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WICCNews

WICC Newsletter February/March 2023



Bunuru

Second summer February - March

Season of adolescence - hottest part of the year



Photo by Tim Gamblin

Farmers in focus



Greg Sounness on the family farm

Kylie Cook recently caught up with 4th generation Denbarker farmer, Greg Sounness. Greg and his wife Linda have moved back onto the family farm and coordinate the management of Denvale Dohnes across three generations of the Sounness family. Greg has also taken on the Chairperson role at WICC.

Kylie: Greg, tell us a bit about your farm...

Greg: We are fourth generation farmers. I've been living on the farm since the 1970's. Currently my wife and my parents run it with a bit of involvement from my sons. All the grandkids think they're involved too, they come down and help out as well. We primarily run sheep and cattle incorporating a small Dohne stud.

Kylie: You've taken part in several WICC programs. How have you found working with WICC?

Greg: Really good. WICC is really professional and has accessible programs. It's not a case of participating in a program and it's over, you have ongoing access and support. The Wilson Inlet Growers Group has been fantastic. Catching up with other farmers, whether you are big or small, has been great. We all have the same goals, just different scales. If you have had a hard week, catching up with other farmers who have faced similar issues is a great help to motivate you and sometimes borrow their ideas.

Kylie: What are some of the benefits you've seen on your property with the programs you've been involved in?

Greg: Nutrient mapping is a great resource, making informed management decisions has many

benefits with production, sustainably and financially. There are lots of professionals that we now have access to as well. The information's out there, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. "Take the guess work out of it!"

The dung beetle program has also been really cool. That's involving grandkids who love coming down and collecting poo for the beetles. You can see the difference they make. They are playing a huge role in controlling flies.

Fencing off the bush has also had a big impact. The bush has always been a good place to go and have a look at and sometime just chill out. Now all the orchids are regenerating. It is easy to walk past something and take it for granted living on the farm, but when you take time to observe the changes you really notice the improvements from these things.

We are also working on implementing rotational grazing something we gained from the Grazing Matcher course

Kylie: Have the programs helped you improve the profitability of your farm as well as improving biodiversity and environmental values?

Greg: Definitely. If we are not economically viable then we are not able to implement things that benefit the environment. Improved livestock health and soil health benefits the bottom line and everything flows on. It sort of compliments each other. While we are passionate about looking after our patch we still need to be commercially viable.

Kylie: What are your future plans for the farm?

Greg: We want to continue making the farm economically viable with an eye on the environment and sustainability. A bit more fencing to make smaller paddocks to help with our rotational grazing. It all comes down to improving our pastures. Continue our work on preventing wind and water erosion. There is so much information available to implement science based management. It is important to not jump on board movements that are just about the marketing and hype. So yes, farming on facts if that makes sense.

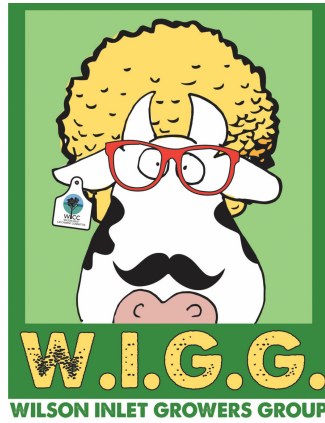
Kylie: You are now the Chairperson of WICC. Thank you. Tell us about that.

Greg: I learned that I'm surrounded by a lot of really humble professional people. From the board to the staff we are very fortunate in that regard. You can't help but learn from those people by being around them. With our current and pending programs it's a really exciting time. Having programs based on science is so important. I think WICC is one of the benchmark catchment groups around. I get that not from sitting there running meetings... you hear it and I think that is a reflection on the team at WICC.

Kylie: And what enticed you to be, uh, put your hand up for chairperson.

Greg: I think it was extortion! :)

Managing water with Ron Watkins



Ron Watkins presenting to 36 farmers in a shed

At the latest Wilson Inlet Grower Group we were fortunate to have Ron Watkins present on how to manage water on our farms. Ron and Sue Watkins are third generation beef farmers whom have recently taken on a Young's Siding farm after moving from Frankland. Ron has pioneered an innovative approach to managing water in the landscape which was highly regarded in Charles Massey's 'Call of the Reed Warbler'. By carefully mapping how water moves through a farm landscape, Ron has demonstrated that any grower can retain more fresh water on farm and mitigate waterlogging at the same time.

Ron's concept of whole farm planning has seen him win several major environmental awards including the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) Global 500 Award, UNEP Saving the Drylands Award, Rural Achiever of the Year Award and the Churchill Fellowship. Ron started providing a consultancy in 1984 doing whole of environment landscape designs. Ron considers Energy, Soils, Seasons, Water, Air, Plants, Animals and Humans with each of his designs and believes you must take all of these aspects into account when designing and managing a farm.





Ron Watkins



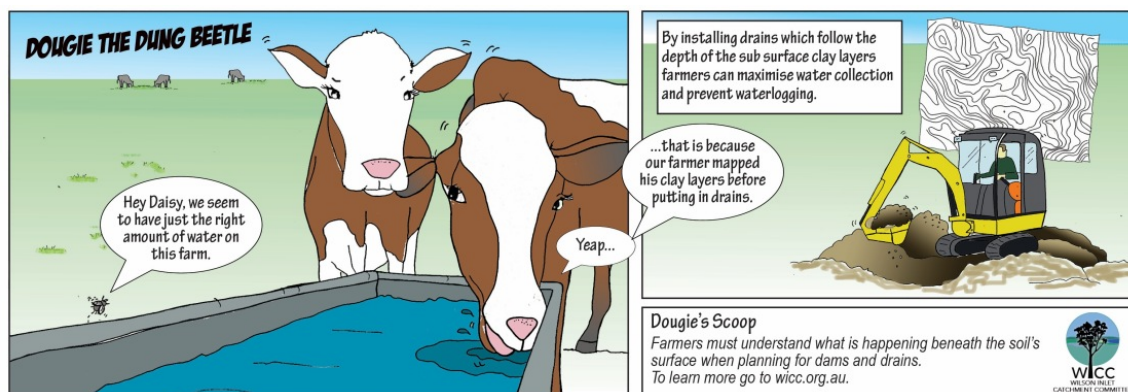
Farmers inspecting a sample site

Ron says that water on the farm not only runs off the surface but moves below the surface on top of the clay layer (in duplex soils). By mapping the contours of the clay layer (which requires digging several holes and carefully observing visible topographical features) a farmer can situate their drains so they capture this water which is otherwise lost. Drains are then dug down into the clay layer (they must reach into the clay layer). In this way water can be channelled to a receiving water body (dam or soak), or in the case of waterlogged pasture, channeled elsewhere to prevent pooling during the winter. Waterlogging must be prevented as this creates an anaerobic environment which kills off your soil biology and pasture growth.

Ron also emphasised the important of maintaining understory in your remnant vegetation and wind breaks as this provides habitat for the small birds that nest and forage in the understorey and provide natural insect control. Farmers need to consider that small birds seldom fly further than 100 metres from their understory habitat, therefore spacing your wind breaks closer together not only prevents drying of your soil but also maintains natural insect control.

For a fee, Ron can attend your farm as a consultant which can save you valuable time and money. Contact Ron at watkinsrg@westnet.com.au.

Watch Ron's presentation [HERE](#)



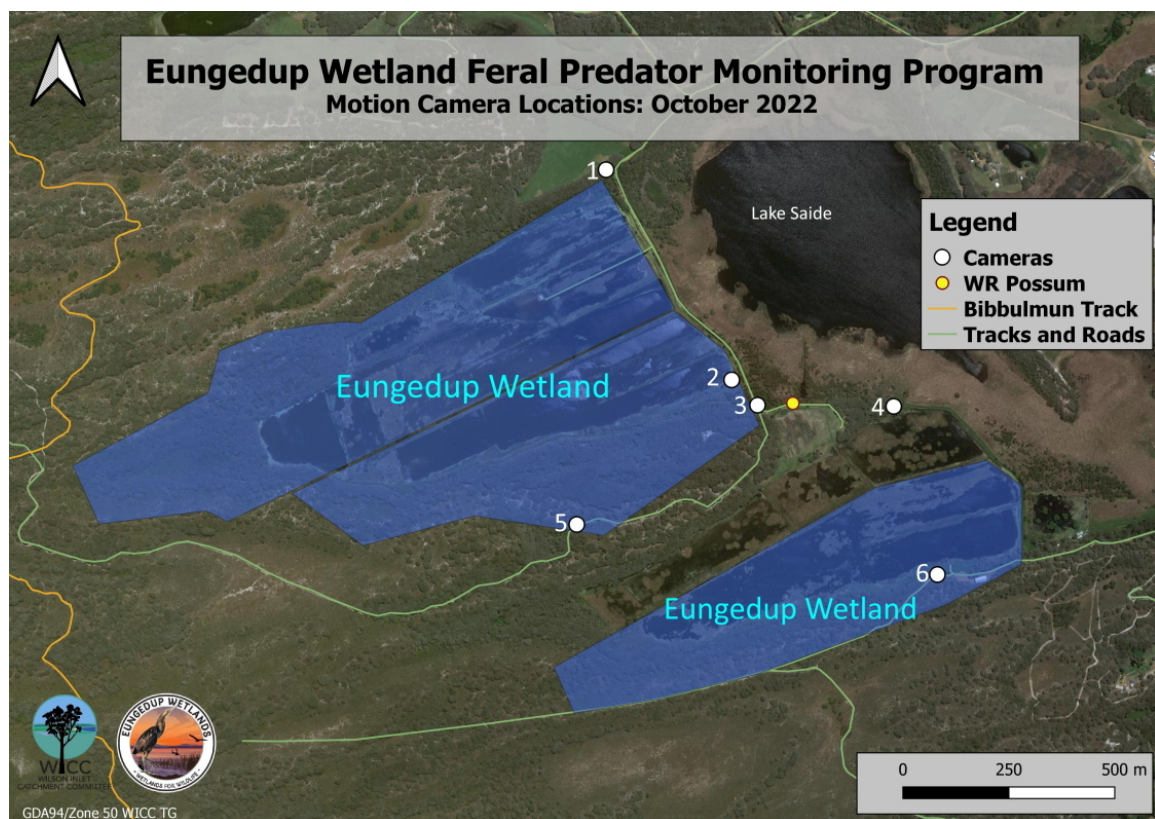
Eungedup Wetlands Update

By Tim Gamblin





The results of the first motion camera monitoring cycle at Eungedup Wetland (October – December 2022, Kamarang-Birak) are out. The six motion sensitive cameras took over 12,000 images. Of course, not all were animals. It's a trial-and-error system of fine-tuning cameras between being sensitive enough to capture an animal's often brief and quick movement across the screen's field of view versus avoiding being so sensitive that a photo is taken with each sway of a branch or leaf. When the strong easterlies blow or a front comes in, even the best camera placement and pruning still results in many false triggers. That said, there are other more interesting reasons for many images. For example, ravens like to walk around in front of the camera to get as many selfies of themselves as possible. In other projects I've had ravens pecking at the camera lens itself, every day... for weeks! Resulting in thousands of images of a big black beak and large curious eye. There were also kangaroos at Eungedup Wetland that chose to mate in front of the camera for extended periods and water birds that lurked in and out of frame for hours. All very compelling but not really what we are trying to achieve, which is to capture feral predator activity.



Locations of motion sensitive cameras at Eungedup Wetland and the only record of Western Ring-tailed Possum - Spring 2022.

The motion cameras were placed facing tracks and open areas, which feral predators (foxes and cats) favour to move through the landscape. No bait or lure was used as an attractant and the cameras have a black flash which the animals can't see. The cameras also needed to be hidden as this area still has some public access and motion cameras are often removed if discovered by

people. One camera was placed in a location with the potential to capture an Australasian Bittern or Rakali (water rat) but nil results this time around. Fingers crossed for next time.



Cameras facing tracks need to be discreet.

No cats were observed, which is interesting but this is still very early data so I suspect with time this will change. One of the possible reasons is that there was still a lot of water around, however as it dries over summer, I expect to observe some cat activity. Also, a high fox population usually suppresses cat abundance.

Foxes were recorded at 4 of the 6 camera locations. A 'camera event' is a group of photos taken immediately after each other, which we presume is the same animal. We then use a 5-minute interval without a photo of this animal as the division between this event and the following. This gives an indication of animal activity. It may still mean it's the same animal that has returned. There were 28 fox events over the installation period. In an ideal situation you would be able to use the mark-recapture scientific method. An animal is trapped, marked so it's easily identifiable and then released. In subsequent monitoring you can observe the marked animals again with traps or cameras and therefore record exactly which individual it is and how many new animals there are. However, in this project, trapping feral predators is difficult enough without releasing them back into the wild, even if it achieves better statistics. It not only risks ongoing predation to wildlife but also that marked animal becoming 'trap shy' for the rest of its life.

The length of time a camera can be installed in the bush is affected by age of the rechargeable batteries, age of the camera and location (some sites have more false triggers which uses up energy). Hence the number of trap nights sometimes varies between cameras. Thus, to measure fox activity at each camera location, the number of fox events was divided by the number of trap

nights. This allowed for a rough guide to where the most fox activity was.



The larger spheres indicate more fox activity (fox events).

The purpose of monitoring feral predators is to help direct management actions such as trapping, 1080 baiting and potentially shooting. It can also be used as a measure to identify the efficacy of management programs. For example, there was a clear decrease in fox and cat activity on monitoring camera results within the Nullaki fenced area after predator control programs began.

16 native species were recorded. All were birds with the exception of kangaroos and quenda (bandicoots). Other feral animals include the introduced black rat, house mouse, laughing kookaburra, dogs and people.





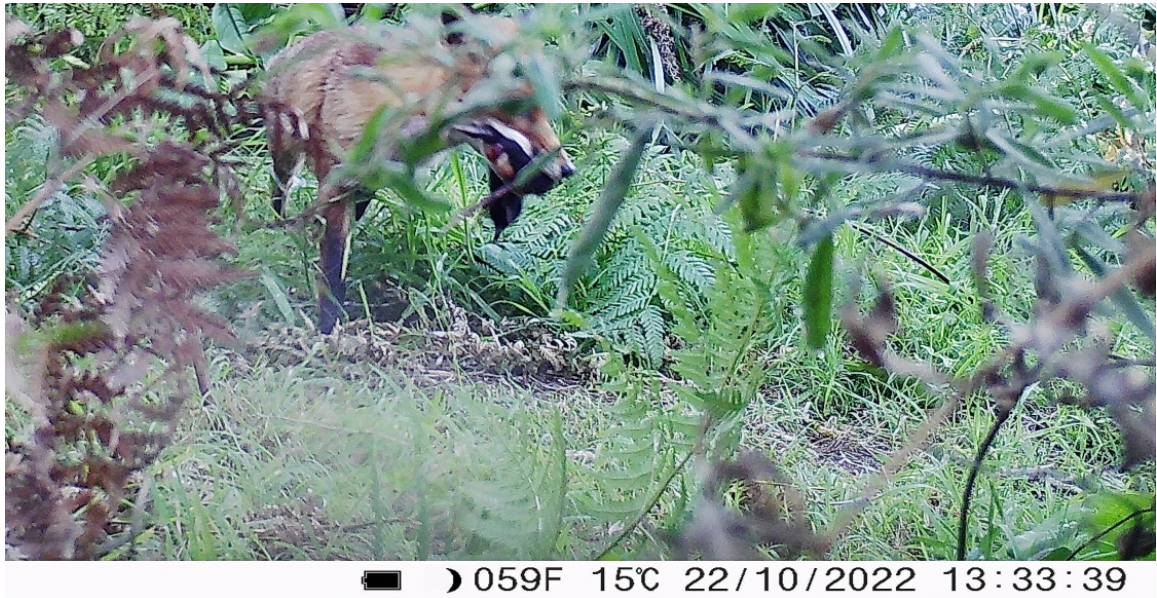
The sometimes very loud Purple Swamphe and chicks



Buff-banded Rails mating

There is a healthy population of buff-banded rails and images capture them mating, then later with chicks. The cameras also picked up purple swamphe adults feeding their chicks as well as breeding dusky moorhens and pacific black ducklings. Unfortunately, in the same location that buff-banded rails were seen a fox was seen shortly afterwards with a waterbird in its mouth. A week later another fox was recorded also with a bird in its mouth. While it's a sobering image it was a useful illustration for the new Eungedup Wetland Prospectus to highlight to potential donors the importance of acquiring this wetland so we can manage these feral predator threats. Over the next few seasons in 2023 there will be further updates on this program as well as the monitoring at the Nullaki and Lowlands.





Fox with waterbird in its mouth

WICC has raised over 25% of the required \$505,000 to purchase Eungedup Wetlands. Shaun Ossinger and Georgina Steytler recently attended the WA Wetland Conference to launch Eungedup's new prospectus which will be used to promote large business and philanthropy investing in Eungedup Wetlands. If you are interested in learning more contact Shaun at info@wicc.org.au.

The Eungedup Management Group recently met at Gondwana Link and proudly welcomed Meneng Elder, Carol Petterson to the group.





Georgina and Shaun at the WA Wetland Conference



Eungedup gets a prospectus!

Like the work we are doing? You can help by donating

to one of our initiatives



Wetlands Initiative

WICC is raising funds to purchase Eungedup Wetlands. Nestled between Denmark and Albany on the south coast of Western Australia, these remarkable wetlands provide a unique opportunity to preserve endangered wildlife.



Biodiversity Initiative

Work with landowners to restore and maintain the natural biodiversity in the catchment through invasive species controls, preservation of remnant native revegetation and weed control.



Waterways Initiative

We implement work programs in coastal waterways to further establish native vegetation, minimise erosion and strip nutrients.



Sustainable Agriculture Initiative

We source and distribute funds and expertise to assist landowners to implement environmentally sustainable practices that reduce nutrient loads in the catchment.

To learn more or donate click here

DONATE

Donations of \$2 or more are fully tax-deductible

WICC gets a new grower group





*Group convenor Benita Cattalini with her breeding colony of the winter-active dung beetle *Bubas bison*.*

Land managers in the Owingup Kent Catchment are invited to join a new Grower Group at the Kentdale Hall. The first meeting – a welcome function where we share plans and seek input from interested farmers – will be held on Friday 24th of February at 10am. We have received funding from the state government to secure a series of guest speakers to present information to the group over the next 2 years. There is no cost to join the group or attend meetings.

Recently a small group of local farmers, with a range of backgrounds, started to communicate about their land management plans, challenges and ideas. Sharing information about current practices and opportunities to join landcare programs or events has proved valuable to the group. They spoke about how to sustain their farming, agricultural pursuits, landholdings and businesses, while contributing to the health of the Owingup Kent catchment area.

The Owingup Kent Growers Group (OKGG) has now joined forces with the Wilson Inlet Catchment Committee (WICC), which will allow Owingup Kent farmers to access funding for a range of programs, including soil testing and revegetation of waterways.

“With WICC’s support, we attracted over \$70,000 in funding. It is a great start and allows us to

with WICC's support, we attracted over \$70,000 in funding. It is a great start and allows us to bring some expertise to talk and work with us over the next couple of years. We will learn more about sustainable practices, keep our catchment healthy and sustain our families and community,' Benita Cattalini, group convenor, says.



Simon Carne releases winter active dung beetles onto his property

Some of the topics that will be discussed at future meetings are feral control, weed control, new practices to support the important relationship between soil, pasture and animal health, drought resistance, interpreting soil test results, optimising fertiliser applications, improving the spread and survival of dung beetles, carbon credits, and recycling of on-farm plastics.

There are also opportunities to add to this list of topics, and share your knowledge, experience and expertise.

OKGG is funded in part by the Western Australian Government's State Natural Resource Management Program.

Contact Benita Cattalini; okgg@wicc.org.au for more information.

RSVP HERE



have an interest in the health of the Owingup / Kent Catchment Area?



You are invited to join a group of growers that recognise the value of working together to support the sustainability of the land, waters and ecosystems in the catchment and connecting areas.

Landholders in the Owingup and Kent River catchments are forming the Owingup/ Kent Grower Group (OKGG). Working alongside Wilson Inlet Catchment Committee the OKGG is sourcing experts in sustainable land use to mentor local farmers.

Topics for 2023-2025

- How to improve the spread & survival of Dung Beetles, with a variety of beetle species to ensure year-round activity
- Carbon credits & what is on the horizon for farmers with regards to net zero products, markets
- New practices to support the important relationship between soil, pasture & animal health
- Poison and weed control on farms & across the catchment
- Feral control – Specifically foxes & the reduction of impact of kangaroos on crops & pastures.
- Rehabilitation of land & waters across our catchment – what is the current health & what needs to be done?
- Recycling of on-farm plastics.
- Understanding how fertiliser (in particular NPK) works in the soil. A focus on the way growers could affordably source, apply & monitor the impact across large areas.
- Water and how to capture & slow it down as it moves through your property

10am Friday, 24th Feb. Kentdale Hall.

There are always opportunities to add to this list of topics, come along to an information session, you can contribute ideas, join or just check it out.

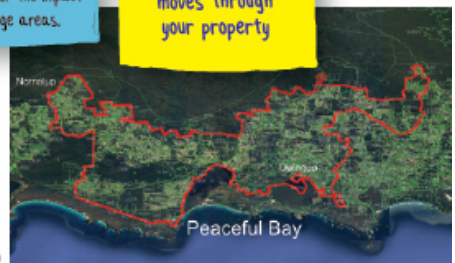
For more information and to RSVP: whatson/WICC.org.au or contact Benita Cattalini on 0431 458 385.



natural resource
management program



The O.K.G.G. is funded in part by the
Western Australian Government's State Natural Resource Management Program



Soil Wise – Soil Health Workshop

By Kylie Cook

In December, Wilson Inlet farmers gathered in Denmark to take part in one of a series of soil health workshops, part of the Soil Wise program. David Hardwick from Soil Land Food illustrated tricky concepts about soil health with the assistance of talented local farmer/actor Gill Murray, who lent her considerable skills to performing the role of “A Plant”. Gill gave an impressive impersonation of a plant exuding substances from the roots to attract beneficial fungi and bacteria.

The workshop kicked off with a quick round of judging of soil samples brought by each farmer

The workshop kicked off with a quick round of judging of soil samples brought by each farmer. Jenny Brenton won first prize for Best Soil of the Day, voted by her peers. The contest led to some spirited discussion about what makes a good soil – with reference to soil structure, colour (representing mineral content), organic matter content and plant communities.



Gill Murray and David Hardwick illustrate (using lollies) how plants exude carbohydrates to attract beneficial fungi, and how soil nutrients move between available and unavailable forms. Sadly, Oyster Harbour Catchment Group got the lollies at the end.

Minerals are present in different forms in the soil, David explained, and testing for total nutrient reserves can give a useful measure of what minerals are present, including those which are currently in a less available form. It is difficult to accurately measure the amount of available nitrogen in the soils as it can change so quickly. “Nitrogen is like Donald Trump – very volatile,” says David. David also highlighted that nutrients can be changed from less available to more available forms. Most widely used soil tests only consider nutrients that are currently available. There is great potential to improve soil productivity by increasing the availability of nutrients that are already present in the soil.





Local farmers examine soil samples for structure, mineral content and organic matter

Local farmers examine soil samples for structure, mineral content and organic matter





Congratulations to Jenny Brenton who received first prize for Soil of the Day, judged by her peers. In yesterday's workshop, local farmers extended their understanding of soil ecology, nutrient cycling and availability and the limitations of current soil testing technology.

"Plants haven't been waiting for agronomists for thousands of years – nutrients have been cycling all along" says David. Interactions between plants and fungi can be beneficial to both, with fungi living on plant roots extending the plants' ability to collect nutrients over greater distances. In return, the fungi receive carbohydrates from the plant: "Everything needs carbs," David explains. A single plant can carry over 100 kilometres of fungi strands (hyphae).

Most plants – not just the well-known legumes – have partnering fungi which are specific to the type of plant. Only 2 plant families don't partner with mycorrhizal fungi – the brassicas (cabbages) and chenopods (buckwheat, quinoa). Recent developments in soil DNA tests now allow affordable analysis to determine whether you have the mycorrhizal fungi you need for your pasture plant groups. Seed inoculation may then be able to help establish missing fungi families.

Soil Wise is funded by the National Landcare Program Smart Farms Small Grants – an Australian Government initiative. It is supported by Healthy Estuaries WA – a State Government program.

Contact Shaun Ossinger; 0401 291 457; info@wicc.org.au for more information.

Inlet update



Setting up a monitoring transect

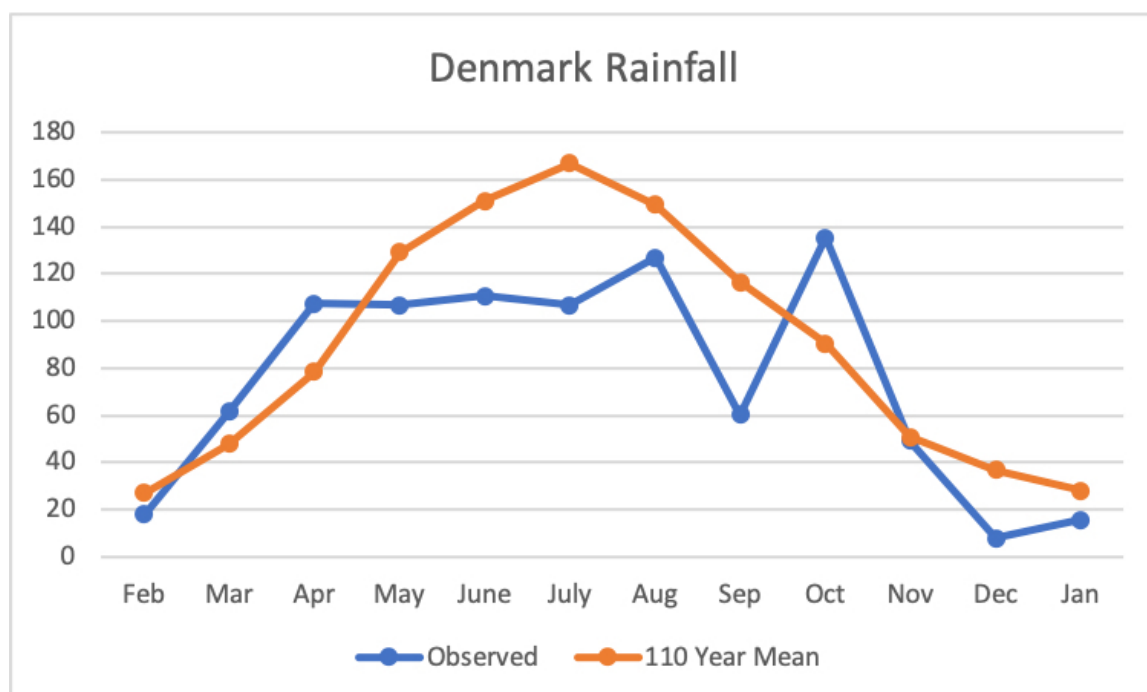
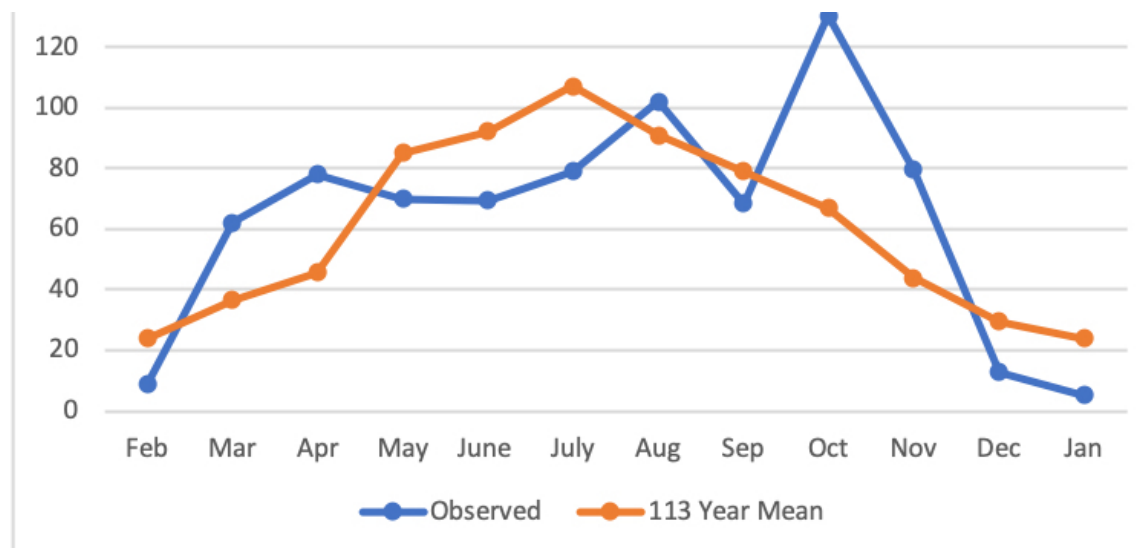
Maintaining healthy vegetation surrounding the inlet is essential for the inlets water quality and inhabitants. WICC carries out annual flora surveys across numerous sites across the inlet so we can monitor any changes and make informed decision about revegetation and weed control. Last year, in partnership with the Shire of Denmark we planted over 20,000 seedlings across the foreshore. These efforts will continue this autumn around the Little River area with opportunities for the community to get involved. Thank you to the Shire of Denmark who has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to the inlets health by investing in these activities.

[See the latest inlet monitoring data HERE](#)

Rainfall update

Once again we had a drier than average December and January. For February to April 2023 there is only a neutral probability of above average rainfall for our region with most of our climate drivers hovering around neutral as well (DPIRD / BoM).

Mount Barker Rainfall



Whats on?



Is your spreader wasting fertiliser?
Join us at an Accu-Spread demonstration day to find out



Did you know that the majority of fertiliser spreaders deliver highly variable spread patterns? This means some areas in the paddock receive too much fertiliser and others too little.

Join Australia's leading Accu-Spread specialist Russell Nichol, who will demonstrate how to test and calibrate your own fertiliser spreading equipment to increase productivity and reduce nutrient loss to waterways.

Date: Tuesday 7th March, 8am to 2pm

Location: Russell & Heather Carter's Farm

(654 Denmark - Mount Barker Road, Denmark)

Register: <https://www.wicc.org.au/rsvp-to-accu-spread-workshop.html>

Lunch provided. Please register and provide dietary requirements and let us know if you'd like your spreader to be tested (limited numbers!)



#WAestuaries
estuaries.dwer.wa.gov.au

This project is part of Healthy Estuaries WA, a State Government initiative to improve the health of our South West estuaries.

RSVP to Accu-spread Workshop

SOUTH COAST
ENVIRO-EXPERIENCES



GREAT COCKY
COUNT 2023

workshop

BUNURU



with the group

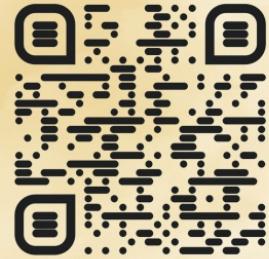
Saturday 25th February
9.30am - 11.30am

Co-operative Building
Museum of the Great Southern, Albany

morning tea provided

IMAGE: Keith Lightbody

**Presented by Merryn Pryor (Birdlife
Australia), Ines Pereda (Birdlife Australia),
and Sandra Gilfillan (South Coast NRM)**



**For more details and to register, scan the QR
or head to www.trybooking.com/CFKTW**

Contact Catherine
(p): 0421 437 525

(e): catherinej@southcoastnrm.com.au



natural resource
management program



birdlife
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