

Saving Western Pygmy Possum Expedition - 19th to 20th September 2020

The Museum's Professor Steve Donnellan is leading a Citizen Science Project aimed at confirming the extent of the Western Pygmy Possum habitat and exploring how to help their survival in eastern South Australia. This project will span over 3 to 5 years with Waterhouse Club members preparing, installing and monitoring nest boxes in bushland on private properties and conservation reserves throughout the mid-Mallee region of South Australia.

This Saving Western Pygmy Possum Expedition weekend began on Saturday morning, 19th September, with 18 Waterhouse Club members arriving at Meldanda Bush Garden at Cambrai in time for a picnic lunch on a lovely sunny, no-wind, no-flies day. After lunch Steve Donnellan gave us a presentation on the planned project which included the known sites of Western Pygmy Possums with known DNA profiles and corridor vegetation for movement around different temperature zones in South Australia. Don (volunteer box maker) then showed members the nest box kits and how to assemble them with two members at each of the six work stations inserting correct sized screws to preformed panels to complete the nest box. While half of the expeditioners were constructing the nest boxes the other half were given a tour of the extensive Meldanda Bush Garden by Aimee Linke, Mid Murray Landcare.

Sunday morning we had an opportunity to view the community nursery and then drove in convoy to Moorunde Wildlife Reserve where we met Gary Taylor, Entomologist, who took us to their campsite within the reserve and along with volunteer Susan, they shared the history of land donations to make the final reserve area about 7,000 hectares with a population of 3,000 wombats. We installed four nesting boxes near the campsite followed by lunch and another very informative talk by Steve Donnellan about the South Australian State Premier's offer of a generous financial grant to the Museum to assist in a revival program of the Kurna language. This is to be followed by plans for many other indigenous languages.

In the afternoon we drove in convoy up the Centre Track and installed the remaining 16 boxes each side of the track on larger trees with bush vegetation around the base. This installing task included recording the box number, GPS co-ordinates, surrounding vegetation, specific site identification then screwing the nesting box to the tree around a metre above the ground. Gary then took us further north on the track to view some large wombat warrens using limestone ridges as the ceiling. This was the completion of our expedition so with thanks and goodbyes, we left the Reserve through the gate near the Sturt Highway for our journeys home.

Expedition Leaders Tim and Gaye Fischer