

Conservation and management of Australasian birds

THIS is a special issue of *Pacific Conservation Biology* on the conservation and management of Australasian birds. Originally, the papers were presented at the Southern Hemisphere Ornithological Congress (SHOC) held in October 1996 at Albany, Western Australia. The Congress was organized by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union following discussions in 1990 at the International Ornithological Congress in Christchurch, New Zealand on the need for regular, scientific ornithological meetings in Australia. The intent of those discussions was for a meeting of Australian/New Zealand ornithologists every two years.

SHOC, as evidenced by the breadth of papers in this issue, confirmed the need for regular ornithological meetings in Australia. Whereas studies of mammals and mammalian ecology dominated Australian vertebrate ecology research during the 1970s and early 80s, significant advances in the study of avian behaviour, populations, and communities have been made since then. The result is that avian research in Australia now dominates studies of terrestrial vertebrate ecology and behaviour. As illustrated by the papers in this issue, avian research contributes importantly to the development of national conservation and land management strategies. The papers on fire ecology in this issue alone set new directions for fire management across a broad spectrum of habitat types. Other important advances in management discussed in this issue concern the effects of habitat fragmentation and degradation on bird populations and communities and the need for more refined land and vegetation management procedures.

A much earlier indication of the importance of avian research to the conservation and management of Australian landscapes and biodiversity was given by the 1985 publication of *Birds of Eucalypt Forests and Woodlands: Ecology, Conservation, Management* published by Surrey Beatty & Sons and edited by J. Keast, H. Recher, H. Ford and D. Saunders. Given that this book was based on papers presented at a scientific meeting of the RAOU at Armidale, New South Wales in 1982, it is disappointing that fourteen years elapsed before another quality, scientific

conference on Australasian ornithology could be held. These delays and the failure of the RAOU to make any provision for the publication of the SHOC papers highlights the need for a strong, scientific ornithological organization in Australia and New Zealand. North America has a number of such professional societies which provide for regular ornithological meetings and the publication of scientific ornithological research. With the RAOU adopting a new name, *Birds Australia*, emphasising amateur studies and birdwatching and moving away from its traditional association with New Zealand, the need for a professional ornithological society in Australasia is greater than ever.

A professional society would give stimulus to the kinds of studies presented in this issue of *Pacific Conservation Biology*: effects of fire and habitat fragmentation on populations and communities, interactions between species, behavioural responses to habitat disturbance, avian conservation and management, and the use of habitat by birds. In his paper, John Craig comments that the activities of people have degraded ecosystems worldwide. He argues that we need to explore ways of integrating the conservation and management of plants and animals with human activities. SHOC provided such a forum and it is regrettable that there appears to be no machinery or an organization committed to holding such meetings in Australasia. Hopefully this issue of *Pacific Conservation Biology* will act as a stimulus to the organization of a professional ornithological society in Australia which could then foster such activities.

The organization and editing of this issue of *Pacific Conservation Biology* was largely undertaken by Denis Saunders (CSIRO Wildlife and Ecology) and Allan Burbidge (Conservation and Land Management, Western Australia). I appreciate the considerable effort each contributed. Other papers on the conservation biology of birds within the Pacific region that were presented at SHOC will appear in subsequent issues of *Pacific Conservation Biology*. I apologize to those authors that it was not possible to include all the papers in this issue.

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