

Saving Western Pygmy Possum Expedition Two 17 - 18 April 2021

Expedition Leaders' Report

Professor Steve Donnellan, Chief Research Scientist from the SA Museum 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. The project will span 3 to 5 years and involves Waterhouse Club members as volunteers for assembling, installing and monitoring nest boxes in bushland on private properties and conservation reserves throughout the mid-Mallee region of South Australia. The first of these expeditions, planned for April 2020 was deferred and was instead held over the weekend of 19 and 20 September 2020 which became the first post Covid-19 expedition for the Club.

The second Saving Western Pygmy Possum Expedition began on Saturday morning, 17 April, 2021, with 16 Waterhouse Club members arriving at Paxton Cottages in Burra around 1 pm in time for a lunch, sourced in Adelaide, 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 Lester (volunteer box maker) then showed members the nest box kits and how to assemble them. After the expeditioners had assembled around 40 boxes, the group photo was taken to show the outcome of their efforts and looks of exhilaration on their faces! Only a thankful Pygmy Possum smile is more appealing! Happy hour, drinks and nibbles and a barbecue followed. Meat and salads had been locally sourced and five



volunteers from the Burra Men's Shed did a great job with the cooking. They were rewarded with a generous donation.

Sunday morning the group checked out of their Paxton Cottage rooms after enjoying the breakfasts which had been distributed the night before. A 9:30 departure, in a convoy of 11 vehicles led by Aimee Linke, drove to two prearranged farms around half-an-hour's drive away in the Tothill Range. At the farm of John Neal, 10 nesting boxes were installed at a site which was also the location of the intersection of the Heysen Trail and Lavender Federation Trail. At the nearby Weeroona station, fifth generation, Brenton, welcomed the group and talked about his family's long connection with the location and their conservation involvement. He then led us up into the Tothill Range to locate nesting boxes across a transect of the range which provides a corridor between the Mallee and Flinders Ranges ecosystems. Installation included recording the box number, GPS co-ordinates, surrounding vegetation, specific site identification and photograph, then screwing the nesting box to the tree around a metre above the ground. After the provided (and again locally sourced) picnic lunch under the trees, Steve Donnellan gave a comprehensive talk about how sympathetic the South Australian State Premier is to the Museum's needs and how this has resulted in funds for indigenous language promotion and renewing and greatly expanding the storage facilities of historic items of, not only the museum, but also the state library, art gallery and other history organisations. Special thanks need to go to Margie Heylen, Alastair Dow and Natalie Rollinson for promotion and resourcing our group, to Prof. Steve Donnellan, for support and planning of this Citizen Science Project, to Aimee Linke, Project Manager of Mid Murray Landcare and also to the eager and helpful Waterhouse Club members who so willingly participated.

This short Expedition was very unique as our members again got to make and install nesting boxes. We anticipate doing this 4 or 5 more times over the next few years and would encourage as many people as possible to enjoy this experience.

Tim and Gaye Fischer

