

Avicultural Representatives to meet with the Threatened Species Commissioner

The Canary and Cage Bird Federation of Australia (CCBFA) has been lobbying for a meeting with the Threatened Species Commissioner for some years. A December 14th meeting in Canberra has now been scheduled with Sam Davis, Gary Fitt, Graeme Phipps, Steve Sass and Simon Degenhard representing avicultural interests nationally. A wider group of representatives from across the country are actively conversing via an email group to ensure ideas and opinions are shared leading to widespread support.

We aim to raise awareness of possibilities where private aviculture can run programs in parallel to and with the support of existing threatened species projects. The office and role of the Threatened Species Commissioner (refer *Appendix A*) is well positioned to assist us, to assist with, threatened species we care for and care about.

Those attending the meeting were selected for their specific areas of expertise and experience.

Sam Davis



Sam is currently President of the Finch Society of Australia (FSA) and Vice President Government Liaison of the Canary and Cage Bird Federation of Australia (CCBFA). A major focus under Sam's leadership is the promotion of aviculture, with emphasis on communicating our strengths, achievements and potential to the general public, scientific, government and zoo community. Sam actively represents the interests of aviculturists nationally on a number of government committees and via his lobbying efforts on behalf of the hundreds of CCBFA affiliate clubs.

Aviculture remains a lifelong passion for Sam. As a child he bred and exhibited budgerigars. He has kept a broad range of finches, quail, and parrots over the years. After moving onto acreage Sam constructed a number of larger aviaries housing numerous finch species, some parrots and in recent years a range of softbills. One area of personal interest to Sam is including private aviculturists in threatened species work. Aviculture's involvement will be enormously beneficial. Our expertise is an untapped and economical resource of knowledge and skills.

Gary Fitt



Gary Fitt has over 50 years experience in finch aviculture having kept and bred a number of native and foreign species. Gary established significant avicultural collections in Narrabri NSW and now Brisbane and has been involved in management roles in aviculture for some time. Gary has been President or Vice President of the Qld Finch Society for the last 10 years, was convenor of the last 4 International Finch Conventions (2008, 2011, 2014, 2017) and was the inaugural and is the current President of the National Finch and Softbill Association. In these roles he has interacted with governments around several issues which threaten aviculture and has initiated conservation breeding programs through QFS for species which have become rare in aviculture. These

are usually foreign finch species. In addition Gary is actively involved in finch conservation in the wild. He is Science Advisor for the Save the Gouldian Fund coordinating the research program focussed on recovery of the Endangered Gouldian finch across northern Australia, including on-

ground actions to make a difference. Gary is also a member of the Blackthroated Finch Recovery Team which implements the Federally endorsed recovery plan for this species, seeking to stem the precipitous range contraction and decline in abundance of the southern Blackthroat, *Poephila cincta*.

Graeme Phipps



Graeme Phipps has been a member of the Avicultural Society of New South Wales since the mid-1960s and is currently President.

In the 1980s he presented at the first International Conservation and Aviculture Convention in Hollywood, USA on the need for zoos to collaborate with private aviculture, pointing out the mathematical limitations of zoos to achieve ANY of their stated goals without the involvement of the private community. A database system to facilitate collection management called OZCOLL was outlined.

Since that time, 37 years ago, there has been little advance in the area of collaboration on recovery programs and species management goals involving the private community. In 1985 Graeme became Curator of Birds, Taronga and Western Plains Zoos (later Principal Curator) and developed a cut down version of OZCOLL called REGASP – originally the Regional Avian Species Planning database system, later the Regional ANIMAL Species Planning database system- which was taken up by the International Species Information System (ISIS) and used by most zoos throughout the world for cooperative and collaborative collection management, in six languages. He also founded the ASMP – the Australasian Species Management Program to drive cooperative program work in Australasian zoos. To his delight REGASP evolved 25 years later into ZIMS – the global realtime online Zoological Information Management System. REGASP was also a core tool underpinning the World Zoo Conservation Strategy.

In 1988 Graeme was simultaneously Curator of Birds for the Zoological Parks Board of NSW; Conservation Committee chairperson to the Avicultural Federation of Australia (a position held for nearly 20 years) AND chair of the Conservation Committee of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union. One would think that that would offer a unique opportunity to facilitate collaborative programs – when in fact it was the Bermuda Triangle. There was no way one could navigate thru the bigotry of the birdwatching and zoo communities; features which continue to this day. Disappointing to witness such unscientific and uninformed attitudes dredged up as facts – particularly disappointing in that if people thought that the private avicultural community was responsible for species endangerment in Australia it meant that they were not looking at the real issues that were confronting these populations.

Species on the national threatened species list are increasing, not decreasing. A paper written by Graeme at the time of the publication of 'Birds to Watch' in the 1990s entitled 'Threatened Species in Australian Aviculture' and subsequently re-edited twice at 10 year intervals outlines potential roles private aviculture can and NEEDS to play. There are some 100 threatened species or their analogues that figure in Australian aviculture.

Graeme is trained in facilitating PHVA Workshops. PHVAs – Population and Habitat Viability Analysis and Assessment workshops are participatory and collaborative workshops which use modelling to arrive at measurable and consensus options for the recovery of species. The tools and programs on which these workshops depend are created by the CPSG – the Conservation Planning Specialist

Group of the SSC the Species Survival Commission of the IUCN – the World Conservation Union, of which Graeme is a member of CPSG Australasia.

Despite the injunction of the IUCN and the SSC to use these tools and to engage in ex situ support of in situ recovery programs early, most critically threatened species have not had these workshops run for them....notably the Orange-bellied Parrot *Neophema chrysogaster*. It is shocking to watch this species slide into an extinction vortex without even the benefit of such a workshop; and ignoring the many offers of assistance that have come from, and continue to come from the private avicultural community which has both the skills and spaces to assist; while at the same time the program is being managed by people who are clearly not up to the job of recovery.

Graeme attended a PHVA held in Canberra three years ago for the Plains Wanderer *Pedionomus torquatus*. It is a matter of record that South Australian aviculturist Eric Ridley cracked the aviculture of the species – which would have to be one of the most undemanding species possible to imagine re captive management. Graeme coordinated the creation of a Husbandry Manual for the species. Yet it was still decided that ZOOS had to confirm all of that information before proceeding further, and of course private involvement was not required. Plus, that zoos could ‘save’ the species at a cost of \$20Million over 10 years! Well they might; although note their performance with the Orange-bellied Parrot ...and note that private aviculture has the capacity to achieve any of those outcomes for a tiny fraction of those costs.

Graeme currently teaches Collection Management to zoo keepers at Certificate 3 and Certificate 4 levels. A unit of study exists at Certificate 5 and Lou Grossfeldt, Curator of Mogo Zoo and Species Co-ordinator of Bolivian Squirrel Monkeys and co-convenor of the Primate Taxon Advisory Group of ZAA will be offering with him thru TAFE a skill set to enable ANYONE to gain the skills to create and run studbooks, and operate as species co-ordinators for any captive population.

The contribution on offer from the private avicultural community is significant and should not be ignored. Indeed one should take a view that those who continue to ignore private avicultural involvement need to be held to account because species recovery is EVERYONE’s responsibility. It is inappropriate that avicultural involvement needs to pass thru the filters of what zoos or bird watching NGOs consider worthwhile. Their own performance in the balance is found wanting.

On a final note, Graeme was recognised for environmental contributions as Parramatta Citizen of the Year for 2008; for the creation of REGASP and ASMP by ARAZPA – the Australasian Regional Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums (now ZAA); and is a Life Member of the Avicultural Society of New South Wales. Of all the degrees, awards etc it is the Life Membership he values the most because aviculture is a celebration of the lives of birds and most speaks to his values. Aviculturists as a community need to step up for them and not be put aside any longer by anyone because it is birds and their survival that matters.

Steve Sass



Steve is a highly experienced Consulting Ecologist having undertaken hundreds of ecological surveys and assessments across Australia since 1992. Steve was appointed through his ecological consultancy EnviroKey, as an ‘Expert’ by NSW Office of Environment & Heritage (OEH) for 23 species (mostly birds) listed as Endangered under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. A keen aviculturist, Steve has more than 30 years’ experience in a wide range of birds including very difficult species such as the ‘softbills’ (eg, bush stone curlews, whipbirds, chats, robins, kingfishers, bowerbirds, honeyeaters and fairy-wrens)

and is a member of the NSW Expert Bird Group (OEH), formed as part of a review of the existing state legislation. In 2015, Steve along with his wife Linda (an aviculturist for the past 25 years and a Consulting Ecologist for the past 12 years), opened On the Perch Bird Park at Tathra on the NSW Sapphire Coast. A fully licensed zoo, On the Perch brings the field expertise of Steve and Linda, and translates it into an avicultural setting, show casing more than 90 species to more than 13,000 visitors annually with a commitment to threatened species conservation and education.

Simon Degenhard



Simon Degenhard was born in December 1980 and has been watching, keeping, breeding, reading and writing about and generally living and breathing birds for some 30+ years. Simon's love of our feathered friends was recognised from a young age and was encouraged and nurtured by his family, especially his late grandfather Roland, who spent many hours pointing out the native birdlife that was found on and around the family farm in Crystal Brook, South Australia.

Simon's avicultural journey all began in the Adelaide suburb of Campbelltown in the mid 1980's with the taming of a young Galah that was affectionately called Galahry, and yes he knows that this name was not very original, but it was effective all the same! From that point on Simon was hooked and his life with birds rapidly progressed.

The next additions to the family were Peach-faced Lovebirds, which Simon quickly achieved breeding success with. He was thrilled with this early success and enjoyed taming the chicks, many of which were then sold to various friends as pets; such was his enthusiasm for aviculture that he took every available opportunity to encourage as many friends as possible to give it a go.

From here he progressed to numerous other species including Ring-necked Pheasants, domestic ducks, bantams, various native and foreign parrots, finches, softbills, pigeons and doves. Simon was told on many occasions by older experienced breeders that he should think about specialising, but as much as he could see their point he couldn't possibly choose just one group of birds, let alone one species to concentrate on!

Simon moved to Bellingen, on the mid-north coast of NSW in December 1994 and was immediately taken by the amazing native birdlife found throughout the region. This abundance of wild birdlife satisfied his desire to get back on the avicultural band wagon for the short term. A year or so later the first new aviary was erected and the aviculturist within came back out as if it had never left! He maintained a mixed collection throughout his high school years, and especially enjoyed hand rearing numerous Cockatiels and selling them to other Bellingen locals.

Upon finishing high school in 1999, Simon moved to Sydney to pursue work. This meant living without a bird collection for a while, but he stayed in the mix by attending bird club meetings and visiting other breeders as often as possible. Following the purchase of a property with his wife Telea in 2004 he quickly set about building aviaries and subsequently built up a mixed collection of both native and foreign parrots, cockatoos, native and foreign lorikeets and softbills.

From the age of twelve Simon's enthusiasm compelled him to seek further knowledge by means of doing work experience at various wildlife parks and zoos. He started this with a stint at the Gorge Wildlife Park in the Adelaide hills back in 1993 and since then has spent time at Currumbin Sanctuary

on the Gold Coast, Featherdale Wildlife Park and Taronga Zoo in Sydney and Walsrode Bird Park in Germany.

Over the years Simon has had involvement with numerous bird clubs including the Avicultural Society of South Australia, the Coffs Harbour Caged Bird Club, the Softbill and Native Pigeon Society of Australia, the Parrot Society of Australia (NSW) Inc., the Finch Society of Australia, The Northern Rivers Avicultural Society and the Avicultural Society of NSW.

Simon's writing career began in the early to mid 1990's with articles that were published in bird club magazines. This love of writing about his feathered companions progressed further over the years and in the mid 2000's he began writing regularly for Australian Aviary Life (AAL) magazine (now Aviarylif). This association with AAL led to Simon becoming assistant editor of the magazine and then co-owner in 2010. AAL is something that he is evidently very proud of and enjoys working on immensely. Simon is now the Editor and sole owner of Aviarylif magazine. In recent years Simon has also written numerous other articles for various bird club magazines.

Simon has travelled fairly extensively over the last decade and has made a point of visiting bird collection wherever possible. He has been lucky enough to visit collections in England, Europe, Singapore and the USA along with countless setups in Australia. He has also visited some of the world's best bird parks including Walsrode (Germany), Loro Parque (Tenerife, Canary Islands), Bird World (England), Jurong Bird Park (Singapore) and Dallas World Aquarium (USA).

Over the past 6-7 years Simon has turned his attention to the conservation of birds in a major way, supporting many projects through publicising their work within the pages of Aviarylif. During this time Simon has closely followed and supported the work of German based NGO, the Association for the Conservation of Threatened Parrots e.V. (ACTP) with great enthusiasm, and is immensely proud of his strong ties with this leading player on the worldwide conservation scene.

Simon's passion for all things feathered is a major force within his life; his love for birds encompasses both aviculture and ornithological interests, with the long-term preservation of the world's birdlife being at the top of his agenda..



Threatened Species Commissioner

Terms of Reference

Background

The Threatened Species Commissioner brings a new national focus and effort to address the growing number of plants and animals in Australia that are faced with extinction.

The Commissioner, sitting within the Australian Government Department of the Environment, champions the development and implementation of practical conservation actions designed to secure priority national threatened species in the wild for at least the next 100 years.

An important part of the Commissioner's role is bringing together partners to deliver the agreed programme of conservation actions for priority threatened species - whether through funding or contributing other skills and expertise.

The Commissioner also leads efforts to report on the outcomes of conservation actions for priority threatened species, including the effectiveness of specific investments and achievements in terms of the goals of securing priority species in the wild.

A key role for the Commissioner is to work collaboratively with all levels of government, scientists, the non-profit sector, industry and the community to build on new initiatives and strategic approaches to threatened species conservation being trialled and implemented across the country; to better coordinate conservation effort; and to share information about these activities.

The work of the Commissioner complements but does not duplicate or override the important statutory responsibilities of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee.

The Commissioner also draws upon a group of informal expert advisors in developing a programme of conservation actions for priority threatened species.

Roles/responsibilities

In the short term (first 12 months):

- Work with stakeholders to identify priority nationally listed threatened species for which conservation actions are likely to be successful.
- Work with stakeholders to identify the highest priority actions to secure those species in the wild for at least the next 100 years.
- Identify and secure partners and resources to implement and monitor this programme of high priority actions over the longer term.
- Contribute to a process of reform to simplify and streamline the statutory recovery planning process.

In the medium to long term (1 – 5 years):

- Advise on and direct conservation actions in priority national threatened species recovery programmes in collaboration with the programme coordinators.
- Develop a strategic approach to threatened species conservation, including a prioritisation framework for species and conservation actions, building on government, non-government and community-based threatened species initiatives.
- Work closely with the Threatened Species Scientific Committee to strengthen the connection between the statutory listing and recovery planning processes and the implementation of conservation actions.
- Identify opportunities for longer term resourcing models, including co-investment and partnerships, to support the threatened species conservation programme.
- Monitor the effectiveness of priority conservation actions and report to the Minister and to the public.

Outcomes

- Implementation of conservation actions for priority nationally listed species.
- Priority threatened species are secured in the wild for at least the next 100 years.
- More integrated, complementary threatened species conservation efforts at a national level.
- Targeted, practical and cost effective investment in threatened species conservation actions.
- Clear and accessible public reporting on effectiveness of threatened species conservation actions.
- A more strategic approach to threatened species conservation to better inform government policy, planning and investment.