



WICCNews

WICC Newsletter October - November 2022



Kambarang

Second spring, wildflower season
Season of birth, longer dry periods



Farmers in focus





Sylvia Leighton and Peter McKenzie

WICC recently caught up with Sylvia Leighton and Peter McKenzie. Having adopted regenerative agriculture principles they have engaged in a 'land-sharing' farm model where they mix both food production and restoring wildlife habitat areas. They have been trying to strike a balance between healthy, cleaner, greener, ethical food production whilst trying to contribute positively to preserve the rich ecological values of the landscape. Sylvia and Peter are the most recent recipients of the coveted Australian Farming Landcare Award.





Sylvia Leighton and Peter McKenzie (middle and right) won the Landcare Farming Award. (PR HANDOUT IMAGE PHOTO) Credit: AAP

WICC: Congratulations. Tell us about Wilyun Pools Farm?

Sylvia: Wilyun Pools is a 1196ha farm located about about 100 km northeast of Albany and 7 km inland from the coast. I actually grew up on the farm and Peter and I returned to it in 2014. When we took on the management we wanted the farm to provide an example of being a successful commercial agricultural operation that doesn't cause continual decline to the landscape health. We have been trying to strike a balance between healthy food production and restoring the rich ecological values of the landscape. We want it to be a model of regenerative farming with alive healthy soils as a core farm philosophy. The property has a permanent freshwater creek and 150ha of biodiverse remnant bushland which was fortunately spared from clearing during the Conditional Settlement era when farmers were required to clear their vegetation. Since 2015, we have revegetated 100ha of 'provenance' wildlife corridors networked across the property reconnecting all remnant vegetation with larger bits of bush.

Farming wise, we practice small paddock rotational grazing of about 2500 sheep. We have a few 'small side line enterprises' including collecting native seed and selling it for revegetation projects. We also produce Wilyun pools Farm honey and we grow about 4000 seedlings a year in the farm nursery. With the funds raised from these products we promote the regenerative ethos of the farm and direct raised funds back into the on-farm revegetation projects.

WICC: You mentioned land sharing. What do you see as the biggest hurdle to maintaining this balance for farmers?

Sylvia: I think maintaining that connection between farmers and their land is becoming lost. When I grew up on the farm, we had families on each of the neighbouring farms around us. Now we have none and the population is maybe 20% what it was in my childhood. The smaller farms have been combined and cropping has now reached the coast. Technology and a drying climate has made the lucrative cropping industry possible where it once was not. Many farmers manage up to 8000ha. Peter and I can hardly manage the 1200 ha single property that we are on. This has made it impossible for these larger growers to maintain intimate knowledge of their landscape. Remnant bush has become an inconvenient obstacle to profits. To achieve these ever increasing yields the land is being treated like a giant hydroponic system. Lots of chemicals. While I understand the need to feed a growing planet we can not do so at the expense of our ancient and fragile landscape.

WICC: So what do you see as a possible solution to all of this?

Sylvia: Australia may need to review its commercial/non-commercial landuses around Australia and start mapping where different activities should occur. The govt. has minimal power over freehold titles but they are able to zone land activities. While they have been reluctant to do this with fear of reprise at the ballot box, we need to start thinking outside of the box, so to speak.

Many of the carbon opportunities which are being made available will hopefully encourage farmers to set something aside. Getting our urban residents to connect with the land, understand the ecological changes that have occurred... and encouraging farmers to view themselves more as custodians rather than owners, is a step in the right direction I believe.

Wonders of the Wet Rakali Rodent

By Tim Gamblin



Photos courtesy of David Judge

If you're on a farm with a wetland or dam or you're a townie having a fish on the Wilson Inlet in the evening, then you might get a lucky glimpse of the elusive Water Rat or Rakali gliding past. More likely you'll hear a splash and see ripples but not know what it was. This shy and secretive native rodent is sometimes known as Australia's Otter. The reason being that it fills a similar niche to that of otters overseas and has physical attributes in common. Rakali is an indigenous name from the eastern states. The scientific name *Hydromys chrysogaster* means golden-bellied water mouse (more or less). There are many indigenous names for this animal throughout WA including Ngurju for the species in the Walpole region. The name Rakali has been used preferentially over Water Rat in recent years in Australia as we try to use indigenous names more frequently and because many people have an aversion to the word 'rat', making an association with feral introduced rats. In contrast to these recently introduced pests the threatened and intelligent Rakali is thought to have been here for 3 million years. Australia has many native rodents and quite a number are listed as conservation significant threatened species. Many of these are very interesting and charismatic species. There's the humidity loving Black-footed Tree Rat of northern Australia that occupies the

species. There's the famously loving Black-footed Tree Rat of northern Australia that occupies the niche of a squirrel and the Pebble Mound Mouse of the Pilbara that builds a huge mounded house of thousands of small rocks. The iconic and cute Spinifex Hopping mouse that bounds along on its long kangaroo like legs with long and tufted tail held up for balance and industrious Stick-nest Rats that build a home from sticks, passing the construction on to new generations to add to. There are many others but down here we have our own local charming native rodent - the Rakali. It's one of few amphibious mammals, so you could consider it our local platypus. They are however, found Australia wide.



Photos courtesy of David Judge



Photos courtesy of David Judge

The reason why you might see a Rakali during an evening stroll along Prawn Rock Channel, or a sunset fish at Lights Beach is that they are considered crepuscular, that is, active mainly at dawn and dusk, though they can be active at other times during the night. Unlike introduced rats they have an obvious white tip on their tail, a low flat head with small ears and are larger at about a foot long. The heavy tail used like a rudder, its nostrils on the top of its snout, webbed hind feet and thick waterproof coat make it highly adapted to its aquatic habitat. Unfortunately, the thick coat made it popular in the fur trapping trade and it was close to extinction by 1943. Now the Rakali is protected.



Midden



Scat



tracks and tail slide

Photos courtesy Tim Gamblin

Often thought to eat mainly freshwater mussels, fish and crabs, from my observations a better question is - what doesn't the Rakali eat? from frogs to insects to birds. If you don't see one directly, secondary signs can be helpful. They leave their distinctive tracks, scats and middens (feeding platforms). The middens usually have shells, bits of crustaceans and feathers from recent meals. The tracks are distinctive as seen below, with widely splayed 4 front toes and 5 back toes sometimes with webbing marks and often with a tail drag. These are most easily seen on beach sand such as Ocean Beach. Rakali are common in marine environments, not just around fresh and brackish water. They live in burrows on the waters edge or in caves or hollow logs.

Rakali are bioindicators and as per the last article on frogs, their absence may be a warning that an ecosystem is out of balance. According to WWF's Living Planet Report, freshwater fauna species declined globally by 74% between 1970 and 2010, almost double the rate of decline detected in terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Climate change poses additional stress and management challenges to the conservation of these threatened ecosystems. Due to the species' localised decline in Western Australia (particularly in the southwest), Rakali have been included on the State Priority Fauna list and are, therefore, considered a species at risk and in need of monitoring. I used motion cameras to monitor this species in Walpole and it took about 5 weeks to finally capture one, showing how wily, observant, and clever they can be. Cats and foxes are always keen to monitor them.

On a brighter note, public awareness of this species has increased markedly over the past few years and signage in the south-west has alerted people to the risks of using box traps such as the opera house traps for marron, that don't allow Rakali to escape and resulting in drowning.

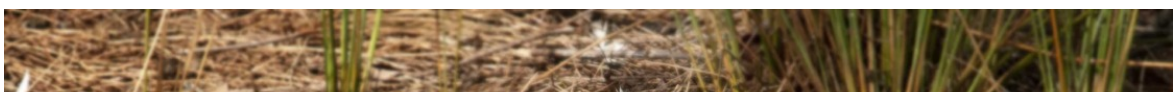




Photo courtesy of Tracey Oliver

Inlet update

The channel has stayed open since it has been breached in June last year. This is the first time on records that it remained continuously open over the dry period of summer and autumn. While the channel has been small and shallow for quite a few months now, it allows for some exchange between the ocean and the inlet, still providing blue water to Prawn Rock Channel – even some seals were reported to enter the inlet in September.

While 2021 has been a wet year by recent standards, 2022 has been on the dry side so far. Such large differences between years are likely to be more frequent in the future due to climate change. Dr. Elke Reichwaldt from the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation says the last 16 months of monitoring has given us the unique opportunity to study how Nullaki (Wilson Inlet) reacted and adapted to these conditions. Anyone who is interested to learn why the bar hasn't closed in autumn 2022 and what this meant for water quality is invited to join us at the forum on the 17th Nov.

[Click HERE to see the latest inlet monitoring data](#)

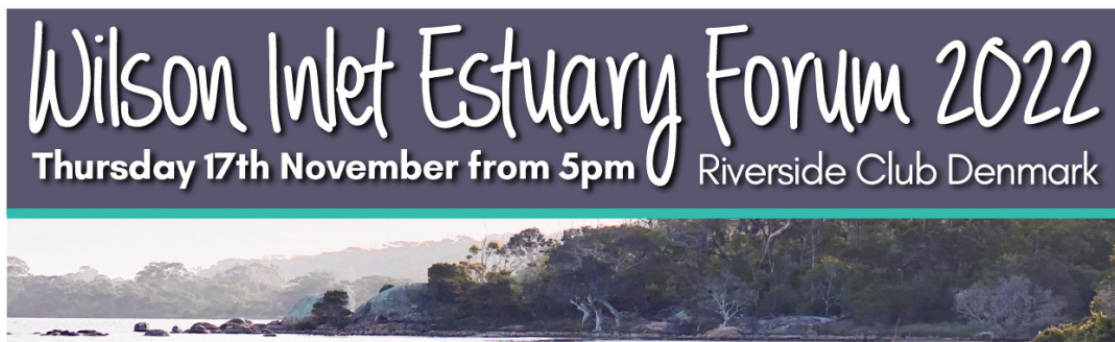




Photo by Katrina Hawley @thirdeyephoto

Join the Department of Water & Environmental Regulation & the Wilson Inlet Catchment Committee for the latest information on the health of the Inlet, scientific research & on-ground actions.
Implemented as part of Healthy Estuaries W.A.

Guest Speaker, Georgina Steytler is a Conservationist, Wildlife Carer, Nature Photographer & Author: "For The Love of Birds" published by The Australian Geographic.

Registrations are essential for catering purposes at wicc.org.au/whats-on



SCAN ME TO REGISTER

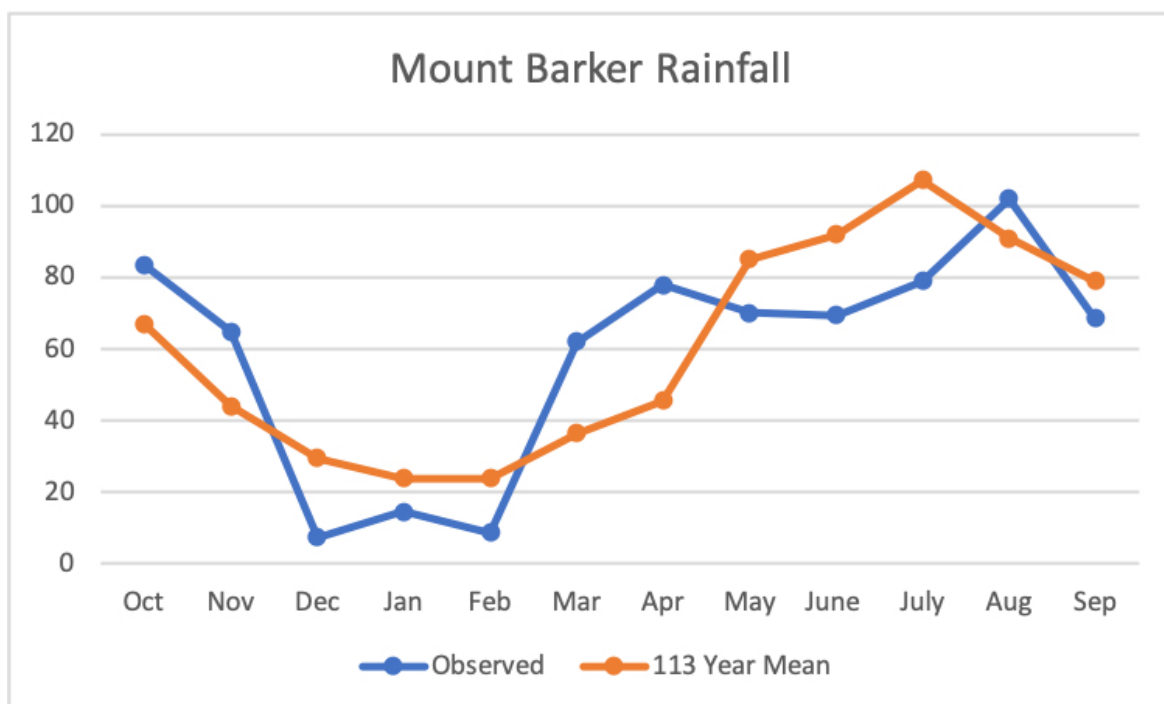
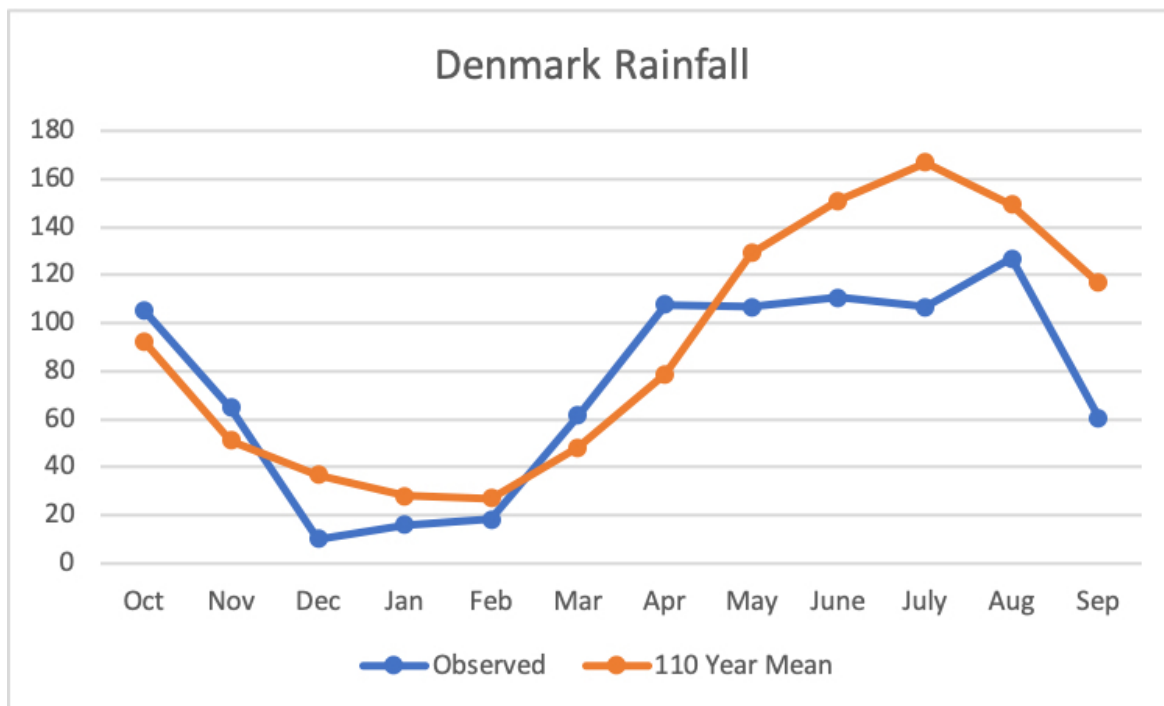


Department of Water and Environmental Regulation
Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Register HERE

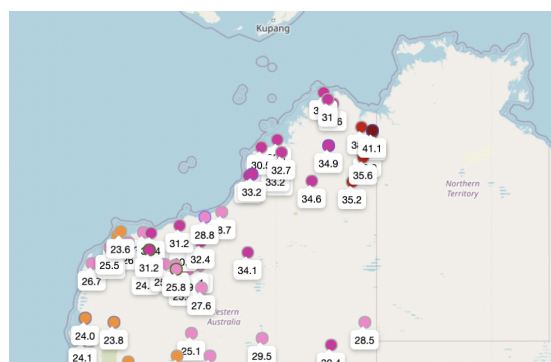
Rainfall update

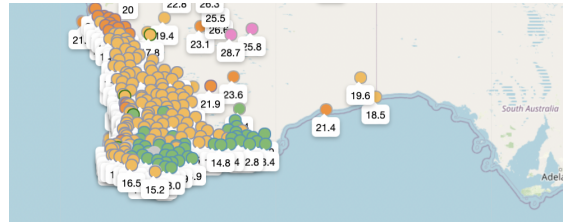
Winter rainfall was well below average for the southwest and south coast of WA as predicted, especially near the coast. The Southern Annular Mode (SAM) index is currently in a positive phase, and it is likely to remain positive throughout spring and early summer. This means the West Wind Drift in the Southern Ocean is further offshore. A positive winter SAM in our patch tends to lead to drier than normal conditions. It has less effect on our rainfall once we get into summer. The Indian Ocean Dipole is expected to remain neutral for the foreseeable future. The current La Niña event (which is expected to return to neutral this summer) has minimal impact on our local weather. This all adds up to a slightly less than average rainfall prediction for our catchment area over the next couple of months.



DPIRD has recently launched a new easy to use weather website which is a great source for current and observed weather conditions. Check it out!

[Click here](#)





Weeds in focus

By Terran Ablett



Dolichos Pea- *Dipogon lignosus*

Dolichos Pea (*Dipogon lignosus*), is yet another plant brought from South Africa that is now encroaching upon our natural landscape of the south coast and elsewhere in southwestern coastal areas. Sold as an ornamental by nurseries from the 1920s, Dolichos Pea (Cape Sweet Pea, Mile-a-minute Vine) is a **smothering invader** and a nitrogen-fixer that brings permanent changes to soil chemistry. This rampant, twining vine produces masses of white, pink or purple pea shaped flowers in the spring. Because of its rampant nature it can smother all ground natives and shrubs thus preventing any regeneration of local flora.

If left Dolichos will spread over bushland and impact on ecological processes and plant communities. Infestations smother all ground-flora, topple shrubs and trees and prevent any regeneration occurring. The seedbank persists for up to 5 years, soil disturbance and fire generates mass seed germination.

Control

Small plants can be hand pulled but larger plants tend to break off and regrow. In open situations

Small plants can be hand pulled but larger plants tend to break off and regrow. In open situations dolichos can be cultivated with a disc harrow or grazed heavily by sheep/goats in a controlled manner for several years. Fire can be used to kill mature plants but will stimulate the germination of the dolichos seed bank on mass. Herbicide is the best method of getting it under control to the point where the odd hand pulling of smaller saplings is all that is required. The best time to control is in spring when it is growing prolifically the best herbicide to use is Picloram, Glyphosate works but is less effective.

Mix 10ml of Picloram plus 25ml of pulse, brush-wet or any surfactant in 10L of water, or 100ml of Glyphosate and 25ml of surfactant (pulse) in 10L of water and spray all leaves on the plant, if it is a tall climbing plant cut it off at the base and paint the stump with straight 100% Glyphosate to kill the root to stop it from resprouting also don't let the top part touch the soil as it will set out new roots. Disturb soil or burn the area to stimulate seed germination in autumn and repeat the spray in spring to follow up the initial control.

Help WICC buy a wetland!



Eungedup Wetlands provide habitat for countless species of aquatic and terrestrial plants and animals, it also provides shelter for fish as well as wintering grounds for migrating birds.

WICC is raising funds to purchase Eungedup Wetlands and we have reached nearly \$100k. Thank you to all those who have helped us reach this milestone. We still have a ways to go... We need to raise a further \$410K.

Enormous gratitude to the community members who raised \$550 towards the purchase of Eungedup Wetlands at the recent community gathering to send a message to COP27 on climate change.





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

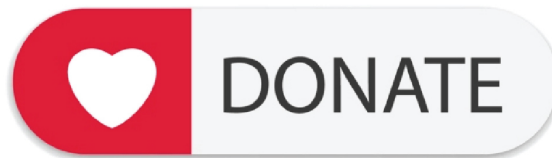
We implement work programs in coastal waterways to further establish native vegetation, minimise erosion and strip nutrients.



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](#)



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



Wilson Inlet Catchment Committee Annual General Meeting 2022

Join us at the Denmark Riverside Club on Tuesday 22nd November
AGM 5pm - 5:30 pm



Followed by guest speaker, Georgina Steytler
Conservationist, Wildlife Carer, Nature Photographer &
Author: "For The Love of Birds" published by The Australian Geographic.

A light supper will be served
and the bar will be open for those who wish to buy drinks.



RSVP by the 17th November
for more information email: info@wicc.org.au

RSVP HERE

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and recognise their continued custodianship and connection to the land, waters and community.