



ACT FLORA AND FAUNA COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT

**14 SEPTEMBER 2004
TO
13 SEPTEMBER 2005**

**ACT FLORA AND FAUNA COMMITTEE
TENTH ANNUAL REPORT
14 SEPTEMBER 2004 – 13 SEPTEMBER 2005**

1. BACKGROUND

This report outlines the activities of the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee for the period 14 September 2004 to 13 September 2005.

The Flora and Fauna Committee was established on 12 January 1995 in accordance with amendments to the *Nature Conservation Act 1980* (the Act) which came into force on 11 October 1994. The Minister for the Environment last appointed the Committee in September 2004, for a further three-year term.

The Committee met four times during the reporting period. A schedule of meeting dates is at Attachment A.

1.1 Functions

The Committee has specific responsibilities to assess the conservation status of nominated species of flora and fauna and ecological communities in the ACT region and the ecological significance of nominated threatening processes. The Committee makes recommendations to the Minister for the Environment, for declaration of species as endangered or vulnerable, according to the degree of threat and for declaration of ecological communities as endangered and for declaration of threatening processes. The Committee also provides advice to the Minister in relation to nature conservation issues in the ACT region.

Nominations for the Committee's consideration are accepted in accordance with guidelines specified and published by the Committee, which are set out in "Threatened Species and Communities in the ACT. Criteria for Assessment. ACT Flora and Fauna Committee, July 1995".

1.2 Membership

The Act specifies that the Committee shall consist of seven members with expertise in ecology and biological diversity. A range of disciplines is represented so that collectively the Committee can address a variety of issues with a high degree of competence. Members are appointed by the Minister on a part-time basis and hold office for a period not exceeding three years. In September 2004, six members were appointed to the Committee for three years, with one vacancy remaining open for the duration of the reporting period.

Dr Rosemary Purdie, Dr Chris Tidemann and Dr Geoff Clarke were not available for reappointment to the Committee in September 2004. Two new members (Mr Paul Stevenson and Dr Barry Richardson) were appointed and Dr Will Osborne was appointed as the new Chair and Dr Suzanne Prober as the new Deputy Chair.

Appointed members:

On 13 September 2004 the following persons were appointed to the Committee

Chair:

Dr Will Osborne University of Canberra, School of Resource,
Environmental and Heritage Sciences.

Other members:

Dr Richard Norris University of Canberra, Cooperative Research Centre for
Freshwater Ecology.

Dr Penny Olsen Australian National University, Division of Botany
and Zoology.

Dr Suzanne Prober Ecological Consultant, Ecological Interactions.

Dr Barry Richardson University of Western Sydney and CSIRO Division of
Entomology.

Mr Paul Stevenson Parks Australia, Department of Environment and Heritage.

More information about Flora and Fauna Committee members is provided at
Attachment B

1.3 Observers

Representatives from the Heritage Council of the ACT and the Natural Resources Management Advisory Committee attend ACT Flora and Fauna Committee meetings as observers. Their attendance facilitates communication between the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee and these two committees. The representative from the Heritage Council of the ACT was Dr Warren Nicholls. Mr Ian Fraser represented the Natural Resources Management Advisory Committee.

1.4 Secretary

Dr David Shorthouse, Manager, Wildlife Research and Monitoring, Environment ACT.

Ms Marjo Rauhala, Wildlife Research and Monitoring, Environment ACT provided administrative support for the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee.

2. HIGHLIGHTS OF COMMITTEE BUSINESS

2.1 Assessment of nominations

The Committee assessed two nominations during the reporting period:

- Brindabella Midge Orchid (*Corunastylis ectopa*)
- Canberra Spider Orchid (*Arachnorchis actensis*)

The Committee assessed both these species as satisfying criteria for declaration as endangered. Recommendations to the Minister regarding the declaration of these species were forwarded to the Minister for his consideration.

2.2 Declarations

During the reporting period, on the advice of the Committee, the Minister declared the following species as endangered.

- Brindabella Midge Orchid (*Corunastylis ectopa*)
- Canberra Spider Orchid (*Arachnorchis actensis*)

A complete list of declared species and ecological communities, rare species and other assessed nominations since the Committee's establishment in January 1995 is at Attachment C.

2.3 Action Plans

Once species or communities are declared, the Conservator of Flora and Fauna is obliged to prepare Action Plans outlining conservation issues and proposed conservation measures for protecting threatened species and communities. The Flora and Fauna Committee provides advice to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna on whether the proposed Action Plans adequately address the conservation requirements of the species or ecological community concerned. Scrutiny of preparation and the implementation of Action Plans is a significant component of the Committee's work. The Committee considers Action Plans at two stages in the statutory process - the first being prior to their release for public comment and the second as revised Action Plans following consideration of written submissions.

Draft Action Plans

The Flora and Fauna Committee provided advice to the ACT Government during development of the following Draft Action Plans:

- *Draft ACT Lowland Native Grassland Conservation Strategy (Draft Action Plan No 28)* (released for public comment in October 2004);
- *Draft Aquatic Species & Riparian Zone Conservation Strategy (Draft Action Plan No. 29)*; and
- *Draft Action Plan for the Spotted-tailed Quoll (Dasyurus maculatus)* (released for public comment March 2005).

Final Action Plans

The Flora and Fauna Committee provided advice to the ACT Government during finalisation of Action Plans following a period of public comment on the drafts. This included an opportunity for the Committee to consider the way in which the action plans had been modified to take account of public comments received. The Committee endorsed the release of the following:

- *Action Plan No 28 - ACT Lowland Native Grassland Conservation Strategy* (completed in June 2005)
- *Action Plan No 30 - Spotted-tailed Quoll (Dasyurus maculatus)* (completed in August 2005)

2.4 Review of Action Plan implementation

The Committee undertakes a rolling program to review progress in implementing Action Plans. During the reporting period the Committee reviewed the Government's implementation of the following Action Plans.

- Action Plan 11. Two-spined Blackfish *Gadopsis bispinosus*
- Action Plan 12. Trout Cod *Maccullochella macquariensis*
- Action Plan 13. Macquarie Perch *Macquaria australasica*
- Action Plan 14. Murray River Crayfish *Euastacus armatus*
- Action Plan 26. Silver Perch *Bidyanus bidyanus*
- Action Plan 24. Tuggeranong Lignum *Muehlenbeckia tuggeranong*

The Committee, in its letter to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna about the implementation of these Action Plans made the following comments and recommendations:

In relation to the aquatic species Action Plans (11, 12, 13, 14, 26), the Committee noted the progress made in implementing these Action Plans and made the following comments and recommendations.

The Committee:

- a. noted the significant progress made by the WRM aquatic team in implementing these aquatic species action plans and to linking fish monitoring to management activities;*
- b. noted the post-fire audit and fish monitoring work that has been conducted;*
- c. commended the regional approach being taken to threatened fish survey and monitoring;*
- d. noted the difficulty of attracting tertiary students for research projects in Canberra due to the lack of local academics in the area of fish research;*
- e. recommended that the data used for drawing inferences about the status of species be included in some form in the aquatic/riparian community strategy (Action Plan No. 29);*

- f. noted that riparian vegetation restoration is a key issue for the aquatic/riparian strategy;
- g. noted the potential implications of the ACTEW future water supply options on the conservation of native fish;
- h. recognised the continued need for a strong program of community education relating to threatened aquatic species;
- i. noted that successful breeding of **Trout Cod** in the Bendora Reservoir has been detected;
- j. in relation to **Macquarie Perch**, noted with extreme concern that:
 - the last remaining viable population of this species in the ACT is in the Cotter Reservoir;
 - recent water quality data from the Cotter Reservoir indicates a significant issue in relation to water quality (dissolved oxygen levels); and
 - Cormorant predation is a potential threat to Macquarie Perch in the Cotter Reservoir.
- k. noted that a priority is to establish other **Macquarie Perch** populations in the Cotter catchment and other catchments as a way of safeguarding the species in the ACT.

*The Committee also noted progress on the implementation of **Action Plan No. 24** for the **Tuggeranong Lignum Muehlenbeckia tuggeranong**. The Committee queried the lack of progress on germination trials for this species, and suggested that this should be given a higher priority.*

2.5 Liaison with NSW on Regional Issues

The Committee exchanges information with the NSW Scientific Committee on a regular basis. Amongst other things, the ACT provides information on ACT Determinations and copies of ACT draft and final Action Plans. NSW in turn provides information on Preliminary and Final Determinations made under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995. The Committee regularly assesses the Determinations made in NSW with the view to identifying any species, communities and threatening processes that warrant consideration from an ACT and region perspective, and if relevant, provides advice to the NSW Scientific Committee on their proposed determinations

2.6 Liaison with the Commonwealth on National Issues

The Committee receives information from the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage about nominations it has received for national listing under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. During the reporting period, the Committee provided advice to the Commonwealth regarding nominations it had received for two species of orchid that occur in the ACT.

2.7 Committee role in assessment of nature conservation issues

2.7.1 Advice to ACT Government agencies during development and review of policy, strategies and legislation

With part of the Committee's charter being to provide advice on nature conservation issues generally, the Committee provided comment and advice on ACT Government documents and other matters referred to the Committee by Environment ACT.

Reports

- Draft Environmental Flow Guidelines (May 2005).
- Bushfire Fuel Management Plan and Bushfire Operational Plans.
- Action Plan No 28 - ACT Lowland Native Grassland Conservation Strategy.
- Action Plan No 30 - Spotted-tailed Quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*)

Other matters

The Committee provided advice to Environment ACT on the following.

- The Proposed ACT list of Noxious Plants
- The ACT Vertebrate Control Program 2004-2005.
- A draft variation to the Management Plan for Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve

2.7.2 Formal advice to Minister

No matters were referred to the Committee by the Minister during the reporting period.

2.8 Flora and Fauna Committee Strategic Plan 2005-2007

The Committee prepared, for the Minister's consideration, a Strategic Plan that sets out a schedule for its work during its current three-year term.

2.9 Review of criteria used by Flora and Fauna Committee in assessing nominations.

The criteria used by the Committee in assessing nominations for threatened species, communities and threatening processes has been in place since 1995. The Committee undertook a review of the criteria, taking into account national and international developments in defining criteria for threatened species and paying particular attention to terminology and definitions used in the document. It is expected that the modified criteria will be finalised in the next reporting period.

2.10 Review of the Status of species in the Committee's working category 'Rare'

The Committee reviewed recent information about the status of the following species.

- Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*)
- Masked Owl (*Tyto novaehollandiae*)
- White-bellied Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*)
- Large Bentwing Bat (*Miniopterus schreibersii*)

The Committee concluded that all should be retained in its working category 'rare'. Furthermore, in relation to the Large Bentwing Bat, it was agreed that due to recent taxonomic changes, the Committee adopt the name *Miniopterus orianae oceanensis* for the local subspecies and *Miniopterus orianae* when referring to the species.

ATTACHMENT A

1. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND ATTENDANCE

| Member | Meeting No. 52 28 October 2004 | Meeting No. 53 2 December 2004 | Meeting No. 54 14 March 2005 | Meeting No 55 6 June 2005 |
|------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Richard Norris | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Penny Olsen | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Will Osborne | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Suzanne Prober | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Barry Richardson | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Paul Stevenson | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | | | | |
| Observer | | | | |
| Ian Fraser | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Warren Nicholls | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

2. OUT OF SESSION CONSULTATIONS (Not involving full Committee)

- *4 May 2005* – A sub-Committee comprising WO, BR, PS and PO met to review the criteria used by the Flora and Fauna Committee in assessing nominations for threatened species, ecological communities and threatening processes.
- *10 August 2005* – The Chairperson (WO) attended a meeting of the Chairs of all advisory committees and councils supported by Arts, Heritage and Environment. The meeting facilitated a review of operations and terms of reference and examined opportunities for more efficient delivery of committee/council support requirements and their advisory functions.

**SUMMARY CURRICULUM VITAE FOR
MEMBERS OF THE FLORA AND FAUNA COMMITTEE**

CHAIRPERSON

Name: **Dr William Osborne**
Expertise: Conservation of Amphibians, Reptiles, Mammals, Birds
Position: Senior Lecturer in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation
Biology, University of Canberra

Dr Osborne is a senior lecturer and course convenor in the School of Resource, Environmental and Heritage Sciences at the University of Canberra. He has extensive research and practical experience related to biodiversity conservation. His research interests include wildlife ecology, conservation biology, and the ecology of vertebrates in wetland and alpine environments. He is particularly interested in the conservation of small vertebrates (amphibians, terrestrial reptiles, birds, bats and small terrestrial mammals) and has served on six species recovery teams. Dr Osborne has produced over 50 publications related to wildlife conservation biology.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON

Name: **Dr Suzanne Prober**
Expertise: Ecology and conservation of grassy woodlands and rare plant species
Position: Senior Research Fellow, Charles Sturt University
Ecological Consultant (research, policy and community consultation)

Dr Prober's research over the past 15 years has focused on the ecology and conservation of fragmented ecosystems and rare species. Her research has encompassed a range of disciplines, including plant population genetics, population biology, soil nutrient cycling, floristic analysis and plant community ecology, towards developing an integrated ecological understanding of grassy ecosystems and their conservation and management needs. Her current research focuses on restoration of ecological function and diversity in grassy woodlands. Dr Prober also participates in recovery teams and recovery activities for a number of threatened plants in Victoria, NSW and the ACT.

OTHER MEMBERS

Name: **Dr Richard Norris**
Expertise: Aquatic biology, Limnology, Threatening processes,
Ecological assessment
Position: Assoc. Professor University of Canberra
CRCFE Water Quality & Ecological Assessment Program Leader

Dr Norris has over 20 years research and consulting experience in the biological assessment of water quality including agricultural effects, sewage effluent and siltation; in design and review of water quality monitoring programs; and in analysis of water quality monitoring programs. He is currently Theme Leader of the Water Education and Training Program with the e-Water Cooperative Research Centre at the University of Canberra, Interim Director of the Institute for Applied Ecology, and has played a central role in the development of the National River Health Program and the biological assessment method AUSRIVAS. Dr Norris is the author and co-author of over seventy refereed publications.

Name: Dr Penny Olsen
Expertise: Birds
Position: Visiting Fellow, ANU

Dr Olsen is an ornithologist with a particular interest in raptors. Nevertheless, her experience and interests are broad, ranging from wildlife management to behavioural ecology. She has prepared a number of national and state recovery plans, is a long-time consultant to the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage's Environment Australia's Norfolk Island owl recovery program and works as an occasional consultant on other matters of national environmental interest. She is also content editor of Birds Australia's membership magazine *Wingspan*, sits on their Research and Conservation Committee and represents the organization on the NSW Natural Resources Advisory Council. Dr Olsen has published a number of research papers, books and popular articles on a diversity of subjects including conservation biology and pest management. She is a Visiting Fellow in the Division of Botany and Zoology, The Australian National University, where she supervises several post-graduate research students.

Name: Dr Barry Richardson
Expertise: Endangerment theory, conservation genetics, conservation policy, mammals and invertebrates.
Position: Adjunct Professor (University of Western Sydney)
Honorary Research Fellow (CSIRO Division of Entomology),

Dr Richardson is a researcher with a broad background including research in endangerment theory, conservation genetics and conservation policy. He has experience in environmental research/taxonomic revisions in mammal, pest mammals, freshwater fish, pelagic and benthic chordates, terrestrial gastropods, insect communities, waste water management, spiders and red listing procedures. He is currently Adjunct Professor (University of Western Sydney) and an Honorary Research Fellow (CSIRO Division of Entomology), Dr Richardson is the author and co-author of 101 publications and has supervised over 30 Honours, Masters and PhD students.

Name: Mr Paul Stevenson
Expertise: Botany, Wildlife Ecology, Fire ecology.
Position: Senior Planning Officer, Parks Australia, Canberra

Mr Stevenson has extensive expertise in nature conservation management, in particular the administration of national threatened species conservation programs. Most recently these have included the development of the Parks Australia Threatened Species Database, nomination and listing of 46 threatened plant species for Norfolk Island and the development of the Australian Alps Natural Treasures Database. He has also been involved in multi-species recovery programs for Norfolk Island, and various individual threatened species recovery programs. Mr Stevenson has extensive experience in management processes that facilitate effective community involvement with the conservation of native species and control of feral animals.

ATTACHMENT C

COMPLETE LIST OF DECLARED SPECIES AND ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES, RARE SPECIES AND OTHER ASSESSED NOMINATIONS

1. DECLARED ENDANGERED SPECIES

| SPECIES SCIENTIFIC NAME | SPECIES COMMON NAME | Date of Declaration |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Tympanocryptis pinguicolla</i> | Grassland Earless Dragon | 15 Apr 1996 |
| <i>Synemon plana</i> | Golden Sun Moth | 15 Apr 1996 |
| <i>Prasophyllum petilum</i> | a leek orchid | 15 Apr 1996 |
| <i>Gentiana baeuerlenii</i> | a subalpine herb | 15 Apr 1996 |
| <i>Swainsona recta</i> | Small Purple Pea | 15 Apr 1996 |
| <i>Rutidosis leptorrhynchoides</i> | Button Wrinklewort | 15 Apr 1996 |
| <i>Petrogale penicillata</i> | Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby | 6 Jan 1997 |
| <i>Macquaria australasica</i> | Macquarie Perch | 6 Jan 1997 |
| <i>Maccullochella macquariensis</i> | Trout Cod | 6 Jan 1997 |
| <i>Xanthomyza phrygia</i> | Regent Honeyeater | 30 May 1997 |
| <i>Pseudomys fumeus</i> | Smoky Mouse | 12 Jan 1998 |
| <i>Muehlenbeckia tuggeranong</i> | Tuggeranong Lignum | 19 Aug 1998 |
| <i>Lepidium ginninderrense</i> | Ginninderra Peppercress | 26 Oct 2001 |
| <i>Bidyanus bidyanus</i> | Silver Perch | 26 Oct 2001 |
| <i>Pseudophryne pengilleyi</i> | Northern Corroboree Frog | 4 Sept 2003 |
| <i>Arachnorchis actensis</i> | Canberra Spider Orchid | 11 April 2005 |
| <i>Corunastylis ectopa</i> | Brindabella Midge Orchid | 11 April 2005 |

2. DECLARED VULNERABLE SPECIES

| SPECIES SCIENTIFIC NAME | SPECIES COMMON NAME | Date of Declaration |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Delma impar</i> | Striped Legless Lizard | 15 Apr 1996 |
| <i>Gadopsis bispinosus</i> | Two-spined Blackfish | 6 Jan 1997 |
| <i>Melanodryas cucullata</i> | Hooded Robin | 30 May 1997 |
| <i>Euastacus armatus</i> | Murray River Crayfish | 6 Jan 1997 |
| <i>Lathamus discolor</i> | Swift Parrot | 30 May 1997 |
| <i>Perunga ochracea</i> | Perunga Grasshopper | 30 May 1997 |
| <i>Polytelis swainsonii</i> | Superb Parrot | 30 May 1997 |
| <i>Climacteris picumnus</i> | Brown Treecreeper | 30 May 1997 |
| <i>Grantiella picta</i> | Painted Honeyeater | 12 Jan 1998 |
| <i>Dasyurus maculatus</i> | Spotted-tailed Quoll | 4 Sept 2003 |
| <i>Daphoenositta chrysoptera</i> | Varied Sitella | 8 Dec 2003 |
| <i>Lalage sueurii</i> | White-winged Triller | 8 Dec 2003 |

3. DECLARED ENDANGERED ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES

| NAME OF COMMUNITY | DESCRIPTION | Date of Declaration |
|------------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Natural Temperate Grassland | A naturally occurring grassland of the temperate zone, dominated by native perennial tussock grasses, with associated native herbs and native fauna. | 15 Apr 1996 |
| Yellow Box/Red Gum Grassy Woodland | A naturally occurring woodland of the temperate zone, in which Yellow Box co-occurs with Blakely's Red Gum. It includes the species rich understorey of native tussock grasses, herbs and scattered shrubs, together with a large number of native animal species. | 30 May 1997 |

4. NOMINATIONS NOT RECOMMENDED FOR DECLARATION

| SPECIES SCIENTIFIC NAME | SPECIES COMMON NAME |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Lophoictinia isura</i> | Square-tailed Kite |
| <i>Haliastur sphenurus</i> | Whistling Kite |
| <i>Microeca fascinans</i> | Jacky Winter |
| <i>Falsistrellus tasmaniensis</i> | Eastern Falsistrelle |
| <i>Miniopterus schreibersii</i> | Large Bentwing Bat |
| <i>Myotis macropus</i> | Southern Myotis |
| <i>Saccolaimus flaviventris</i> | Yellow-bellied Sheathtail Bat |
| <i>Petroica multicolour</i> | Scarlet Robin |
| <i>Microeca fascinans</i> | Jacky Winter |
| <i>Stagonopleura guttata</i> | Diamond Firetail |
| <i>Petroica phoenicea</i> | Flame Robin |
| <i>Artamus cyanopterus</i> | Dusky Woodswallow |
| <i>Falcunculus frontatus</i> | Crested Shrike-tit |

5. RARE SPECIES (Flora and Fauna Committee working category)

| SPECIES SCIENTIFIC NAME | SPECIES COMMON NAME |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Ninox strenua</i> | Powerful Owl |
| <i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i> | White-bellied Sea-eagle |
| <i>Tyto novaehollandiae</i> | Masked Owl |
| <i>Miniopterus schreibersii</i> | Large Bentwing Bat |

6. INSUFFICIENTLY KNOWN SPECIES (Flora and Fauna Committee working category)

| SPECIES SCIENTIFIC NAME | SPECIES COMMON NAME |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Stagonopleura guttata</i> | Diamond Firetail |
| <i>Petroica phoenicea</i> | Flame Robin |
| <i>Artamus cyanopterus</i> | Dusky Woodswallow |
| <i>Falcunculus frontatus</i> | Crested Shrike-tit |