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## **Threatened species found as locals bring SA River Murray wetlands back to life**

**In a very dry season, local landholders, irrigators and community groups are taking action along the River Murray to save dozens of thirsty wetlands – and threatened species are enjoying the results!**

Private landholders, on the Pike River floodplain near Paringa, have recorded for the first time the Southern Bell Frog (*Litoria raniformis*), otherwise known as the Growling Grass Frog. The bright green and gold frog is listed as vulnerable in South Australia and has not been heard on the property since it was purchased in 2010.

The Southern Bell Frog was once widespread across south-eastern Australia. Over the last 30 years populations have declined significantly. Nature Foundation SA CEO Hugo Hopton said, “Changes to the frequency and timing of natural floods are among the key threats to the Southern Bell Frog. Over the past three years, our Water For Nature program has replicated, as best we can, the natural wetland wetting and drying cycle. The recording of the Southern Bell Frog at this site is a very exciting development that tells us the plant and animal communities in and around this wetland and floodplain are being brought back to health.”

Another threatened species, the Freckled Duck (*Stictonetta naevosa*) has been spotted at two Water For Nature sites – Greenways Landing near Nildottie, and Plush’s Bend near Renmark. The Plush’s Bend site is a joint initiative between Nature Foundation SA, the Renmark Irrigation Trust, Berri Barmera Landcare and the Renmark Paringa Council. These local groups are working together to help the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office deliver water for the environment to thirsty Red Gum saplings and provide drought refuge for water birds.

Water For Nature Wetland Ecologist Dr Anne Jensen said, “Our monitoring has shown that careful watering of areas of ecological importance is improving the health of the native River Red Gum and Black Box woodlands. We have been comparing groups of watered trees with non-watered trees since 2015, and can now show that tree health is far better in trees that have received environmental water. Their canopies are thicker with healthier leaves and they have more flower buds and gum nuts full of seed. This work is vital if we are to save stressed Red Gums and Black Box trees and replace the ancient trees lost from our South Australian floodplains in the Millennium drought.”

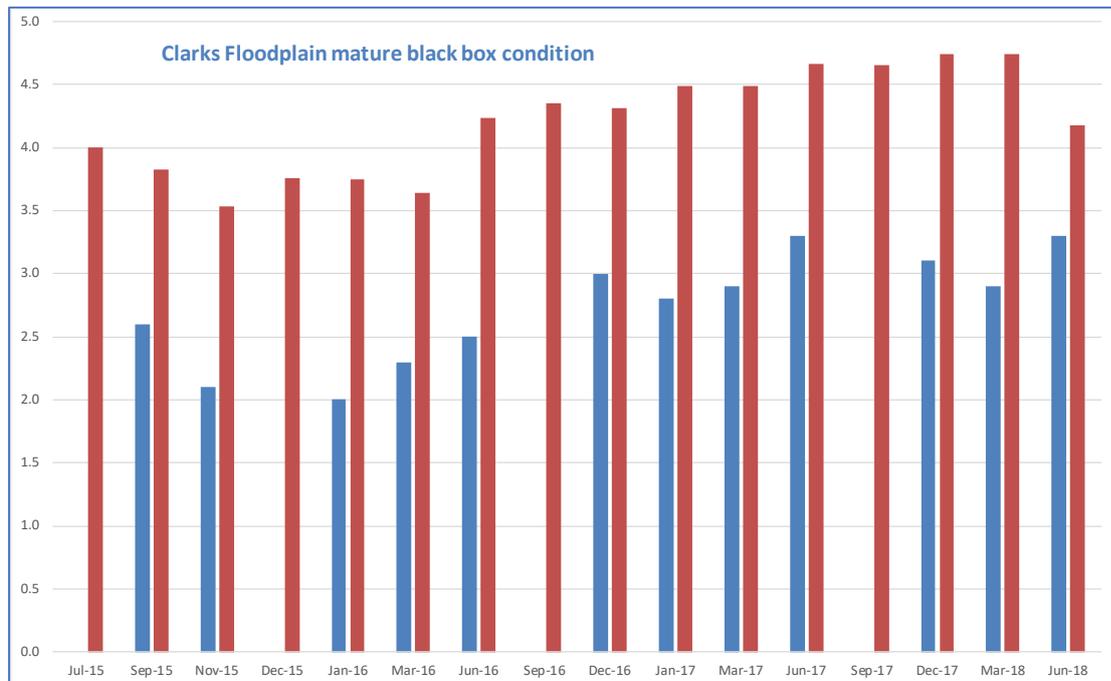
In Milang, on the edge of Lake Alexandrina, the Water For Nature program is working with local volunteers, the Department for Environment and Water, and the Goolwa to Wellington Local Action Planning Association. Together they are delivering water for the environment to a wetland for a bird that travels from Korea over tens of thousands of kilometres for a feed.

Mr Hopton said, “Two of the Latham’s Snipe (*Gallinago hardwickii*) were spotted near the wetland just before Christmas. We are watering to provide the bird with an important food source over summer. The population of this bird is on the decline, and it travels to this area for the freshwater wetlands and surrounding vegetation. The results we are seeing have taken years to achieve and could not happen without Commonwealth water for the environment and importantly not without the commitment of local landholders, irrigators and community groups who are passionate about a healthy river for their community.”

Nature Foundation SA's Water For Nature program has been working with Riverland and Murrayland communities and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder since 2008 to restore wetlands and floodplains from Renmark to Milang. During this time it has delivered more than 12,000 megalitres of water for the environment to nearly 90 different sites.

Water for the environment is water that is provided and managed specifically to improve the health of our rivers, floodplains and wetlands under the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

To find out more about Water For Nature <https://www.naturefoundation.org.au/conservation/water-for-nature>



*At Clarks Floodplain near Berri SA, watered mature Black Box trees (red series) are much healthier than nearby trees which did not receive Commonwealth environmental water (blue series), shown by health scores from March 2015 to June 2018. Both groups were naturally flooded in 2011 and 2016 and benefitted from local rainfall events, and both groups decline in health during dry times. (Data collated by Dr A Jensen for Water For Nature)*

Image of a Southern Bell Frog courtesy of Callie Nickolai



### References

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts "Significant impact guidelines for the vulnerable growling grass frog (*Litoria raniformis*) National threatened species and ecological communities Background Paper to the EPBC Act Policy Statement 3.14."

<https://www.frogwatchsa.com.au/about/about-frogwatch-sa>

<http://www.birdlife.org.au/bird-profile/lathams-snipe>

## **About Nature Foundation SA:**

Over the past 38 years Nature Foundation SA has invested in conserving, restoring and protecting South Australian landscapes to ensure nature survives and thrives in our magnificent state. We do this by:

- restoring unique habitats and revitalising damaged ecosystems
- saving threatened species
- revitalising wetlands and floodplains along the River Murray with environmental watering
- working with local communities
- funding conservation research projects
- encouraging environmental education and citizen science
- nature-based tourism and geotourism on our Nature Reserves

## **Fast facts:**

- Nature Foundation SA has helped protect over 1.1 million hectares of South Australia and is currently working on protecting the next 1.1 million!
- Over 400 post-graduate student grants awarded by Nature Foundation SA continue to yield amazing work and attract wonderful, bright minds to nature science.
- Our Water For Nature Program has delivered more than 12,000 megalitres of environmental water to help revitalise nearly 90 River Murray wetland and floodplain sites.
- Nature Foundation SA manages six Nature Reserves with significant conservation value. This land protects threatened species, builds wildlife corridors and provides a base from which scientific studies can be undertaken.

For media information, high-res images or to arrange an interview, contact:

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<https://naturefoundation.org.au/>

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