

Working Together

THE first issue of *Pacific Conservation Biology* was published in June 1993 and somehow I missed our 10th anniversary. Maybe I missed it because this is only the final issue of the ninth volume and the first issue of the tenth volume will not appear until June 2004. We missed a year during the first three of publication because it was difficult to get enough good quality papers for three full volumes. All that has changed and *Pacific Conservation Biology* currently receives sufficient papers to keep the Editor busy and reasonably happy, although I would always like more papers and a bit more variety (e.g., papers on conservation genetics, more papers from outside Australia, and particularly papers from the islands north of Australia). There is also more than enough material for us to print an issue every three months, while still being able to publish most of the papers submitted and accepted within 12 months of receipt. I get good feedback on the journal and frequently see papers published in *Pacific Conservation Biology* cited in other journals. Equally encouraging are the inquiries from students for papers and advice, a topic I discussed in my last Editorial (Recher 2003a). To me this means our journal is seen as providing a service to conservation biologists and is presented in ways useful for learning. No doubt there is scope for improvement and the next year should see some helpful changes.

I missed out on getting this done in 2003, so no promises, but I hope 2004 will see the end of volumes overlapping years. That is, all of Volume 10 will be published this year and Volume 11 will commence with the first issue in 2005, thus rectifying a problem created in our first three years of publication. Getting *Pacific Conservation Biology* on to a calendar publication schedule will be helpful for a number of reasons, but two stand out. First, it eliminates the inevitable confusion of "what is the volume year?" and occasional incorrect referencing. Second, it synchronizes *Pacific Conservation Biology* with the other journals promoted through or published by the Society of Conservation Biology (SCB), a society we now have a co-operative working relationship with.

Reaching a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Society of Conservation Biology signals other changes for *Pacific Conservation Biology*. In the "News and Views" section of the Australasian Branch of SCB, Karen Firestone outlines the main points of the MOU. Among the changes starting with Volume 10 is a restructuring of the "Editorial Board" and the expansion of the "Advisory Board". The role of the Editorial Board will remain unchanged. The Associate Editors will continue to provide me, as Senior or Co-ordinating Editor, support in the processing and review of manuscripts. In the past year or so, Drs Peter Cale and John Hunter have contributed significantly to the easing of my workload (very helpful in a year when I moved house and ended formal employment). I would like to take this opportunity to extend them my deepest appreciation. The associates also assist importantly in providing advice on referees, standing in as referees when the refereeing process has dragged on interminably (as it does from time to time), and helping in reaching

decisions on difficult manuscripts. Manuscripts can be difficult for a variety of reasons — disagreement among referees, contentious material, length, and feisty authors are a few among many.

Reaching an understanding with SCB will bring other benefits. It expands our horizons and gives *Pacific Conservation Biology* a pool of conservation biologists to draw upon for support, ideas and papers. It extends our network and is already expanding our readership and circulation. Here, I will again point out (solicit!) that *Pacific Conservation Biology* is a forum for ideas and opinions. I would like to receive many more essays and opinion pieces than I do. Surely some of you have things dealing with conservation biology in the Pacific that you are burning to say — water rights in New South Wales, land clearing in the Northern Territory, the takeover of plantations in New Zealand by Harvard University, rising water levels and sea temperatures in the South Pacific, calls to renew whaling in the Antarctic, the freedom of scientists to speak (I have just had a paper pulled at proof stage because the author was afraid of losing employment if it was published) and global warming are a few off the top of my head that individuals might like to comment on. If so, all you need to do is write the ideas and comments down, and submit the paper. I do review opinion pieces and essays, but there is no censorship; in my world, everyone is entitled to have their ideas and opinions expressed. And, as I explained in my last Editorial, I am as interested in hearing from students, the next generation, as I am from established workers.

On the subject of essays and opinion pieces, I really do not think scientists put enough effort into communicating their ideas. It is fine to publish research based on careful and well-designed experiments and statistical analysis, but it is also important to spend some time and effort in reflecting on what the findings mean in a wider, say social or ethical, context (Recher and Ehrlich 1999). I know we are not trained to do this, but it does not make it any less important. Especially, I hope to receive more of this kind of material from the members of the Australasian Branch of SCB.

There are times when I despair for the human race and its apparent reluctance of make the effort to understand how the environment in which we live and on which we depend actually functions. These times are more than ever balanced by the energy and enthusiasm and willingness to be seen and heard that I see every day from the new generation of conservation biologists (and the continued commitment from more than a few dinosaurs in the fields). Our new association with SCB, like the advent in Australia of WildCountry (Recher 2003b), brings promise for a bright future. I for one look forward to it and the changes it will bring.

Australia needs scientific research reserves

In 1968, I made my first trip to the Nadgee Nature Reserve on the far south coast of New South Wales. My travelling companion was the

mammalogist, John Calaby. John was impressed by the richness of Nadgee and the abundant mammal fauna and told me it had to be one of the most important reserves for nature conservation in Australia. Even I, as a new immigrant to Australia, was impressed by how easy it was to observe wildlife, including the notoriously secretive and nocturnal mammal fauna. Subsequently, Martin Schulz, working on bats with me at the Australian Museum, showed the mammal fauna was much richer than even John Calaby imagined, with a rich variety of bat species added to the rodents and marsupials he and I had observed.

As a result of that trip in 1968, I established a research plot on the Nadgee River at 'arry's 'ut' to study a community of native small mammals (mainly *Antechinus stuartii*, *A. swainsonii*, *Rattus fuscipes* and *R. lutreolus*). Shortly after, Allan Newsome and colleagues at CSIRO established research programmes on a much wider range of native mammals at Nadgee and in 1979, I commenced formal studies of heathland birds. Remarkably, we have managed to keep these programmes active until the present. Dan Lunney, of the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service, assumed responsibility for monitoring the mammal plot at Nadgee River, but I managed to sample the heathland avifauna until 2000. Not only have these studies contributed important information on the ecology of native mammals and birds, they have been central to the development of our understanding of how Australia's eucalypt forest and heath faunas respond to fire. What makes them especially valuable is their duration — upwards now of 36 years of data are available. If used properly (they are not), they would be of immense benefit to conservation management not only at Nadgee, but elsewhere in eastern Australia.

The productivity and importance of the research at Nadgee would not have surprised John Calaby. On that 1968 trip, he and I discussed (actually I just listened) the need for field studies of native mammals and the role Nadgee could play in such studies. The potential of Nadgee for research and the importance of having areas such as Nadgee dedicated to field research of native plants and animals was recognized a decade before John and I visited Nadgee in 1968. Allan Strom, Chief Guardian of Fauna in New South Wales, and Allan Fox, also of the old Flora and Fauna Panel, saw Nadgee not only as an important nature reserve, but as a site for research, the results of which they could apply to their wildlife conservation initiatives throughout the State (Fox 2002). As a result of their vision, Nadgee not only became a reserve, it became the site for the longest running fauna studies in Australia and some of the longest in the world. Unfortunately, all this has changed.

In 1994, Nadgee was declared a Wilderness under the New South Wales *Wilderness Act* and access by researchers has been progressively throttled (Recher 2002a,b). The new Plan of Management for the Nadgee Nature Reserve (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, June 2003) makes it clear that the kinds of pioneering long-term and intensive studies

initiated at Nadgee by myself, Allan Newsome, Dan Lunney and others will be discouraged and our work phased out (if nothing else, age will ensure this). New South Wales, Australia and the World will therefore lose an irreplaceable and invaluable research asset in what was a political decision to pander to the green lobby (Recher 2002a,b; Recher and Lunney 2003).

Making Nadgee a Wilderness has come at a great cost to biological research and conservation in Australia. The idea of Strom and Fox for a dedicated research reserve (albeit with recreation access) at Nadgee has been rejected, but this does not make their vision any less important. Australia must have natural areas where both pure and applied studies of native plants and animals, as well as ecological processes and functions, can be studied without fear of managerial and political interference or the termination of projects long before they are completed. Too many field studies in Australia are sited on lands where research is at best viewed as one of many uses and at worst as a nuisance to be tolerated. Places are needed where research can be given security of tenure, habitats, ecosystems and biota manipulated, and to where researchers in 100 or 500 years can return and investigate really long-term changes at sites with solid baseline data. Conservation Biologists need to begin to lobby to obtain such sites and ensure that they are given real security of tenure through Parliamentary protection at state level and vesture in an independent Board of Management with the imprimatur of a body such as the National Academy of Sciences. Only in this way can we be certain that important research areas will be secure from political whim and the ignorance of land managers and green lobby groups.

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¹Named by David Hope, the reserve's ranger, after Harry Redman, a frequent visitor to Nadgee who worked closely with David in establishing the reserve's infrastructure.