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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Correspondence from Ballarat Birdlife President, John Gregurke, has confirmed that their group will support the Brolga Recovery Group in its efforts to raise awareness of the importance of brolgas, wetland habitats and the implementation of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Action Statement. This is a good partnership and provides both a regional and national approach through respective Birdlife branches and the national office. It is great to see the increase in BRG membership during the year and it reflects people's interests in not only brolgas but wetlands as well. I am interested in hearing from members about future activities and the role that our group can play. Please contact us should you have some ideas, sites or events that we could incorporate into our 2012-2013 program.

Barry Kentish

## SECRETARY'S REPORT

The brolga calendar launch at Mortlake went extremely well and my apologies for the short notice regarding this event. The program included a presentation by Jorda Burnett on why brolgas are important to her. Her prize-winning brolga photo adorns this year's calendar. Ammie Jackson from Greening Australia, spoke on their *borrell-a-kandelop* Project which focuses on the RAMSAR-listed Western District Lakes near Camperdown and Colac. She is also working with 60 landholders, some of whom have brolgas on their wetlands. Peter Bolte from Pallisters Reserve near Orford, showed video footage of a brolga attacking a motion-activated camera that had been placed near their swamp. The aim was to record when the birds nested, laid eggs and hatched chicks. Unfortunately the camera was wrecked and found in the water, but good vision of the birds was collected. Two pairs of brolgas have regularly nested on or near the Reserve. Pallisters Reserve is a 250 hectare wetland and woodland area owned by Trust for Nature, supported by a wonderful local friends group who implement pest plant and animal control and coordinate research. This video is now on Trust for Nature's website for all to view. My

thanks go to these speakers and attendees who posed some good questions regarding brolgas, their nest sites and observations.

**Brolga calendars:** Please continue to send in your monthly sheets from the calendars. Should you wish to keep these sheets please copy them and forward them to me with any photos that you might have of these sites. There are still a few calendars available should people need them.

**Next meeting and site visits:** Hamilton, Wednesday November 14th – please keep this date free. Held in conjunction with Southern Grampians Shire Council, we will meet at 10 am for morning tea, with the meeting to commence at 10.30 am. All are welcome to contribute to discussion, but only members vote on policy and decisions. After lunch Southern Grampians Shire Council will provide an overview on their activities and projects and we will visit some wetlands hosted by local people. An update with specific information on the sites we will visit will be forwarded to members shortly.

**Future events and activities:** The group aims to provide a minimum of 2 newsletters annually. Ideally we would like to do this quarterly but it depends very much on our volunteer capacity. We also try to provide members with a meeting and quarterly field visits. Should you wish to assist in organising a field day or other event please contact me. My thanks to Louise Thomas and Lauren Eddy who compile and distribute this newsletter.

Sue Mudford

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## UPDATE ON BROLGA MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH WEST VICTORIA

by Inka Veltheim, PhD Candidate, University of Ballarat

The PhD research project investigating movements of brolgas in south west Victoria is now in its fourth year. The research has involved capturing brolgas to fit GPS satellite transmitters and colour bands. A total of 19 birds with transmitters have provided detailed information on seasonal, non-breeding and breeding site habitat use and movements between late 2010 and 2012. This has included information on pre-fledged chicks, adults and juveniles. The data collected during this project is providing interesting and exciting new information about seasonal movements between summering and wintering sites, dispersal of chicks from breeding sites, habitat use and survival of chicks, juveniles and adults, greatly expanding our knowledge of this threatened species.

The adults and juveniles captured in 2010 and 2011 at the Willaura and Peshurst flocking sites all dispersed approximately 100 kilometres south west to areas near Casterton, Digby and Dartmoor. One juvenile spent the 2011 winter between Mount Gambier and Casterton, moving between South Australia and Victoria. Long distance movements away from summer and autumn flocking sites generally occurred in May and June in both years. Many of these individuals returned to the flocking sites where they were originally captured.

Eight pre-fledged brolga chicks colour-banded during the 2009-2010 breeding season all survived to fledging and dispersed from breeding sites. The distance of dispersal varied, with some individuals staying within a few kilometres of the site where they hatched and one moving up to 75 kilometres. These individuals have shown high survival and have been seen at flocking sites in the Peshurst, Darlington and Carranballac areas.

Pre-fledged chicks were fitted with GPS satellite transmitters in 2010–2011 breeding season. These birds were captured in the Skipton and Streatham area, with one chick captured near Casterton. After fledging, many

of these young birds stayed near the area where they were born and did not disperse until late autumn or early winter in 2011. Over 2010–2012 the activity of a number of these brolgas has concentrated in an area between Glenelg and Hamilton Highways and Lismore-Skipton Road and Mortlake-Ararat Road. They have used known flocking areas around Carranballac and Darlington and two brolgas have briefly visited the Willaura flocking site. Three brolgas with transmitters also used areas around Woorndoo. The bird captured in Casterton has used habitats between Mt Gambier and Casterton.

*Below: Releasing a juvenile and adult brolga with colour bands and transmitters in 2010 (Photo by Prue Wright)*



## BUILDING AN INTERNATIONAL PROFILE FOR BROLGAS

Inka Veltheim, a PhD student at the University of Ballarat, recently completed a draft species assessment for the brolga for an updated Wetlands International (WI)/International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Species Survival Commission (SSC), Crane Action Plan (CAP). The last CAP was published in 1996 and the aim of the current exercise is to update the changes to status and threats for all the 15 species of cranes in the world and to identify priority conservation actions for the future.

The brolga species assessment reviewed the current knowledge on brolgas in Australia and identified top priorities for conservation action for the next decade (see



<http://www.ozcranes.net/info/news.html>). While doing this review it became quite clear how little we know about brolgas and how few of the management actions from the last plan and local action plans have been implemented. Inka is filling some of these knowledge gaps on brolga biology and ecology in her research project with the hope that the information will be used to make more focused and informed decisions to manage the species. An IUCN SSC meeting in China later this year will work towards finalising the CAP.

## **A NEW PARTNER FOR THE BROLGA RECOVERY GROUP – NATURE GLENELG TRUST**

by Mark Bachmann, Nature Glenelg Trust

In January 2012, a new not-for-profit environmental organisation was launched in the region – Nature Glenelg Trust, or NGT for short. NGT has been started up by a small group of people who are based in the South West (Victoria) and the South East (SA), and who feel that issues of most relevance to this region could be more effectively tackled with the support of a small, focused and regionally specific organisation that has been established with the primary objective of getting things done on the ground. Importantly, our new organisation can operate freely across the state border.

Given the significant landscape feature that wetlands are in this region, they are a topic of specific focus for NGT. We have created a public fund, the Wetland Restoration Fund, that (once approved by Canberra in the near future) will allow for tax-deductible donations to be received, to be invested in wetland restoration projects. We are also actively seeking other sources of funding to bring investment into the region and allow us to offer financial assistance to land managers to undertake wetland restoration (particularly hydrological restoration) projects on both public and private land.

As members of the Brolga Recovery Group will already know, given the extent of past wetland drainage works

on both public and private land across the region, there is no shortage of sites out there (with willing land managers) to start working on!

The brolga is an iconic species that captures people's attention, and their reliance on wetlands means that they nicely illustrate the fantastic value of having functional wetlands in our landscape. While not all wetlands that NGT works to restore in the future will provide suitable habitat for brolgas, many will, and so we look forward to ensuring that our projects are able to benefit the species wherever possible by relying on the expertise of Brolga Recovery Group members in the future.

NGT is not a traditional "membership driven" organisation, as we feel that there are already a number of highly effective, local or regionally based community groups already doing good work across our region. Our aim is to complement the work of other community groups, and to provide them with meaningful opportunities to participate in on-ground action – particularly in respect to restoring wetlands.

With that in mind, we look forward to a close working relationship with the Brolga Recovery Group and its many supporters – after all, we have a lot in common!

For more information, contact Mark Bachmann at Nature Glenelg Trust on 08 8797 8181 or [mark.bachmann@natureglenelg.org.au](mailto:mark.bachmann@natureglenelg.org.au), or visit our website [www.natureglenelg.org.au](http://www.natureglenelg.org.au).

## **BIRDLIFE AUSTRALIA**

Check out Birdlife Australia's Ballarat group newsletter at <http://www.birdlife.org.au/locations/birdlife-ballarat> They have information on the Brolga Recovery Group on their Projects & Initiatives page. Birdlife Australia sponsors the Brolga Recovery Group.





## VICTORIAN BIODIVERSITY ATLAS

by Department of Sustainability and Environment

The Victorian Biodiversity Atlas (VBA) is the State of Victoria's repository of biodiversity distribution data. It functions as a tool for land managers, planners, researchers and the community to record data about survey effort, species distributions and conservation status.

Terrestrial Fauna records have been collated from a wide range of sources including fauna surveys conducted by the State of Victoria since 1972; Museum of Victoria specimen records; fauna surveys conducted by educational institutions, environmental consultants and field naturalists clubs; natural history journals; and records submitted by interested people.

A major application of the data is to provide a statewide perspective when assessing applications to have a species listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act or for the Federal Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act. For this reason statewide coverage with accurate point data is essential. The Atlas data is made available via the Department's Corporate Spatial Data Library and the Biodiversity Interactive Map. Since taxon distributions are in a continual state of flux and the abundance of all taxa fluctuates with environmental conditions and land-use changes, there is a continuing need for information, particularly from repeatable surveys with consistent taxa coverage. However, priorities may be set for areas or taxa that most urgently require new data.

The value of the Atlas will depend to a considerable extent on the quality of the data included as well as on the uniformity of coverage. For this reason an expert panel assesses the acceptability of each record.

Records are assigned to reliability classes based on current knowledge of the distribution and habitat of the species concerned and the documentation provided by the observer. Three reliability classes: Confirmed –

substantiated by a specimen or identified by an experienced observer; Acceptable – not documented, little or no reason for doubt; Unconfirmed – further substantiation necessary. Where possible unconfirmed records will be verified and upgraded if appropriate. Records of threatened taxa are subject to close scrutiny.

All interested people are encouraged, whatever their skill level, both from within and outside DSE to contribute. Recording templates are available to assist with this process, or, preferably, data can be entered directly into VBA online. Requests for instructions and recording templates can be emailed to [vba.help@dse.vic.gov.au](mailto:vba.help@dse.vic.gov.au)

Privacy notice: Personal information supplied by you in this record is collected and used for the purpose of validating the record and noting your intellectual property in this record. The species record you submit will be disseminated to various organisations, but will not include any personal identifying information. You have the right of access to your personal information by emailing the VBA Administrator [vba.help@dse.vic.gov.au](mailto:vba.help@dse.vic.gov.au).

## MAKING HISTORY AT MOORAMONG

by Inka Veltheim, PhD Candidate, University of Ballarat

"Mooramong", a historical property in south west Victoria near Skipton owned by The National Trust, became the scene of another historical event in late 2010. David Coutts, Mooramong's Conservation Officer, rang me to let me know that a pair of brolgas breeding on the property had hatched twin chicks. Apart from a successful breeding event, this was very exciting news indeed, as twin chicks are extremely rare in Victoria. In my six years of observing brolgas I had never seen twin chicks in this region, although they are quite commonly seen in northern Australia. It seemed that the Victorian brolgas had benefited from recent wet years, as quite a few twin chicks were seen in south west Victoria between 2009 and 2011.



David provided me with regular updates on the progress of the chicks and we were all excited to hear that they had survived the first couple of months. Both David, and Ian Waller, the property manager, showed great support for my project and gave permission to capture the chicks prior to fledging and fit them with leg band GPS transmitters. So when the chicks were old enough but not yet fledged, we were ready to attempt a capture. This was to be a historical occasion, as broilga chicks had never previously been fitted with transmitters – a world first!

With twin chicks, I knew I needed quite a few helpers to attempt a capture. I was extremely pleased to have the support and enthusiasm from Ian, David and Simon Bubb from the station to help out. I also had some experienced broilga handlers with me – Matt Wills from Serendip Sanctuary, Parks Victoria, and Roger Standen, from the Victorian Wader Study Group, who had helped me in the field previously.

Having David's, Simon's and Ian's knowledge of the site and the birds helped enormously in a successful capture. With an experienced group of broilga handlers we quickly fitted the transmitters and released the chicks.

These birds are now two years old and are still alive with operational transmitters continuing to provide information about their movements. Interestingly, the twins stayed together for about a year before separating from each other. They stayed at Mooramong near the breeding site until late July 2011 and then moved to the Blue Lake, Pink Lake, Salt Lake wetland complex south of Carranballac. The pair also spent some time at Woorndoo and went their separate ways in late 2011. One moved to the Willaura flocking site and the other to Lake Wongan.

The Mooramong twin chicks may not have ended up as Hollywood screen stars like Claire Adams who once called Mooramong home. However, the twin baby broilgas that grew up there will go into the history books as the first ever broilga chicks fitted with GPS transmitters, providing amazing and extremely important information on how broilgas use habitats and move in the landscape in Victoria. This information can be used to protect and

manage the threatened broilga population in this state, befitting of the other conservation activities that Mooramong has supported on the property.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to The National Trust, Ian Waller and David Coutts for supporting my project and realising the benefit of fitting transmitters on chicks hatched at Mooramong. Without their help and support, we would be poorer of the knowledge on broilgas in this area. I would also like to thank the rest of the team, Simon, Matt and Roger, as well as the South West Victoria Broilga Research Project partners who provided funding for the transmitters and field expenses.

*Below: Broilga chick being released at Mooramong with a GPS transmitter (Photo by Simon Bubb)*





## DSE BROLGA COUNT

by Richard Hill, DSE, Casterton

In late April this year, broilga counters spread out across south-west Victoria to count broilgas at their annual flocking sites. The count had two aims, to get a better estimate of total population size, and to estimate the proportion of young birds to give an idea of the amount of successful nesting that had occurred in the previous two years.

Counters searched previously known flocking sites in the following areas: Willaura, Penshurst, Lake Bolac, Streatham, Darlington, Beeac/Cressy, Bookar/Kariah/Camperdown, Derrinallum/Lismore, Foxhow/Leslie Manor, Strathdownie, and Boole Lagoon. Boole Lagoon/Naracoorte in South Australia was included because it is known that these birds form part of this west Victorian flock.

The attached table shows areas where birds were found. A total of 453 birds were counted on the day. The largest flock recorded on the day was 147 in one flock at Strathdownie. Numbers for Penshurst were considerably down on the count day, with 150–200 birds reported there before and after the count date. Only 62 birds were recorded at Willaura which is down considerably on previous years.

The smallest number reported in previous flock counts in SW Victoria from a survey of flocking sites was 402 by Phil Du Guesclin from 2002, and the largest number of 675 from 2004 by Rebecca Sheldon. The last count in 2009 recorded a total of 469 across flocking sites in January with only 3% young birds less than two years old.

Large numbers of juveniles and sub-adults were found, with an estimated 16% of all birds counted being either juvenile or sub-adult (less than two years old). This 16% figure is at the upper end of values reported for broilgas anywhere in their range and suggests that there has been good breeding success over the past two years. These flock counts giving age structure are helping us build a picture of breeding success in the south west and in the longer term, the viability of this SW population.

I think it is still too early to say what these numbers tell us about trends in broilga numbers in SW Victoria. The

protracted drought is likely to have been accompanied by very low breeding success, the one year of data we have supports that. However, any changes in total population size will be masked by the long life, and low death rates of adult broilgas. Thus any change in numbers of adult birds is likely to occur slowly and to be very hard to detect. Inka Veltheim, our researcher from University of Ballarat, is providing very helpful new information showing how much more mobile broilgas are than we thought, and these findings will help make our population estimates more accurate.

In summary this count is of a SW Victoria/lower SE South Australian population, rather than a SW Victorian population. The estimate used in the Victoria action statement of 600-650 is, I think, still our best population estimate (it includes SA as these counts do, but also the small population in northern Victoria DSE 2003). I hope that we will make this count an annual event, and that the data that come from it will soon allow us to produce a more accurate assessment of the population size and status of our iconic broilga population.

Region	Observer	Date	Total count
Dundonnell	SM	28/04/2012	2
	SM	28/04/2012	35
Penshurst Streatham	PDG	28/04/2012	73
	GC	28/04/2012	7
	KK	28/04/2012	2
	IV	28/04/2012	29
Corangamite Strathdownie	GC	28/04/2012	2
	RH	28/04/2012	147
	RH	28-Apr	25
Willaura	IV	28/04/2012	62
Lake Bolac	IV	28/04/2012	39
Boole Lagoon	RH	28/04/2012	30
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>453</b>



## WHEN BROLGAS DANCE

O, bright may be the ballroom  
And glamorous the tune  
Where fair girls in their finery  
Step out in silver shoon,  
But no one knows Terpsichore  
Until by happy chance  
He passes on the claypan  
And sees the brolgas dance.

In cloaks of grey and crimson  
They drop from skies of blue  
And bring their grace and beauty  
To weave a spell for you.  
They claim from you no plaudits,  
They ask of you no fee,  
And to their roofless ballroom  
They bid you enter free.

Behold them set to partners,  
Advance, retreat, and bow,  
And thread a wondrous pattern  
Of steps unknown till now!  
No gallant meets this lady  
With dalliance so sweet,  
No maiden moves to music  
With surer, lighter feet.

Our ballrooms have their courtesies,  
But none so rare as this,  
Where touch of every wing-tip  
Is gentler than a kiss.  
A man may ride the bushland  
Where many scenes entrance,  
Yet know not all her beauty  
Till he sees the brolgas dance!

Will Ogilvie [ Scotland] 1869–1959 [approx.]



Photo by Jorda Burnett