



Researcher Marina Louter holding a thick-billed grasswren (photograph Amy Slender).

# Significant Environmental Benefit NEWSLETTER

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## Nature Foundation SA – SA's largest non-government conservation land owner

### Introducing Hugo Hopton as Nature Foundation SA's new CEO

Nature Foundation SA Council and staff were delighted last month to announce the appointment of Hugo Hopton as its new CEO. Hugo has an impressive background ideally suited to the role of leading our organisation and managing our work in all its complexity into an exciting future. Hugo is featured on page 2 in our SEB Committee member profile.

### SEB biodiversity offsets in action: Funding research into the threatened thick-billed grasswren



Classic thick-billed grasswren habitat at Witchelina Nature Reserve (photo M. Louter) and (inset) a thick-billed grasswren (photo A. Slender).

In 2011, Nature Foundation SA designed a biodiversity offset strategy for Arrium Mining's habitat disturbance at the Peculiar Knob Iron Ore Mine, which triggered EPBC obligations for investigating and remediating thick-billed grasswren (TBGW) habitat as well as an SEB obligation.

The strategy centered on a research component, designed to improve knowledge of the ecology, distribution and environmental preferences of TBGWs in arid South Australia to better inform conservation management strategies on Witchelina Nature Reserve. The research was conducted by PhD students Marina Louter and Amy Slender from Flinders University, and the final results and analysis are coming together now. NFSA is excited to report on this fantastic example of how SEB offsets can lead to real conservation outcomes.

Marina and Amy conducted bird surveys across 100+ plots across Witchelina and a large area west of Lake Torrens and took blood samples from 164 individuals across two populations. Habitat features such as predation pressure, chenopod vegetation cover and insect abundance were related to the presence/absence of TBGWs at sites with low and high historical grazing pressure. TBGWs were more likely to be absent from sites that had experienced heavy grazing.

DNA analysis of blood samples revealed low gene flow between the two populations of grasswrens and that the TBGWs on Witchelina have low levels of extra-pair paternity (high fidelity in grasswren breeding pairs). A second component of the SEB offset was to reduce on-ground predation (feral cats and foxes) on the TBGW populations and increasing the area/ quality of TBGW chenopod shrubland habitat. Predation pressure on TBGW nests was low: 71% of TBGW nests survived until fledging. Although the identity of nest predators remained unknown, the high nesting success of TBGWs at Witchelina indicates that predator control measures are paying off.

Now that we are better informed of the TBGW's ecology and distribution across Witchelina through this SEB-funded research, conservation measures such as these can be even more targeted into the future. For example, the research found that TBGWs almost exclusively use large chenopod shrubs such as black bush (*Maireana pyramidata*) and low blue bush (*M. astrotricha*) to build their nests in and that grasswrens do not occur in areas without these shrubs.

Marina and her partner have recently become rotational managers at Witchelina. "We could not resist stopping at a few grasswren territories along the road. I was happy to see that the first grasswren we ever caught at Witchelina in 2012 was still alive and is now a male of at least 5 years old and together with a female and three other birds, including a juvenile of a few weeks old, which had a yellow gape. The grasswrens are breeding!"



Lachlan Wilkinson donates his prizemoney to Nature Foundation SA President, Bob Loft.

Lachlan Wilkinson from consultancy JBS&G was awarded the Environmental Practitioner of the Year 2015 from the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ). Lachlan had heard about the work Nature Foundation SA is doing in the Significant Environmental Benefit (SEB) space through Steve Milne, a consultant who works closely with NFSA SEB partners Beach Energy and Senex.

Lachlan said, "I have been aware of Nature Foundation's work for several years now, in particular their role in working with resource sector companies to deliver environmental offsets. I have seen the increasing use of environmental offsets, not always with success. Offset proposals only deliver real environmental benefits if they are strategic, based on priority conservation needs, have a clear set of objectives, and provide for ongoing science-based management. NFSA's SEB program ticks all these boxes and is an excellent example of the innovative role not-for-profit organisations can play in conservation."

## Upcoming event: Hiltaba Grand Working Bee Thursday 28 April to Sunday 1 May



Emus at dawn (photograph Natasha Harper)

Bring your skills, enthusiasm and sense of adventure to the 2016 Grand Working Bee at Hiltaba Nature Reserve from Thursday 28 April to Sunday 1 May. We'd love you to join us. Your help will contribute to vital conservation and property maintenance work and you are bound to have fun working and socialising with like-minded people. A day is set aside for a guided tour of the magnificent property.

Hiltaba Nature Reserve is located approximately 700 km north-west of Adelaide on the Eyre Peninsula. The 780 sq km reserve has very high biodiversity, protecting nine species of national conservation significance and 40 species of state conservation significance. Go to our website for further information and to download a registration form at [www.naturefoundation.org.au/events-volunteering/events](http://www.naturefoundation.org.au/events-volunteering/events)

## SEB member profile: new CEO Hugo Hopton



Before joining NFSA as CEO in February, Hugo's most recent role was as Regional Manager, Natural Resources SAMDB based in Murray Bridge, where he led delivery of the programs of both the SA Murray-Darling Basin NRM Board and DEWNR for the community and government. Prior to this he was General Manager of the South East NRM Board and CEO of the South East Catchment Water Management Board. After completing Bachelor of Science (Forestry) degree at the Australian National University, Hugo began his career as a Forester in the South East and Fleurieu Peninsula, moving on to work as the Manager for State Flora and Revegetation Program Manager within PIRSA.

Throughout his career Hugo has worked with communities and industries in land conservation, primary production, native vegetation management and water management. He has strong relationships with government departments within South Australia and the Commonwealth, and with local government and the NGO sector. Hugo says he is thrilled to be joining NFSA, "I am very much looking forward to helping the Foundation and its significant member and volunteer base build on its most impressive achievements to date."



For further information or to discuss your SEB needs, please contact Caroline Nefiodovas, Nature Foundation SA's SEB Business Development Manager [caroline.nefiodovas@nfsa.org.au](mailto:caroline.nefiodovas@nfsa.org.au) or phone 8340 2880



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