (Australia) (rfrankha@rna.bio.mq.edu.au); Harry Recher (Australia), Editor of PCB (hjrecher@pacific.net.au).

#### SCB2007 Conference Bid

We were unsuccessful in our bid to host the 2007 annual meeting of SCB. Instead of Wellington, New Zealand, as the Australasian Branch proposed, the decision was made to stage the 2007 meeting in South Africa. The Australasian Branch will give its full support to the South Africans, but we are now putting plans in place for an Australasian regional conference in 2007. This will be timed to avoid conflict with the South African meeting. It is the strong intention of our section to draw conservation biologists together in a regular meeting in our region. The planning for this task is co-ordinated by our Programming Chairperson, Rob Davis. Rob is now convening a conference committee, so if you are interested and able to assist with planning for this, please contact him at rob@graduate.uwa.edu.au.

This is also an ideal opportunity to thank our very dedicated and committed members who put so much of their time and effort into the NZ

bid. Particularly, we are indebted to Prof Charles Daugherty (Head of School; Professor of Ecology) and Principal Investigator, Allan Wilson (Centre for Molecular Ecology and Evolution) of the School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington, and SCB-A board member Dr Nicola Nelson (Millennium Post-doctoral Fellow, Conservation and Research for Endangered Species, San Diego Zoo; Lecturer, Conservation Biology, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington; Communications Chairperson, SCB Australasia Section) who agreed to host the meeting and did the bulk of the leg work. They were ably assisted by many others, both in New Zealand and Australia. The resulting bid was an extremely well-researched and comprehensive package and a testament to the hard work and professionalism of the team. We are grateful to have such enthusiastic members in our section and are sure this enthusiasm will be transferred to our own regional meeting.

#### Upcoming Events

Following is a list of upcoming conferences of interest to conservation biologists. It is by no means comprehensive . . . so if you have something you would like listed in future, please contact us!

- Ecological Society of Australia 2005 (November 29–December 2, 2005). [http://www.ecolsoc.org.au/Conference/ESA2005/ESA2005\\_000.htm](http://www.ecolsoc.org.au/Conference/ESA2005/ESA2005_000.htm)
- Australian Network for Plant Conservation Conference 2005 (September 26–October 1, 2005). <http://www.plevin.com.au/anpc2005/index.htm>
- Invertebrate Biodiversity and Conservation Conference (December 4–9, 2005). <http://www.invertebrates2005.com/>
- Australasian Wildlife Management Society Conference (November 21–25, 2005). <http://www.awms.org.nz/files/awmsconf2005.pdf>
- Australasian Ornithological Conference (December 6–10, 2005). <http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/aoc/>

### Board Activities

A meeting of the new Board of Directors is planned for late 2005 or early 2006. This will be the third meeting of the Section's Board and among the items for discussion will be: 1) planning for the future direction of SCB-Australasia; 2) regional conservation biology meetings; and, 3) increased involvement of Branch members with the management of *Pacific Conservation Biology*. Matters from section members for consideration are always welcome and can be addressed to any of the board members.

**Strategic planning:** The Section's Strategic Planning Committee is Rob Davis (rob@graduate.uwa.edu.au), Karen Firestone (kfirestone@unsw.edu.au), Brendan Mackey (brendan.mackey@anu.edu.au) and Menna Jones (menna.jones@utas.edu.au). We welcome other committee members who would be interested in participating or contributing ideas. A draft strategic plan will be made available for members to comment on, prior to finalization.

### Student award

We have awarded a number of student prizes this year; the latest was

at the combined meeting of the Genetics Society of Australasia and the Society for Molecular Biology and Evolution. The winner of the SCB-Australasia student award for a spoken paper, as judged by the GSA judging committee, was Dominique Sigg, a PhD student from the University of Queensland. Congratulations, Dominique!

Dominique's talk was titled "Strong evidence of fine-scale spatial genetic structure and male-biased dispersal within the only known remnant population of an endangered macropod" and was presented on behalf of herself and co-authors Anne Goldizen and Andrew Lowe. Her abstract follows:

"The bridled nailtail wallaby (*Onychogalea fraenata*) has declined from an extensive range covering semi-arid eastern Australia to a single population of fewer than 500 animals. Furthermore, animals are patchily distributed in small areas of suitable habitat within the protected remnant. We used seven highly polymorphic microsatellite loci to examine the genetic diversity and spatial genetic structure of bridled nailtail wallabies within and among these patches. We found that bridled nailtail wallabies had one of the highest

levels of heterozygosity (0.821) and allelic diversity (12.57) recorded for any marsupial. Significant spatial genetic structuring was detected between patches separated by just four kilometres, suggesting reduced gene flow between patches of suitable habitat. Both direct and indirect measures of gene flow revealed that dispersal between patches was male-biased. Isolation by distance and spatial genetic autocorrelation methods also revealed highly significant spatial genetic structure among females, but not males, within a continuous patch of animals covering just 750 ha, providing evidence of strong female philopatry and male-biased dispersal. We suggest that genetic diversity can be maintained in remnant populations of endangered species and that the spatial genetic structure and dispersal characteristics observed in this study may contribute to this. However, further studies are required to ascertain whether this diversity will be eroded in the future."

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