



Newsletter 2/26

April 2026

Annual General Meeting 15 April 2025

The 41st Annual General Meeting of the Wetlands Conservation Society will be held at the Wetlands Centre Cockburn, 184 Hope Road, Bibra Lake at 7.30pm on Wednesday 15 April 2026. At this meeting we will receive the Annual and Financial Reports and elect the Committee and Office Bearers for the next 12 months. The Agenda and Minutes and Annual Report are attached to this mailout. The AGM provides an opportunity to catch up with other members and review our achievements and identify areas where more effort is needed. There will also be an opportunity for you to raise matters for discussion. I hope you will be able to attend. Please bring a small plate of food for the supper that will follow the meeting.

2026 WA Wetlands Conference

The 2026 WA Wetlands Conference opened with a powerful keynote from Walter and Fran of the Bibbul Ngarma Aboriginal Association, grounding the event in cultural truth-telling and ecological urgency. Their message - restoring ecosystems, reinvigorating cultural heritage, and reconnecting communities with rivers - set a compelling tone for two days of learning and collaboration.

Rose Weerasinghe from SERCUL gave a fascinating talk on the importance of conserving salt marshes for wildlife habitat and as carbon sinks. She reported that salt marshes store up to four times more carbon per hectare than terrestrial forests.

The Wetlands Conservation Society (WCS) and Walliabup Wildlife Warriors (WWW) were proud to be actively involved throughout the conference. Felicity Bairstow and Philip Jennings served on the Planning Committee and Steve Shaw and Joyce Gadalon supported event logistics, embodying the grassroots volunteering spirit that powers wetland conservation across WA.

Dr Felicity Bairstow delivered Paul Markendale's presentation, "Why Turtles Matter: A Community Approach to Conservation Action", highlighting the critical role of citizen science and volunteer coordination in protecting turtle populations. Dr Nandi Chinna presented "A Community of Care: Oral Histories of the Cockburn Wetlands Centre", exploring and documenting the oral history of the grassroots movement establishing the Cockburn Wetlands Centre and its significance role in wetland protection.

The WCS sponsored former WCS member, Dr Rod Giblett's presentation to the Conference entitled "Wetland Cultures: Aboriginal, Colonial, Post-Colonial". Philip Jennings also launched Rod Giblett's latest book *Wetland Cultures: Ancient, Traditional, Contemporary* during the sundowner session.

The conference reinforced the WA Government's commitment to restoring the Swan and Canning Rivers and their connected waterways, with wetland health and traditional custodian partnerships at the heart of that strategy.

From keynote to closing remarks, the 2026 WA Wetlands Conference was a celebration of community, culture, and collaboration - an inspiring reminder that protecting wetlands is not just environmental work, but a shared responsibility across generations and sectors. As usual it was a great occasion for networking and exchanging ideas about wetland conservation.

40 Years of Wetland Conservation – What Have We Achieved?

Recently the WCS has merged with the Walliabup Wildlife Warriors (WWW) and this has brought many new members into our group. As we work together for the conservation of wetlands and their wildlife it is important to look back at what we have achieved over the past forty years and the challenges ahead. Conservation requires long term commitment and perseverance, and it can often be frustrating and disappointing in the short term, but when you look back over forty years you can see how effective we have been.

The WCS was formed in February 1985 following the unsuccessful campaign by conservationists, students and local residents to protect the North Lake wetlands from damage by roadworks associated with the construction of Farrington Road. Most of the foundation members were veterans of the Farrington Road campaign and we were determined to raise community awareness about the value of wetlands and bushland and to advocate for their conservation. We set ourselves an ambitious agenda and over the past forty years much of it has been accomplished.

Amongst the many successful campaigns that we have been part of are the following:

- establishment of the Cockburn Wetlands Education Centre (1993)
- banning of recreational duck shooting (1992)
- Ramsar nominations (1990, 2000)
- establishment of the Regional Parks system (1997)
- release of the Wetlands Conservation Policy for WA (1997)
- revegetation of the Beeliam wetlands (1985 -)
- creation of the WA Wetlands Conference (2001, 2005 -)
- Regional Parks legislation (2012)
- abandonment of Roe 8 (1985 - 2018)
- numerous books and other educational publications (1985 -)
- creation of our popular web site (2020 -)
- release of State Planning Policy 2.9 on Planning for Water (2025)

In addition, we have conducted numerous excursions to the wetlands and networked with kindred groups. The WCS has made hundreds of submissions to the EPA and government projects and members have served and continue to serve of many state government committees. The effects of this work are often seen in government policies.

These are just a few of the major achievements for wetlands that we have played a significant role in. We don't claim to have done them alone. We have worked with many allies to achieve these results.

Networking is essential for success in conservation campaigns. There have also been many disappointments along the way and there is still much urgent work to do. Some of the key challenges for the future include:

- addressing the impacts of climate change on wetlands and biodiversity
- development and implementation of a wetland buffers policy
- conservation of turtles and waterbirds
- control of feral predators
- further Ramsar nominations
- expansion of the Regional Parks system
- creation of a system of greenways to facilitate wildlife migration

Thanks to all of you for making this happen. We look forward to your ongoing support as we tackle the task ahead. For further information about these matters visit the publications page of our website:

<https://wetlandswa.org.au/>

Bird Flu Alert!

In 2020 a new strain of the avian bird flu H5N1 emerged. Since then, it has spread to every continent except Australia, causing millions of bird deaths. It has also spread to mammals, including humans. Fortunately, it does not spread easily between humans and most of the reported infections have arisen from handling infected animals. Australian bio security authorities expect it will arrive soon in Australia, and they are urging people to be vigilant and to take sensible precautions to avoid catching or spreading this virus.

The main message from the authorities to the public is that if you see a dead bird or clusters of dead birds, do not touch them but instead record the details and location and report it to either the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline 1800675888 or the Wildcare Helpline 94749055. They recommend that anyone involved in field work or bushwalking should save these numbers on their phone in case they encounter a sick or deceased bird with no obvious signs of injury.

Birdlife Australia has an excellent webpage that describes the symptoms of bird flu and what to do if you encounter sick birds. It also provides advice to field workers about hygiene and how to protect themselves in such situations. Their website is located at <https://birdlife.org.au/h5-bird-flu-avoid-record-report/>

Action at Last on Cat Control

Cats are estimated to kill over a billion native animals in Australia each year. Birds are one of their favourite preys. Feral cats are a major problem in rural areas, but domestic cats are a larger problem in urban areas. Many community groups have drawn attention to this tragic loss of wildlife and some local government authorities have enacted cat laws. However, most of these local cat laws have been struck out by the Legislative Council Committee on Delegated Legislation on the grounds that the state government wants uniform statewide cat laws. A review of the Cat Act of 2011 is now underway, but it is unlikely to lead to a new statewide law before 2030. In the meantime, more than five billion native animals may be killed by roaming cats.

The Minister for Local Government has responded to community concerns by announcing that the government will amend the Cat Act as an interim measure to allow local government authorities to develop their own cat laws to control the problem of roaming cats. She said that the government still intends to update the Cat Act and issue model local laws to assist local authorities to manage the cat problem. However, the timeline for state government action is likely to be at least five years, so local government will be allowed to develop and implement their own cat laws in the meantime.

The Minister's announcement has been welcomed by local government and community groups.

Urban Greening Strategy Released

As we are all aware Perth is already experiencing the effects of climate change in the form of declining annual rainfall, longer and hotter heatwaves, coastal erosion and loss of biodiversity. Perth has the undesirable distinction of having the lowest tree canopy cover of any Australian capital city. Current estimates vary between 16 and 22% and this has been declining due to urban sprawl and urban infill which often result in the loss of mature trees. In comparison Melbourne has 30% tree canopy cover and Sydney has 44% cover.

Wetlands and trees both have a cooling effect on the climate, and they are essential for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Several local government authorities have attempted to address this issue by enacting local laws to preserve existing trees. All other Australian capital cities have such laws, but our state government does not support them and they struck out several local tree preservation laws. There was a public outcry and the planning minister promised to develop a greening strategy to increase Perth's tree canopy cover to 30% by 2040. The result is the Urban Greening Strategy

(<https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-planning-lands-and-heritage/urban-greening-strategy>).

This is a strategy, not a law, so it is strong on incentives but lacking any enforcement powers. It is full of commendable objectives such as creating green links, such as the Cockburn Community Wildlife Corridor. It also includes funding for community groups and local government to plant trees on public land. It also encourages developers and homeowners to retain trees on private property.

This strategy is a cautious step in the direction of addressing our serious lack of urban tree canopy. and it will be interesting to see if it is effective or whether laws are needed to prevent the ongoing clearing of mature trees in the Perth and Peel regions.

Protecting Burswood Park: WWW and WCS join the Call for Action

Around 100 community members gathered at Burswood Park on Saturday 14 February for the D-Day Save Burswood Park protest, where Walliabup Wildlife Warriors joined WCS members in standing with the community against the State Government's proposed redevelopment of the park. Under the current proposal, seven small ponds within the wetland precinct will be infilled to make way for a motorsport track and associated infrastructure, significantly reducing green space and disrupting an important urban wildlife refuge. Speakers at the rally included Save Burswood Park Alliance Co-Convenor Dr Robin Harvey, Greens Leader Brad Pettitt MLC, Town of Victoria Park Mayor Karen Vernon and Liberal MLC Neil Thomson, all voicing strong concerns about the environmental, cultural and governance implications of the project. WCS members David James and Bryony Fremlin, along with WWW members Steve Shaw, Carrie Russell and Joyce Gadalon, attended in support of protecting the wetland.



Some of the gathering at Burswood Park which included WWW & WCS members



Steve Shaw, Carrie Russell & Joyce Gadalon

The proposed works raise serious questions about how wildlife will be managed before construction begins, particularly as essential services to the ponds - including aeration - have already been switched off, creating immediate welfare concerns for turtles and other aquatic species. With the infilling of ponds and loss of habitat likely to displace fauna, WWW will be working closely with local wildlife rehabilitation groups and DBCA to ensure any relocation is handled properly and ethically. The protest highlighted the community's deep connection to Burswood Park and the growing concern that the redevelopment will permanently diminish one of Perth's remaining inner-city green spaces.

Clean Up Australia Day – Bibra Lake & Manning Park

WCS and the Walliabup Wildlife Warriors proudly delivered two successful Clean Up Australia Day events on Sunday 1 March, with volunteer teams operating both at Bibra Lake and Manning Park. A total of 16 volunteers - eight at each site - took part in the morning's activities, contributing their time and energy towards improving the health of the Beelihar Wetlands.

We extend our sincere thanks to the Friends of Manning Park, whose support and participation helped strengthen the impact of the Manning Park clean-up. Their collaboration reflects the strong community partnerships that underpin conservation work across the region.

Across both sites, volunteers collected a significant amount of waste, including plastics, food packaging, cigarette butts, balloons, drink containers, and other debris that poses serious risks to wetland wildlife. Thanks to the hard work of all involved, these areas are now cleaner, safer and better protected.

The event also attracted media interest, with promotion from the Clean Up Australia media team and a mention on ABC Radio Perth's Saturday Breakfast program, helping raise awareness of the clean-up and the importance of caring for our wetlands.

Throughout the morning, volunteers engaged with many members of the public, distributing WWW contact cards, receiving new sign-ups for the Blue Gum Turtle Program, and welcoming new WCS membership enquiries. This strong community engagement highlights the growing interest in local conservation and citizen-science initiatives.



Abby Kaesehagen, Steve Shaw, Jason Sparrow, Ainsley Goldsack and Elly Nitschke with bags of collected rubbish



Jessica Bell and Carrie Russell engaging with members of the public

We are pleased to report that no injuries or incidents occurred. All volunteers worked safely and effectively, demonstrating excellent teamwork and commitment.

Given the volume of waste still present across the Beelihar Wetlands, WWW will now host monthly clean-up events at different locations throughout the wetland system. These regular activities will help maintain momentum, support community involvement, and continue improving habitat conditions for local wildlife. WCS thanks all volunteers, partner groups and supporters for their dedication. Together, we are making a meaningful difference for our wetlands and the species that depend on them.

Citizen Science in Action at Piney Lakes: Community Helps Uncover the Mystery of the Blue Gum Turtles

Walliabup Wildlife Warriors and 'The Crazy Bushman' Ian Barlow hosted a successful citizen-science themed stall at the Bottle Top Hill Community Event on Saturday 14 March, using the opportunity to raise awareness about the alarming decline in turtle sightings at Blue Gum Lake and to promote the upcoming Blue Gum Turtle Tracker and Spotter Program.

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Volunteers Joyce Gadalón, Carrie Russell, Ian Barlow and Jeff Mengler engaged with a steady stream of community members, sharing TurtleSat data that revealed a 76% drop in turtle sightings over recent years. The A3 TurtleSat maps and the new *Mystery of the Blue Gum Turtles* poster - beautifully designed by Carleen James - sparked thoughtful conversations, with many attendees expressing concern and curiosity about what is happening to the lake's turtle population.

The stall encouraged the public to become part of the solution by joining the 2026 Blue Gum Turtle Tracking Program, reporting turtle sightings, and learning how citizen science contributes to conservation outcomes. The response was overwhelmingly positive, with **four new volunteers signing up** for the program and **one new WCS membership** on the day.

Feedback highlighted how powerful the visual data displays were in communicating the urgency of the issue. Future improvements may include offering a QR code for downloading TurtleSat and a simple step-through guide on how to log sightings.

Overall, the event strengthened community engagement, increased awareness of turtle conservation challenges, and helped build momentum for the Blue Gum program. It was a wonderful example of how citizen science can inspire action and bring people together for wildlife.



Jeff Mengler at the WWW & WCS Citizen Science booth promoting the Blue Gum Turtle Tracker Program



The Poster - Become a Turtle Detective and Solve the Mystery at Blue Gum Lake - courtesy of Carleen James' creativity

Six Years of Warnings: Why Bibra Lake's Turtles Are Still Dying on Our Roads

Recent turtle-road patrols at Bibra Lake have further highlighted a long-standing issue: our wetlands wildlife continues to be placed at risk by road designs and land-use decisions that have never been adapted to the ecological needs of the Beelihar Wetlands. Volunteers recorded more than 50 turtles attempting to cross major roads in a single day, with several turtles struck by vehicles on well-known hotspots including Hope Road, Osprey Drive, Progress Drive and North Lake Road.

This problem is not new. In 2019, ABC News reported that Bibra Lake turtles were being "pushed to the brink by foxes and drivers", identifying the same roads and the same dangers that are present today. In January 2026, WWW volunteers submitted an Annual Electors' Meeting motion calling for engineered road-mitigation measures, yet turtle casualties continue on the same stretches of road.

A critical missing piece remains the lack of **effective wetland buffer zones**. For years, WCS has advised that robust buffers are essential to protect turtle habitat, to maintain ecological linkages, reduce road mortality and prevent further fragmentation. Many wetlands in the Beelihar system are adjacent to or surrounded by

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busy roads and suburban development, leaving turtles with compromised and often unsafe options during nesting or migration between wetlands.



Whilst volunteer patrols help prevent some turtle deaths, structural solutions are essential to support successful long term turtle conservation. Protecting our turtles requires engineered road-mitigation, science-based buffer zones and a commitment from local governments to prioritise ecological resilience. The data is clear, the risks are known and the solutions are well established. What is needed now is action!

WWW volunteers Sara Woollett and Claire Lyons on Hope Road, helping turtles make their dangerous crossings safely

WWW Stand with Community at Save the Jarrah Forest & Black Cockatoo Rally

Perth's Forrest Place came alive on Sunday 22 March as thousands of Western Australians gathered to defend our Jarrah forests, our drinking water, and the future of our iconic black cockatoos. Walliabup Wildlife Warriors (WWW) volunteers proudly joined the crowd, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with community groups, traditional custodians, scientists, families, and conservation organisations from across the State.

The atmosphere was electric - a powerful mix of courage, unity, and deep love for Country. Voices echoed through the city as people called for urgent action to protect the world's only Jarrah forest and the species that depend on it.

The rally highlighted the growing concern about habitat loss, declining black cockatoo populations, and the impacts of mining on forests and drinking water catchments. Speakers delivered heartfelt messages about the cultural, ecological, and community value of these landscapes, reminding us that when we stand together, we are powerful.

Our WWW volunteers joined many other groups including Save the Black Cockatoos, WA Forest Alliance, Bob Brown Foundation, The Wilderness Society WA, Peel Environmental Protection Alliance, Jarrahdale Forest Protectors, Save Perth Hills, Julimar Conservation and Forest Alliance, Nannas for Native Forests, LEAP, and more - united by a shared commitment to protecting Western Australia's natural heritage. For WWW volunteers this rally was a natural extension of our mission. Healthy forests, waterways, and wildlife are interconnected.

The time for change is now. Our community is ready. We hope our government is ready to stand with us!



WWW volunteers Rosalie Warton, Steven Shaw and Joyce Gadalon (not pictured) stood alongside thousands in Forrest Place, calling for the protection of our Jarrah forests and black cockatoos.

Our Wonderful Wetlands: Community, Mud & Meaningful Action

It's been a big month for hands-on wetland care, with volunteers getting muddy, learning new skills, and strengthening the community that keeps our wetlands thriving.

At the **Wetland Restoration Skill Share** in Mary Carroll Park, volunteers teamed up with SERCUL, the Armadale Gosnells Landcare Group, the Friends of Mary Carroll Park and the City of Gosnells for a hands-on session in planting and protecting sedges. It was fun, practical and full of generous knowledge-sharing - the kind of grassroots energy that keeps our wetlands thriving. It also provided an important opportunity for WWW's Joyce Gadalon to progress turtle protection and fox-monitoring discussions with Eunice from the Friends group, strengthening the partnerships needed for effective State Government advocacy.

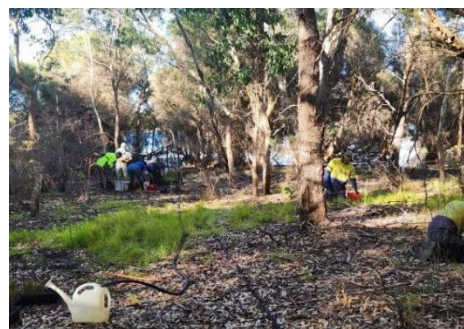
We also joined the **Friends of North Lake** for their weekly planting session - a relaxed, friendly morning restoring habitat and connecting with locals who care deeply about their wetland. These regular meet-ups are a great way to build community and momentum, and they help reinforce the alliances essential for long-term conservation

outcomes. Joyce also used the opportunity to meet on-site with Michael from DBCA to progress discussions on turtle protection and fox-monitoring opportunities at North Lake - a key priority for WWW. Two events, one message: when community comes together - and when we build strong relationships with the people working on the ground - our wetlands and our advocacy both grow stronger.



Shane from Armadale Gosnells Landcare Group talking about how new plantings can be protected by utilising natural dead branches that are found in the wetland reserve to prevent swamp hens from pulling out the new seedlings.

The DBCA, SERCUL volunteers are busy planting seedlings before it gets too hot in the North Lake reserve!



Why Water Supplementation Matters: A Wildlife Perspective from the Beelihar Wetlands

Across the Beelihar Wetlands, declining groundwater levels have become one of the urgent threats to local wildlife. For Walliabup Wildlife Warriors (WWW), the impacts are visible every season: drying lakebeds, exposed turtles, increased fox predation, and the collapse of habitat that once supported thriving wetland ecosystems.

Water supplementation - originally embedded in Ministerial Statements 45, 467 and 688 as part of the Southern Lakes Drainage Scheme - was designed to prevent exactly this kind of ecological decline. Yet, as highlighted in the WWW submission to the Auditor General's review of the Environmental Offsets Program (via WA LandCare Network) supplementation has not been delivered at Bibra Lake, North Lake or Lake

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Forrestdale, despite clear evidence of hydrological stress and repeated non-compliance with minimum water-level criteria.

The consequences for wildlife are severe. Dr Ricky Spencer's 2025 expert report shows that prolonged drying dramatically increases adult turtle mortality, with fox predation surging when turtles aestivate in exposed sediments. More than 500 turtle deaths have been recorded across the Beeliam Wetlands since 2023 - numbers that push the species toward functional extinction in urban wetlands.

Recent WCS advice from the Environmental Defender's Office (EDO) reinforces that offsets must be *delivered in practice*, not simply documented. Where ecological decline is evident, agencies have a legal and ethical obligation to implement mitigation measures - especially when infrastructure and drainage water already exist. The successful topping-up of Thomsons Lake demonstrates that supplementation is both feasible and effective when prioritised. WCS continues to work closely with the EDO to finalise a separate submission to the Auditor General on the Environmental Offsets Program, and to explore all available options to ensure the strongest possible submission.

From a wildlife perspective, the path forward is clear:

- restore hydrological offsets
- repair and reinstate supplementation infrastructure
- apply consistent, equitable water-management decisions across all wetlands
- ensure transparent monitoring and enforceable compliance

WCS and WWW will continue to advocate strongly for full compliance with Ministerial Statements 45, 467 and 688, and for the reinstatement of water supplementation as a critical measure to protect wetland ecosystems and the species that depend on them.

Without urgent action, the Beeliam Wetlands will continue to lose the species and ecological functions they were meant to protect. With it, we have a real opportunity to stabilise turtle populations, reduce predation pressure, and safeguard these wetlands for future generations.

Dr Ricky Spencer's Report can be found here - [preliminary-expert-report-on-the-impact-of-fox-predation-on-southwestern-snake-necked-turtles-at-bibra-lake-wa-1.pdf](https://www.wetlandswa.org.au/~/media/2025-03-10-preliminary-expert-report-on-the-impact-of-fox-predation-on-southwestern-snake-necked-turtles-at-bibra-lake-wa-1.pdf)

WCS Website

The new WCS website is now fully functional, and it contains lots of nice images of wetlands as well as some interesting information. Our recent publications are also available there. You may enjoy visiting it from time to time. The URL is <https://wetlandswa.org.au/>

Subscriptions Are Due for 2026

Thank you to all those members who have paid their subs for 2026 and to those of you who made donations to the trust fund. You should have received your receipts by now. Some members are still unfinancial for 2026. If a membership renewal form for 2026 is attached to this mailout, please renew your membership today and help us to maintain our campaign for wetland conservation in WA. A donation to our Wetlands Trust Fund would also be very welcome and it is tax-deductible. You may pay your subs by cash, cheque or bank transfer. Details are provided on the renewal form.

This newsletter was compiled and edited by WCS Membership Officer, Simone Finlay, with assistance from Joyce Gadalon and Philip Jennings. Comments to wcs.membership@gmail.com

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