

CPSG Australasia: 2016-17 Regional Report

Richard Jakob-Hoff and Caroline Lees

For the period October 2016– September 2017

Conservation Planning for Species

Bellinger River Snapping Turtle (BRST) Conservation Planning Workshop

The Bellinger River snapping turtle (*Myuchelys georgesi*), a freshwater turtle with a very limited distribution in coastal north-eastern New South Wales (NSW) suffered a dramatic virus-associated mass mortality in early 2015 resulting in the loss of most of the adult population. Its estimated population was reduced from up to 4,500 individuals to 200-300 predominantly juveniles turtles. Now listed as Critically Endangered, an insurance captive breeding program was established and, in November 2016, CPSG Australasia was asked by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) to facilitate a conservation planning workshop hosted by Taronga Zoo and involving 16 experts from eight organisations. The workshop included assessments of all known risks to BRSTs and was the first workshop in which the IUCN-SSC/OIE DRA process was fully incorporated into CPSG's broader conservation planning approach. Organisers said *"the workshop provided us with a clear and logical means for working through the challenges facing the turtle. The opportunity to have a facilitated process with the species experts all in the same room with us was invaluable"*.

Integrated meta-population management for mainland Mala

Mainland Mala (*Lagorchestes hirsutus*) – extinct on mainland Australia after wild fire wiped out the last free-living population in the early 1990s. The population now persists in a number of fenced, pest-free enclosures and on an island off the coast of Western Australia. Sites are isolated and spread across three States and Territories. A three-day workshop in Alice Springs in 2015 brought together the National Mala Recovery team, representatives of Traditional Owners and other experts, to build a vision for the future of Mala on mainland Australia and to forge a plan for realising that vision through integrated, meta-population management that accounts for environmental, demographic and genetic risks. In 2016-2017, PVA models were used to identify a series of viability-related thresholds to guide ongoing management decisions. CBSG Australasia continues to work with the recovery team to move this plan to implementation. A grant has been secured from the Government to implement priority animal movements between remaining populations and work on immediate priorities is underway.

Building a future for the Greater Bilby

The Greater Bilby (*Lagorchestes hirsutus*) – formerly widespread on mainland Australia, now thought to be reduced to small isolated pockets across its former range due to introduced cats and foxes.

In 2015 The Greater Bilby was the subject of a large stakeholder inclusive planning workshop, organised by the Save the Bilby Fund and facilitated by CPSG. Paul Andrew represents CPSG on the recovery team charged with driving forward the resulting plan, and the Branch is currently involved in the development of a meta-population plan for the integrated management of captive, fenced and wild bilbies.

Strategic Committee Meeting

On 6-7th April 2017 Auckland Zoo hosted the CBSG mid-year Strategic Committee meeting. The small group of participants (Onnie Byers, Anne Baker, Bob Lacy, Bengt Holst, Mike Jordan, Jonathan Wilcken, Caroline Lees and Richard Jakob-Hoff) met formally for one day at the Zoo and informally during a further two days while touring nearby islands (Tiri Tiri Matangi and Rotoroa) that feature strongly in the Zoo's *in situ* conservation work. The formal meeting included discussion of the roll out of the name change to CPSG, planning for the Annual Meeting, SSC planning tool gaps, conservation needs assessments and a discussion on an approach to evaluating CPSG's conservation impact led by Evaluator Maggie Jakob-Hoff.

Contributions to planning for conservation organisations

Hauraki Gulf Planning Needs Review

On Monday 10th April following the Strategic Committee Meeting Onnie Byers, Bob Lacy, Caroline Lees and Richard Jakob-Hoff met with Auckland Zoo managers and invited representatives of the Department of Conservation (DOC) and Auckland Council to explore the potential for a strategic, collaborative approach to wildlife management in the Hauraki Gulf situated to the north of Auckland and home to several of New Zealand's most significant conservation sites. The outcome was broad agreement that there are significant gains to be made in taking such an approach and that multi-stakeholder workshop led by DOC and the Council and facilitated by CPSG would be the best approach.

Species360

Erna Walraven provided facilitation support to a Species360 strategic planning meeting in Perth.

Bali Starling Planning Meeting

Paul Andrew represented CPSG at the Bali Starling and Asian Song Bird Crisis workshops in Indonesia and continued to represent CPSG Australasia on the Board of Devil Ark (the main contributor to the Tasmanian Devil Insurance Program).

Acknowledgements

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We also thank Auckland Zoo for its continued support of Dr. Richard Jakob-Hoff in his role as Co-Convenor CBSG Australasia.

Publications and Reports

Jakob-Hoff R, Lees CM, McGilvray G, Ruming S, Chessman B, Gilchrist S, Rose K, Spencer R and Hall J (Eds), 2017, Status Review, Disease Risk Analysis and Conservation Action Plan for the Bellingher River Snapping Turtle. IUCN SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group, Apple Valley, MN.