

THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM'S 2018 BIENNIAL COLLECTING EXPEDITION TO CLIFTON HILLS STATION

1 – 11 September

The Museum's 2018 Biennial Collecting Expedition sponsored by the Waterhouse Club was to Clifton Hills Station, which covers an area of 1.6 million hectares of varied landscapes in the far north east of South Australia about 100 km south of Birdsville.

The Eyre Creek and the Diamantina River join to form Goyder Lagoon – a vast area of floodplain in the north west of the Station - and the wetlands of the Cooper Creek system are in the south east. These are recognised as Nationally Important Wetland systems by the Australian Government, a conservation priority under the State Government's SA Arid Lands Biodiversity Strategy, and as an Important Bird Area by Birdlife International. Consideration is also being given to establishing a reserve to protect the nationally vulnerable Kowari and Fawn Hopping Mouse.

The Museum's Scientific Team comprised Dr Mark Hutchinson, Senior Research Scientist, Herpetology; Dr Cath Kemper (mammals), Graham Carpenter (birds), Dr Remko Leijts (bees/pollinators) and Jo Wood (Museum volunteer assisting Remko).

Our brief was to assist the scientists in their field survey work, offering a rare opportunity for members to work side-by side with a team of scientists recognised as experts in their field of scientific interest. The main collecting zone was east of the Birdsville Track about 60 kms along the Walkers Crossing Track – an area with diverse eco-systems and habitats.

Following an overnight stay and briefing at the Marree Hotel, 26 intrepid expeditioners made their way in convey to meet the Museum team at the Walkers Crossing Track base camp, 260 from Mungerranie. The shady Coolabahs and access to bore water were welcome bonuses! The camp had been set up by the Club's professional camp mangers and caterers, Mal and Val Hansen who looked after us glamping style.

The first task was to complete the installation of the pit lines and traps with the scientists. For the rest of the time on site the daily routine involved options for Club volunteers as follows:

- 7.00 – 11 am Birding
- 7.30 – 11.30 Checking traps from various sites
- 10.00 – 4.00 pm Bee and insect catching
- 4.00 – 6.00 pm Birding

Bat traps were installed and/or shifted to different sites during the week which offered the option to experience evening mist net trapping with Cath Kemper.

Cat Lynch and Peter Mbuteti, NRM Officers for the Marree-Innaminka Region spent several days with us, searching for the elusive Kowari. Unfortunately despite heroic efforts none appeared.

Dan Duval, Botanic Gardens Seed Conservation Centre and his colleagues Jenni Guerin and Denzel Murfett also visited for two nights and provided the opportunity for Waterhouse Club volunteers to accompany them as they scouted the area to identify sites of interest for seed collection. They also escorted the Waterhouse Club group on a day out to Goyder Lagoon, stopping along the way for short walks to interpret the flora – a popular addition to the Museum's fauna focus.

Dave Harvey, Managing Director of Clifton Hills Station, visited us one evening for "dinner, bed and breakfast" and shared stories about station life. On other evenings, there were show and tell sessions about the findings of the day, singing, guitar playing, story-telling and general revelry.

After packing up the base camp on the final day, we left the campsite in convoy. The Birdsville Track was rough and some vehicles suffered tyre punctures and tyre damage either on the way or on the way out, and the rear window in one vehicle was smashed by a rock missile.

Back at the Marree Hotel and our farewell dinner, Mark Hutchinson provided a precis of the scientific “scores”:

- Birds 100 (including 2 from Denzel Murfett, not on Graham’s list)
- Mammals 19 including 15 native species
- Reptiles 21 (2 recorded only from remains)
- Native Bees 50+ species

A more detailed scientific report of the findings will be prepared in due course to accompany this expedition precis.

We thank the Clifton Hills Pastoral Company and Dave Harvey in particular for enabling access to the Station property. We also pass on our very special thanks to the Museum Scientific Team, the Botanic Gardens Seed Conservation Bank Team, and to NRM Regional team, based in Pt Augusta. And finally, we acknowledge the wonderful contribution made by our Waterhouse Club volunteers to the research effort of the South Australian Museum. A good time was had by all - this happy snap tells the story!



**Don and Margie Heylen
EXPEDITION LEADERS
September 2018**

Link to Clifton Hills Photo Gallery:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1n3sJxoWUepRPJOq-DXdRtXUqbloBUenH>