



Save our Bush Stone-curlews – Captive Breeding and Release Program 2007 – 2017

Mid Loddon Box Ironbark Forest CMN, consisting of volunteers from Upper Spring Creek & West Marong Landcare Groups



Members of the Mid-Loddon Sub-Catchment Management Group Inc.
(FTLA registered & Insured)

'The MLSC Management group members are committed to providing a Child safe environment and being a Child Safe organisation in accordance with the Victorian Child Safe Standards'.

Program Summary as at March 2017

Instigated by DSE in 2007 as a partnership project with the Mid Loddon Box Ironbark forest CMN – Member of the Mid-Loddon Sub-Catchment Management Group with CMN members including participating members from the Upper Spring Creek and West Marong Landcare Groups.

This is the only Curlew breeding and release program in Victoria with one in NSW & another in ACT.

Reason for Program:

Monitoring organised by the DELWP CMN Facilitator in 2007 established that there were very few Bush Stone-curlews (possibly 6-8 birds) still surviving in the area around Shelbourne Nature Conservation Reserve which has since been reduced to one pair and a few single birds between Shelbourne and Bendigo with no birds to the south or to the north.

Actions:

Members including a DSE representative (15) toured NSW breeding & release program at Jindera & Moulamein in 2007.

- The Group realised that we would need to upgrade our local habitat if released birds were to survive, as monitoring of NSW released birds showed many were not surviving and dying of malnutrition!
- The Group hired David Baker-Gabb to write an official Bush Stone-curlew Supplementation Program in Central Victoria, as a base for a future breeding and release program.

Program History:

- The State Dept. withdrew from the program from 2010 due to Government and DSE/DELWP staff changes.
- It is now supported financially by the Mid Loddon Landcare Network & CMN with Upper Spring Creek & West Marong Landcare Groups taking the lead roles. USC group is running the breeding program and WM members provide and maintain habitats sites and Fox control, with Parks Vic supporting the forest restoration and protection. Vic Roads have provided habitat logs and litter for protected sites with recent support from the NCCMA via small Vic landcare grants. The Sporting Shooters association also assist the group with fox control.
- From 2007 to 2014 –The Group raised Corporate funds to install five 4-8ha herbivore & predator proof public and private land habitat nesting sites in and around the Shelbourne NCR
- All sites were checked for feral animals and locked from public access.
- All sites were monitored by infra-red cameras to check on security and also wild Curlews.

- To extend quality habitat and also solve farmland degradation caused by forest stormwater run-off, a thinning and restoration of 106 ha (two catchments of the Shelb. NCR as planned in 2012 and finally completed in 2014 – following 12month delay due to permit restrictions by changed staff at DSE (*refer Shelbourne NCR Restoration Program*))

Un-thinned East side of the Reserve remains in a degraded condition with an increasing amount of erosion occurring on and off site.

Wood theft became a problem in 2016 and these were apprehended by Parks Vic Rangers, but the group decided to raise more funds to secure the whole thinned area to reduce the time consuming monitoring by Parks and the community.

Captive breeding enclosures:

- In 2014 the group began installing Curlew breeding enclosures as funds became available. The enclosures are prefabricated off site and then installed by the builder with the assistance of members. The enclosures are numbered and remain the property of the group and can be quickly dismantled and moved if necessary.

Two enclosure extensions were urgently required to enable the moving of young birds and birds to be released – one has been funded by community donations and is now being built.

- A soft release enclosure has been installed on our largest protected site. (Birds must remain in this enclosure for six weeks prior to release.)
- One well known wild pair still living at the west side of the forest are now moving through the protected sites and possibly nesting in one this year.

The Group's main supportive breeding and release advice comes via a strong partnership with the NSW Breeding & Release Program –

- Neville & Jan Lubke, breeding complex at Jindera, NSW &
- Elisa Tack - NSW Curlew Program leader and an A class Bander in her position as Senior Land Services Officer - Environment Team, Murray Local Land Services in Albury

Habitat:

Quality habitat is critical to survival of the chicks and also adult birds. – (Protection with lots of ground litter). Curlews nest on the ground and chicks are unable to fly for first two months. Hatchlings often die during the first week, even in captivity – careful feeding will avoid this. In the wild – the first eggs to hatch will often be in early spring. The mother doesn't feed the chicks, but just points the chicks to food and says eat. If they don't find food in a few minutes they will be called back to the warmth of their mother and if this happens more than once they will die. Understanding this makes it obvious why they are not surviving in the wild unless they have quality habitat consisting of a multitude of leaf litter & twigs, logs etc, which is home to a large population of insects, beetles lizards, frogs etc., all in close proximity to their nest.

- Dry years slowed the regeneration of our project habitat sites with improvement taking a leap forward in 2015 /2016 years.
- Timing for releasing birds will depend on available habitat and very much on the seasonal conditions. This will also dictate how many birds can be released into any given area.

Main dangers to program success and support required.

- Foxes- baiting and shooting control methods on local public and private land – *support from both public and private land managers.*
- Burning – totally destroys habitat food, especially for chicks (totally destroyed the habitat values of one section of the Shelb.NCR, although not protected our wild birds favoured it due to the large amount of leaf litter. The Curlews scattered and all except on pair have not been seen again – *support from DELWP Fire Dept.*
- Lack of quality habitat – a further increase in protected quality habitat sites – *An increase in funding support*

Program current captive Curlew stock:

- One pair donated by the Kyabram Fauna Park
- Four young birds from the Halls Gap Zoo
- A pair donated from the Jindera, NSW breeding complex which have just produced our first two captive bred chicks.

Current captive stock is ten birds.

Other birds have been offered from Melbourne and Perth Zoos, but found to be not suitable for our breeding program.

Raising funds –

- Protected habitat sites – minimum 4ha costing \$20,000 with preferred 8ha @ \$40,000 approx.
- Current completed protected habitat sites x 5 - \$130,000 – Corporate funded
- Enclosures - \$30,000 – Corporate funded
(Corporate funds now difficult to procure)
- Forest restoration and protection -106 ha - \$160,000 State Govt. grants
(further forest thinning/restoration planned @ approx. \$1000 per ha)

Approx. total raised for project support since 2007 - \$324,000

Current program financial requirements –

- Additional breeding enclosures extensions - \$8,000 total cost
This will enable the holding of bred and donated birds for release as a flock in correct seasonal conditions. (This year we will be sending our excess birds to NSW and next year they will send their excess to us)
- Monitoring equipment - required for released birds in 2018
- Floppy top fence extension for soft release site to ensure foxes cannot gain access.

Other ongoing costs

- Curlews food - \$1,500 per year -
- Permits - \$555.55 every 3 years

Current group fund raising –

- Community donations (personal & groups) – (helpful and usually unexpected)
- Crowd funding attempt - (not very successful)
- Open Garden spring trial in 2016 - successful and has potential in future years
- Curlew Garden sculptures, to donators of \$50 and over- recent success with funds being used for captive Curlews food.

Program Publicity:

Presentations:

- Continue to be provided to local and wider community groups & interstate / site tours – agencies, apiarists groups and environmental groups

Media:

- Group BLOG
- Group Website
- Network Newsletters
- Bendigo Addy
- Age.

Curlew program information and associated information booklets and brochures produced by the Network & CMN

- A Population Supplementation Proposal for the Bush Stone-curlew in Central Victoria- *David Baker-Gabb*.
- Bush Stone-curlews program Information booklet 2007-2014 - *community*
- Save our Bush Stone-curlews information brochure - *community*
- Shelbourne Nature Conservation Reserve Soil & Vegetation Restoration Plan – *David Baker-Gabb, Phil Dyson, Mark Stewart, Judy Crocker, Peter Morison*.
- Save our Brush-tailed Phascogales - *community*
- Swift Parrot ID Brochure - *community*
- Fungi of the Box Ironbark Forests & Woodlands of Central Victoria ID Brochure – *Alison Pouliot*
- The Glove Box Guide to Understanding and Improving Woodland Ecosystems in the Mid Loddon – *joint production by the Network and NCCMA*.

Breeding & Release Permits required and obtained when necessary, as the project progresses with support from DELWP.

Carers – Jenny Steele - Boyds Road, Lockwood & Ken Laing – McGlashans Road Lockwood South, who record captive birds details including -

Enclosure number, band number, weight, sex, food requirements

- Wildlife holding permits
- Import licence when bringing breeding stock from interstate and an
- Export licence when sending birds for release in NSW

Group –

- DELWP - Wildlife Research permit – Melb. (Sue Hadden)
- State Ethics Committee permit – Melb. (Max Williams)
- State Translocation Committee permit – Melb. (Peter Menkhorst)
- National Bird Banding Association permit – Canberra (David Drynan)

Program successes and possible continuation will be assessed in five years.

Contact:

Judy Crocker,

Facilitator,

Mid-Loddon Sub-Catchment Management Group

(Mid Loddon Landcare Network & CMN.)

0428 506 525

jcroc22@gmail.com