



Eucryphia

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Robertson Environment Protection Society – to promote the protection and enhancement of the Robertson environment.
PO Box 3045, Robertson NSW 2577 www.reps.org.au

PUBLIC MEETING

Friday 13 April 7.30pm

Robertson Community Centre
Caalong Street

Speaker: **Simon Robinson**

Are Our Bird Populations Changing?



If so, what's driving the change? Simon will discuss changes in bird populations in the Sthn Highlands and some of the factors affecting them.

Simon Robinson is a retired veterinarian with a keen interest in ornithology. He is Conservation Officer for BirdLife Southern Highlands and a member of Birdlife Southern NSW's Conservation Committee.



All welcome

Please join us for supper and a chat after the talk.
A gold coin donation is appreciated.



Fairy Wrens (Wikipedia)

REPORT OF TALK AT REPS MEETING 9th February 2018

Platypus Biology and Conservation: Local and National

At the first REPS public meeting for 2018 President Peter Glass welcomed a capacity audience which had eagerly gathered to hear a talk by platypus expert Dr Tom Grant, Adjunct Senior Lecturer in the School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of New South Wales.



Dr Grant began by outlining the main biological features of the platypus:

- Its nostrils are on the upper side of the bill.
- Nostrils, eyes and ears are all closed while the platypus is under water; it finds its prey through two types of sensors below the surface of its bill which emit an electromagnetic field.
- The webbed front feet provide most of the propulsion in swimming.
- The back feet are partly webbed and are used mainly for steering, but they also have broad claws for digging.
- The broad, flat tail stores fat for the winter.
- Male platypuses have a venomous spur on their back legs, used mainly to fight other males. It becomes longer and more venomous during the breeding season. The venom is painful but not fatal to humans, but if handling the animal it is advisable to pick it up by the tail to avoid the spur.
- Adult females weigh an average of 0.65 kg in northern Queensland and 1.5 kg in Tasmania, while adult males in Tasmania can weigh up to 3 kg.
- Platypuses are well-insulated and regulate their body temperature at about 32 degrees C.
- Cheek pouches with hard ridges store food found at the bottom of the river such as freshwater shrimps, insect larvae, and adult insects from the surface of the water.

A distribution map showed that platypus habitat is mainly in eastern Australia, extending from North Queensland to Tasmania. In Queensland platypuses are seldom found west of the Great Dividing Range, but in NSW they are also found in the west-flowing Murrumbidgee and Murray rivers, although not in the lower reaches of the Murray. Platypuses were formerly found in the Adelaide Hills and the Mount Lofty Ranges

but have since disappeared. They were also introduced at one stage to Kangaroo Island.



They live in pools in creeks and rivers but not in water more than 4 metres deep, as they cannot stay under very cold water for long. During periods of drought they stay in refuge pools, but tend to spread out from these when the rains come and the creeks begin flowing again.

Mating occurs between July and September, with egg-laying usually in the first two weeks of October, and lactation to feed the young in the pouch from October to December. The eggs are about the size of a grape (about 1.5 cm in diameter) and are laid in burrows dug into riverbanks consolidated by vegetation. Adults drag wet material into their burrows to increase the humidity during the breeding season and allow them to dry out gradually as the young grow. Burrows can be used and extended over several seasons and have been found up to 30 metres long. The audience was reminded not to dig into river banks during the breeding season, to avoid danger to young platypuses.



Bubbles seen on the surface of the water above where a platypus is swimming come from air trapped in the fur. When swimming on the surface they travel at 0.7 to 3.6 km per hour. A typical dive lasts from 18 to 40 seconds.

When foraging, the maximum dive length is about 2 minutes, but when waiting for prey they can stay under water for longer.

The next part of Dr Grant's talk included an analysis of suitability for platypus habitat in the Southern Highlands, and he displayed maps

charting locations where platypuses have been found, including the Wingecarribee, Nepean and Avon rivers. Numbers in the Sydney basin have declined with the expansion of the metropolitan area but a few can still be found in the Georges River. Wingecarribee Shire Council has undertaken a platypus conservation project, and copies of a leaflet including information about how to report platypus sightings were distributed to the audience.

The final part of the talk summarised threats to conservation such as:

- Habitat damage and loss
- Danger from eel, fish and yabby traps (for example, 14 platypuses have been drowned in traps in Victoria since late 2017)
- Predation from foxes, feral and domestic dogs
- Lack of land management resulting in erosion gullies and increase of sand and sediment (although farmers these days are tending to use better conservation practices)
- Competition for water, with dams and pumps decreasing habitat in rivers
- Climate change – most modelling predicts a decrease in rainfall (“no water, no platypus!”).

Dr Grant advised those wanting further information that a Google search is likely to include “lots of nonsense”. He listed the following as useful references:

Grant, T, *Platypus* (CSIRO 2007)

Williams, G. A. and Serena, M, *Living with Platypus: a Practical Guide to the Conservation of a Very Special Australian* (Australian Platypus Conservancy 1999)

<http://australianmuseum.net.au/platypus>



A lively question and answer session was followed by a vote of thanks and presentation of gifts by Dr Allan Stiles.

Report by Judith Mee

Photos by David Mee

POETRY CORNER edited by Peter Glass

AUSTRALIAN AUTUMN by DOROTHEA MACKELLAR (1924)

This is the gentlest season of the year.
From mists of pearl and gold
The slow, sweet hours unfold,
To crystal colours, still
As glass, but not as chill.

All birds speak softly in the autumn bush.
One bellbird from the deep
Like a call heard in sleep
Chimes: in the bronze-gold gloom
Cool greenhood orchids bloom.

Brown leaves are withering on the alien trees.
The metal of our hills
Is veiled with blue that fills
The spirit with a bright
Sense of intrinsic light.

Now that the dew has vanished, sheep lie down
By companies content
In wilga-shade and scent;
The reaper sounds nearby
Like the cicadas' cry.

And so the mellow day flows on to dusk,
And loveliness that grows
With skies of mauve and rose;
While fragrant smoke-plumes lie
Subtle as memory.

Curled round our hearts in this still jewelled air,
Risen from the pulsing fire
Many-hued like desire.
Overhead stars blaze white.
Superb in frosty night.

This is the kindest season of the year.
The sun's gold arrows all
Have lost their barbs; thick fall
The berries ripe, and still
Each bird may have his fill.

Now peace and plenteousness have spread their wings
After the blessed rains
On autumn hills and plains.
Remains the exile's mind
Aloof, tormented, blind.

REPS MEETINGS - 2018

- Friday 13th April** Simon Robinson
See front page
- Friday 8th June** Highlands snake
catcher and reptile expert Ray McGibbon
- Friday 10th August**
- Friday 12th October**
- Friday 9th November**
AGM and presentation.
- Friday 14th December**
Christmas Party
-

PLEASE HELP PRESERVE THE ROBERTSON NATURE RESERVE

Wednesday 4th April and Wednesday 2nd May
between 9:30 and noon

Only small pockets of the original 2500 ha of unique rainforest known as Yarrowa Brush remain. Of these the Robertson Nature Reserve is an undisturbed gem. Unfortunately environmental weeds have encroached especially on the edges of this reserve.

A handful of dedicated volunteers have worked over many years to protect the area. However, volunteers for weeding are now urgently needed on first Wednesday of each month between 9:30 am and 12 noon.

No experience is needed! Weeding can be as leisurely or energetic as you make it! All welcome!

For more information you can contact Local Parks and Wildlife Service on 4887 8244 or Helen Tranter 4885 1394.

Or just come along

CONTACT REPS

Those who are interested in supporting our aims are welcome to join REPS. Our aim is to promote the preservation and enhancement of the Robertson environment. We welcome contact with individuals and other community groups. For further information and subscriptions please contact:

President – Peter Glass on 4885 1921,
Vice-President – David Mee on 4885 1483
or PO Box 3045, Robertson 2577

CAALANG CREEK WORKING BEES

The last Saturday of every month at 9:30am onwards, subject to the weather.

Saturday 28th April is the next working bee.

Please come and join us for as long as you are able. Don't forget water, hat and gloves. We have tools available, but bring your own if you can. Caalang Creek volunteers meet at the footbridge in Hampden Park.

Queries to Steve Douglas 4271 4957 or Leon Hall 4888 2222.

IT'S BEHEADING TIME AGAIN!



The agapanthus plant is now out in flower in Robertson. It is classified by the Wingecarribee Shire Council as an environmental weed. Please dead-head your plants as soon as they have finished flowering, making sure that ALL the seed heads have been removed and bagged so that they cannot escape into nearby bushland. The seed heads should not be put in with garden waste but be placed in the red-lidded Domestic Waste bin.

'GLIMPSES IN A RAINFOREST' EXHIBITION

'Glimpses in a Rainforest', an exhibition of paintings, drawings and printmaking by our REPS member Cathryn Coutts, is on display at the Robertson CTC Gallery, 58-60 Hoddle St, Robertson from 21 April until 19 May 2018. Cathryn's art works are inspired by the Robertson Nature Reserve.

Come and have a look!

REPS MEMBERSHIP

Membership is from November to November and we are having another great year. If you are not yet a member, please consider becoming one. Helen Tranter ph.4885 1394

This newsletter is named for the beautiful local tree, *Eucryphia moorei*, known as Pinkwood or Plumwood. Articles for *Eucryphia* may be sent to the editors, Allan Stiles and Lynn Stevenson.

eucryphia@reps.org.au

VISIT THE REPS WEBSITE www.reps.org.au
