

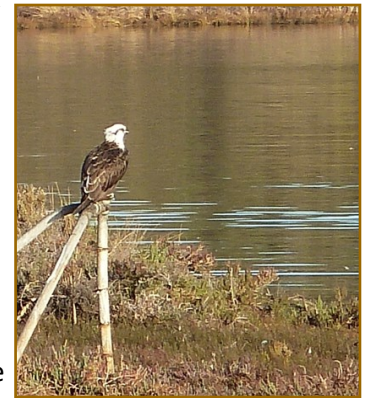


We acknowledge the Whadjuk Noongar People as the Traditional Owners of the Derbal Yerrigan and surrounding country in which we are privileged to work. We pay our respects to their Elders who have handed down and continue to hand down their deep connection to country to future generations.

A Joyous New Year Wander

I was pondering as to whether the fledgling Osprey might be still hanging out with its parents, and this thought was enough to encourage me down to Alfred Cove one morning in the New Year. How glad I was that I went.

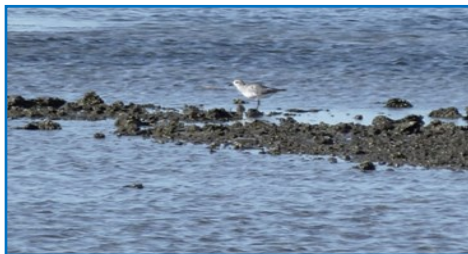
All four Osprey were perched around the samphire flat, on poles, posts and branch, with the young one alongside its mother, calling in its high-pitched voice for attention. In a short while the mother took to flight and began circling over the waters of the Cove and her encouragement paid off, with the young one following and even diving several times from a low height trying to catch a fish – maybe next time it will succeed! All this unfolding before me as I watched from the new viewing platform.



Osprey Pandion

The short walk to Point Waylen revealed the sandspit full of waders – the handsome Pied Oyster-catchers always busy feeding in and out of the shallow water, alongside the elegant Pied Stilts here and there, and six of my most favourite migratory birds, the Grey Plover (or Black-bellied Plover as it is now being called), standing on the alert and occasionally feeding, scattered amongst the other birds right out to the end of the spit.

A little further along I spied a White-faced Heron fully reflected in the little pond near the Point, then more migratory waders out on the exposed mudflats – a Common Greenshank, Marsh Sandpipers and the ever-watchful Grey Plovers. I am so glad that at least for the short time I am there, they are undisturbed by people fishing or kite-surfing or canoeing too closely.



Grey or Black-bellied Plover Pluvialis

The book by Andrew Darby '*Flightlines*' explains that Grey Plovers are site-faithful, in that after breeding in the Lower Arctic they will return to the same Southern Hemisphere destination to fatten up over summer. Furthermore, the females are known to fly farther south than the males which suggests to me that our Swan Estuary Marine Park would be mainly attracting female Grey Plovers, as there are not too many places much farther south than here. So how important it is to protect these mothers for the sake of the next generations!

Two more bird-watchers from Melbourne begin a conversation with me – they are impressed that they can view all these birds here in the midst of suburbia. To reach their favourite bird-watching haunt in Melbourne they need to travel around 40km to the Werribee Treatment Plant, and even there they do not see the Grey Plover, indeed these are uncommon all across Victoria.

I ponder how we can increase awareness and protection of these amazing birds, and hope that the establishment of the Melville Bird Sanctuary will bring a willingness by authorities to declare protected zones within the Marine Park, especially the mudflats and the Cove itself.

As I return to my car, a trilling sound catches my attention and there in a river gum are 8 beautiful Rainbow Bee-eaters. A joyful end to my walk.

Progress towards the establishment of the Melville Bird Sanctuary

Many and varied were the ideas that flowed from a workshop organised by Mick McCarthy, Director of Environment and Infrastructure at the City of Melville, and facilitated by Kathleen Broderick, to develop an Action Plan towards the establishment of the Melville Bird Sanctuary.

From SERAG's point of view, the boundaries of the Sanctuary need confirmation by both the City of Melville and by DBCA's River and Estuaries group, so that public awareness can be enhanced by actions such as appropriate signage and in-water boundary markers. At the same time improved management of people's movement together with more strategically placed bird viewing platforms will give greater protection to the riparian vegetation and thereby greater protection to the Sanctuary.

A step forward in this direction was taken with the opening of the new Bird Viewing platform at Point Waylen, Alfred Cove, which had been achieved through the support of Lisa O'Malley MLA who lobbied for funding by the State Government. The Minister for the Environment, Hon. Reece Whitby formally opened the platform in December with Lisa O'Malley MLA, Kim Giddens MLA, Sam Lim MP, Councillors Jane Edinger, Glynis Barber, Katy Mair and Tomas Fitzgerald attending together with Mick McCarthy and other officers of the City of Melville.



Photograph courtesy of Sam Lim MP

Together with the Friends of Melville Bird Sanctuary, SERAG greatly appreciates the funding for the infrastructure works from the State Government with support by the City of Melville Management Team and DBCA, all of which has helped to realise this project, as well as the interest and support given by the City of Melville Councillors.

SERAG looks forward to continuing its contribution to the survival rates of all the bird species through its revegetation and restoration activities as well as by monitoring for any detrimental incidents, through regular bird counts and on-ground awareness. Baseline data that already exists for Alfred Cove on Birdlife's Birddata and on eBird's website provides the basis for longitudinal studies on the survival of vulnerable species such as the trans-equatorial migratory shorebirds.

There was much discussion on these matters during the workshop, centred around increasing the protection of the bird life, which is currently affected by disturbances to their feeding, resting & roosting, and breeding. SERAG and the Friends of Melville Bird Sanctuary (FMBS) agree that in the long term, the Sanctuary should have 'no take / no disturbance' zones in critical feeding and resting areas such as the mudflats and the shorelines.

SERAG believes that a timely implementation of the Attadale Alfred Cove Foreshore Management Plan in terms of its revegetation plans and the construction of re-sited dual use pathways, walkways and critical viewing platforms will contribute greatly to the success of the proposed Melville Bird Sanctuary.



Proposed Melville Bird Sanctuary boundaries

*Article - M Matassa
Image - courtesy of FMBS*

DBCA Scholarship supports Pelican Point Wave Energy Investigation

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions has awarded a scholarship to a final year UWA Environmental Engineering student to support investigations into the high wave energy at Pelican Point that is causing the severe erosion there.

SERAG has been concerned for many years that the ongoing erosion on the north-east side of the Point could result in the loss of the unique lagoon and sandy reaches on the Point, that are used by local and migratory shorebirds as a breeding area in summer and as a resting and roosting area all year round.

Indeed these fears were realised when the high winter tides of July breached the remaining shoreline and opened a passage to the lagoon.



Photograph - T Graham-Taylor

This breach has since closed over again but the urgency to understand and thereby instigate possible solutions to this erosion is vital. SERAG greatly appreciates the support by DBCA in funding the scholarship for this wave energy study, and also thanks Dr Tim Gourlay of Perth Hydro for his mentoring and advice.

Article - M Matassa

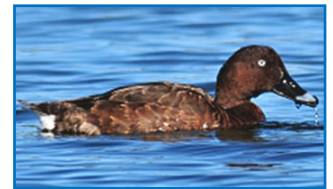
Bird tales from Alfred Cove

There was a huge collective sense of relief when this year's Osprey chick at Alfred Cove successfully fledged in the days leading up to Christmas. The Osprey parents had been on guard for so long – firstly taking turns to hatch the eggs, especially guarding against marauding Ravens, then bringing food for the hatchling whilst still warding off attacks by Ravens and finally encouraging its first flight and eventual independence at around two months of age.

Not so fortunate were the family of Tawny Frogmouths, the parents and two chicks being sighted in November in the Blue Fairy-Wren Reserve, but tragically two were found dead and partly eaten on the grass at Troy Park. Whether predated by a cat or other we don't know, but it shows how precarious it is being a bird!

A rewarding sighting this year was the pair of Rainbow Bee-eaters nesting in the vicinity of the flagged area behind the bush swales. The pair were seen entering and exiting their burrow in the ground and flying around to catch insects over a several weeks, from October to November. Whilst we don't know how successful this pair may have been, we will look out for them again next September / October as they return here from their annual migration north.

We have been grateful to have had the expertise of people such as Dr Claire Greenwell to assist us on occasions with SERAG's monthly bird counts this past year. A total of 74 different species has been recorded for the year, including a Spotless Crake heard calling by Claire and a Hardhead duck, not frequently seen. SERAG also appreciates the time and input given by all the regular volunteers who assist with the bird count.



Photograph - Friends of Queens Park Bushland

Anyone who is keen to help is welcome to join us each month, and is encouraged to bring a pair of birdwatching binoculars. The date and time are published in the calendar, and contact Margaret at admin@swanestuaryreserves.org for more particulars.

Article - M Matassa

“Don't Walk on The Sandbar (Island) when the Shorebirds are Nesting”



Photograph - R Napier

Oliver Raymond's message “Don't Walk On The Sandbar When the Shorebirds Are Nesting” accompanying his poster of the Point Walter Spit & Island proved a winner in the national ANSTO Shorebirds competition, in the section relating to the Swan Estuary. SERAG has supported this annual competition for primary school children, offering local schools guided excursions or incursions to highlight the shorebirds of the Swan Estuary Marine Park, as well as granting book prizes for outstanding posters.

Oliver and his family enjoyed a bird watching walk at Point Walter with SERAG members, Robin Napier and Margaret Matassa, who presented Oliver with his book prize and his ANSTO Certificate (Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation).



Oliver and his sister Emily (foreground) birdwatching at Point Walter Spit

Article - M Matassa Photograph - P Raymond

New Volunteers Add Momentum to SERAG for 2023

SERAG has welcomed the assistance of the City of Melville Volunteer Hub in directing to SERAG enquiries from a range of people interested in helping in the environment.

Whilst we encourage regular or semi-regular volunteering with our teams, those who have come even for a few times have made a difference and have themselves learnt a lot about the Marine Park Reserves and the efforts that go into their care and restoration.

New volunteers immediately realise that there are different techniques required for bush restoration and maintenance than for gardening at home, plus the need to distinguish between weeds and native plants can take a little while. Indeed we are all still learning, so we follow the adage: if in doubt, don't pull it out!

TREEmendous Tuesdays have a good number of volunteers going into 2023 and there is a strong feeling amongst them that the best part of the morning comes with the relaxing cuppa and cake by the river!



Saturday Morning at the Cove has also gained new regulars and provides the opportunity for those with working lives to fit in two to three hours a month of volunteering on fourth Saturdays.

SERAG looks forward to a big year of restoration work in 2023 and sincerely thanks to all our volunteers.

Article and photograph - M Matassa

Did you know?

Season of Birak-Bunuru - December - March (1st and 2nd Summer)

This Noongar Season is represented by the colour red/orange.
It symbolises the season of the young and adolescence.

University Student Guild Volunteers Making a Difference

SERAG has been most grateful for the enthusiasm and energy that the university student volunteers from UWA and from Curtin have brought to bear on our revegetation programs at Pelican Point and Alfred Cove Marine Park reserves this past year.

It has been a pleasure for SERAG volunteers to work alongside and talk with these young people and they in turn have valued the knowledge they have gained about our estuarine habitat and the birds and creatures that depend on it.

Their dedication to the task, whether weeding or planting, in good weather or bad has been very heartening for ourselves and augurs well for the future of our environment.



UWA Student Guild Volunteers weeding despite showers



Volunteers from Curtin's CVI! weeding new plantings at Alfred Cove

The leaders of each group were acknowledged for the extra mile they went to ensure that students were organised, their volunteering hours recorded, and particularly for keeping us informed as to numbers attending on each occasion. To recognise their work, a pardalote box made by SERAG member Peter Seebeck, and a native bee hotel given by CVA leader and SERAG member Tom Potts, were installed in Eucalypt trees at Pelican Point and Tompkins Park respectively.



Warin Chotirosniramit (UWA) holding the pardalote box made by Peter Seebeck



Deepak Kanneganti (Curtin CVI!) working at Tompkins Park

SALP Sedges on the March Across Pelican Point

Thanks to the funding granted to SERAG by Swan Alcoa Landcare Program (SALP) over the years, the coverage of sedges on Pelican Point is steadily progressing year by year.

Importantly, SALP funding covers both the professional weed management of weeds such as the couch grass *Cynodon dactylon* as well as the purchase of the tube stock of *Juncus kraussii*, *Ficinia nodosa* and *Cyperus gymnocaulus*.

Weedy couch devastates native plants by overrunning them and eventually killing them, as the lack of sedges in the first photo below testifies, but is managed by the professional application of a selective herbicide that only targets the running grass (and not the sedges). At the same time, SERAG volunteers work year round to hand-pull the broadleaf weeds such as the Fleabane and Starwort shown growing in the foreground of photo 1, as well as following on with the planting of tube stock of sedges photo 3 and watering them over their first summer, all resulting in steady progress of restoration across the Point, photo 2.

So what was in 2020 a few scattered clumps of *Juncus kraussii* and a lot of weeds has become an area rich in both samphire and mixed sedges.

SERAG is most grateful to be receiving a further grant from the Swan Alcoa Landcare Program for 2023, which ensures further progress in the revegetation of this vitally important area of Saltmarsh community, which is a Federally threatened community.

In turn, a healthy native riparian foreshore protects the seagrasses growing in the nearby shallows, the importance of which was the thrust behind the proclamation of the Swan Estuary Marine Park at Pelican Point, Alfred Cove and Milyu in the 1980's.

The sedges, samphire and seagrasses together are one of the world's most effective carbon storage systems, so their protection and propagation is of the highest significance to our future, giving SERAG all the motivation it needs to continue its efforts to care for these vital Marine Park Reserves.



Photo 1: Looking east across Pelican Point - March 2020 (notice the pylon marker in both photos #1 and #2)



Photo 2: Same view as photograph #1: Pelican Point - January 2023 (notice the pylon marker in both photos)

Planting in progress in the winter months of 2022



A Much Appreciated AGM

'Are you coming to SERAG's AGM?'

"No way – I avoid such occasions as much as possible."

'Well in this case, you'll probably miss out on a good evening.'

And indeed such was the case, with 32 SERAG members greatly appreciating the speaker, the supper and the summary of SERAG's activities at the Annual General Meeting in October last year.

The guest speaker, Dr Rose Weerasinghe, Senior Scientist and Restoration Ecologist with South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare (SERCUL), based her presentation on the Research and Restoration Project she has conducted on the Saltmarsh Community at Adenia Park in Riverton. Saltmarsh habitat is one of the world's most important Blue Carbon Sinks and Alfred Cove has the largest remaining range of this plant community in the whole of the Swan Estuary.

Dr Weerasinghe explained that saltmarsh ecosystems are important for the aquatic food web and also for the capture and storage of carbon. Saltmarshes can store a staggering 2,000kg of carbon emissions per hectare. Western Australia is recognised as a world centre for saltmarshes but, by 1980, fifty percent of the original marshes were gone, and more has been lost since. Saltmarsh habitats are now recognised nationally as a threatened ecological community (TEC).

Dr Weerasinghe has also done vital research into the ways that human disturbance of saltmarsh areas contribute to an increase in mosquito breeding. Her results show for example, that when tidal movement brings natural predators for mosquito larvae into our waterways and wetlands, mosquito numbers are able to be managed naturally. However, human disturbance that causes pools of water to remain when the tide is out can result in unnaturally increased numbers of mosquitos.



Dr Weerasinghe conducting trials for her research Photograph - Courtesy of SERCUL

Dr Weerasinghe illustrated her talk with an interesting slide presentation, answered questions from the audience and stayed on to speak with individuals about her work. Margaret Matassa thanked Dr Weerasinghe for her presentation, and for her determination in turning the tide to gain recognition for this vital plant community.

SERAG's Chairperson Robert Harvey then presented his report, with the overarching observation that SERAG has made a successful transition this year since the death of founding member Cathie O'Neill, with all committee members contributing to that success.

Financially SERAG is in a good position, having secured a number of grants and also having received the Hilux ute and funds to support it, as a bequest from Cathie.

Volunteering by members, corporate groups and university students, has continued strongly, notwithstanding the difficulties due to COVID. Robert added that more volunteers are always welcome, whether contributing to SERAG's environmental or administrative work.

Advocacy was a significant part of SERAG's work over the past year. The advocacy work on the Attadale Alfred Cove Foreshore Master Plan, started by Cathie and continued by Margaret, has been very successful but requires constant vigilance when pushback from small numbers of disaffected residents occurs.

Robert also acknowledged administrative contributions. Nicole Elischer and her daughter, Maddie McGowan, for the new website, Robyn Weir for the newsletter, Chris Gillam for an improved membership system, Rosemary Peek for improved corporate governance and Robert himself for the introduction of a document management system.

Three committee members stepped down from the committee, but they remain as active SERAG members.

- Robin Napier is a key person in community education, particularly her library displays, and with husband Steve, the creation of 'the flock' of corflute birds that educate the public about migratory shorebirds. Robin has also provided many morning teas for appreciative university students and care for native plants at her home while they await planting.
- Robyn Weir and Chris Gillam started as Milyu volunteers, and have liaised with Leisure Centre staff on committee meeting bookings, bringing refreshments as well to these events. Chris also managed SERAG's membership database and Robyn is publishing SERAG's newsletters.

All were thanked for their contributions and SERAG is grateful for their ongoing commitments in these areas.

SERAG's treasurer, Nicole Elischer, tabled the Financial Statements and Auditor's Report and thanked SERAG's auditor, Nigel Penfold, on behalf of the Committee, for his ongoing support of SERAG's work.

SERAG being a community-based group of volunteers must match all grant monies received, by hours donated by volunteers, valued at \$50 per hour. Volunteers are, therefore, vital to the continuation of SERAG's functions and work program. Julie Ginbey presented a small token of thanks to the nine volunteers who, along with committee members, have contributed 30 or more hours in 2021– 2022.

Finally the returning committee members were re-elected with Margaret Matassa as Chairperson, Geoff Webster as Vice Chairperson, Nicole Elischer as Treasurer and Rosemary Peek as Secretary, and everyone stayed to enjoy some food and drink and to catch up with each other.

Article - M Matassa

Driving down Mozzies and Erosion



Can people be convinced to change years of habit tracking across sedges and samphire down to the river's edge to launch a kayak or to go fishing?

SERAG is hoping that the answer to that is YES, and is encouraged by hearing the speaker at our AGM, Dr Rose Weerasinghe, talk of changing people's minds by educating them about the true consequences of their actions.

Whilst the great majority of people accept the need to take their kayak to the nearest public launching site, just a few and even one person who does not, can cause a lot of damage to foreshore vegetation as the photos below show. Furthermore, imprints of shoes can cause small pools of water to be retained in the undergrowth after the tide goes out, and these are a haven for breeding mosquitos.

Fishers compete with the ospreys, terns, cormorants and pelicans for the fish in the Marine Park and have at times lost or discarded their tackle, which then has been found to further negatively impact the birdlife.



A local canoeist persists in trampling an opening through new plantings and sedges at Tompkins Park



Pathway trampled through pristine saltmarsh leaving behind water pools attracting breeding mosquitos.

These breaches in the line of sedges that grow along the very edge of the Alfred Cove foreshore have ongoing consequences as, each winter, the high tides and storm surges wash away the soil in these bare areas, thereby increasing erosion and causing further damage to the sedges alongside.

Furthermore, the pathway down to the edge that is created by trampling becomes a conduit for weed species and these can engulf the foreshore plants, on which birds and reptiles are reliant for roosting and nesting.



SERAG trusts that once fishers, kayakers, kite-surfers and others involved in active water sports realise that trampling through vegetation to the water's edge is driving up the number of mozzies and opening the way for serious erosion, then they will think twice and launch and fish at the dedicated sites outside of the Alfred Cove Marine Park. By talking with friends and neighbours about this we can hopefully start the education process.

Freedom Flight

As featured on Gardening Australia, Zoologist Amellia (Milly) Thormby is piloting a microlight plane around Australia to raise awareness and run education campaigns in schools about the plight of the world's shorebirds, which are the most endangered group of bird species.

Over half of the migratory shorebird species are experiencing population declines, such as an 80% decline for species like the Curlew Sandpiper and the Eastern Curlew.

Milly's 20,000-kilometre journey around Australia is of a similar length millions of shorebirds fly each year in their migration from Australia to breed in the Arctic Tundra and back again.

The birds follow a migration highway known as the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

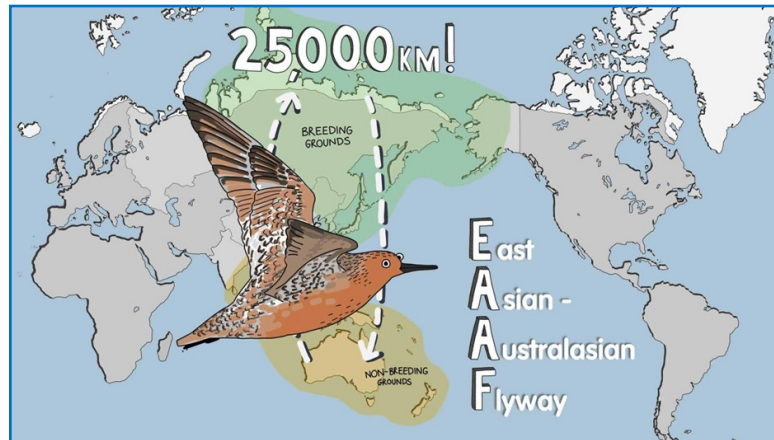


Image - Wingthreads

These are amazing journeys highlighting the importance of protecting our biodiversity.

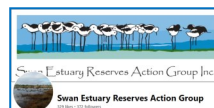
For example, a Bar-Tailed Godwit, by the time it is 15 years of age, will have flown the distance from the Earth to the Moon on its migration pathways alone. Also, a female Bar-Tailed Godwit holds the world record for the longest non-stop flight ever recorded for any bird species – 12,000 kms over nine days.

Milly has illustrated a children's book on the subject – *A Shorebird Flying Adventure*, written by Jackie Kerin and published by CSIRO Publishing.

All this information and more about this remarkable person and her remarkable journey can be found on the website <https://wingthreads.com.au>

Article - M Paterson

Social Media Refresh



SERAG welcomes Spatial Ecologist, Yvonne Fong onto our committee and we are most grateful for her fresh ideas and revitalisation of our Social Media.

Yvonne has been active with SERAG for many years, including leadership of UWA students attending the Saturdays @ Pelican Point whilst completing her Masters studies, ongoing volunteering there since beginning work and more recently by inspiring her boss at NGIS to bring the office team down to Alfred Cove for an afternoon's volunteering. Their efforts made a significant impact on the restoration of a riparian area of old-growth trees.

We encourage you to take a look at our *Facebook* page as well as our new *LinkedIn* page -

<https://www.facebook.com/swanestuaryreservesactiongroupserag/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/swanestuaryreservesactiongroupserag/> and follow them if you are active on either platform. You may need an account to view *LinkedIn*.

Article - M Matassa

Reflection

*On a morning like this
I realise how lucky we are
in the environments we share
with the birds and the trees
the rivers and the seas and the
creatures there-in
to wonder, to learn
what treasures they bring
it fills my heart with delight
and my spirit to sing.*

J Ginbey



Photograph - M Matassa

Mark the Date!

- **Clean Up Australia Day @ Pelican Point** - Sunday March 5th 8.30 - 10.30am
- **Boorloo (City of Perth) Heritage Event @ Pelican Point** - Saturday April 1st 8.30 - 11.30am "A Point Worth Appreciating"
Come and discover the rich cultural, environmental and historical heritage of Pelican Point, Crawley with a guided walk, and an optional planting experience, followed by refreshments. Registration required.

Regular Events for Your Calendar

- **TREEmendous Tuesdays** - Bush Care activities - Alfred Cove 6.30am - 8.30am
- **Saturday @ Pelican Point** - Bush Care activities 8:30am - 10:30am
- **Monthly Bird Count** - 3rd Saturday at Alfred Cove 7.30am - 9.30am
- **Monthly Mondays at Milyu** - Foreshore Rubbish Clean-Up 6.30am - 8.30am
- **Saturday Morning at the Cove** - Bush Care activities (4th Sat) 7:30am - 9:30am
- **Watering at Alfred Cove** - across a weekend every month or three weeks - Friday, Saturday and Sunday

Please contact SERAG to register your interest in any of our events.

Contact SERAG -

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