

# HUNTING FOR CONSERVATION

ISSUE 2 – JUNE 2023

**Great results  
at Gaynor Swamp**

**WET works benefit  
native flora and fauna**

**Hunter-conservationists  
honoured with OAMs**

**Field & Game Australia  
on a mission to preserve  
and protect**

# The original conservationists

## Field & Game Australia

Field & Game Australia has a long and credible history of wildlife and habitat management. We seek to create, rehabilitate and preserve wetland environments for the benefit of the native flora and fauna that depend on these places to survive.

We also seek to improve habitat so that we may continue our sustainable harvest of free-range, healthy protein for our tables, and firmly believe that hunting in general and native game bird hunting in particular not only has a place in our community but is integral to the survival of hundreds of species, not just native game ducks or stubble quail.

For the uninitiated, the practice of hunting may seem a little confronting – but we hope that those who take the time to understand the tangible and immediate benefits that our efforts and our members contribute to protecting and conserving the environments we value so dearly, will see the enormous benefit our activities deliver to the health and wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of Australians each and every year.

Field & Game Australia is a legitimate and verified steward in the conservation of wetland and other related habitats for sustainable use by its communities, which include but are not limited to hunters, naturalists, and recreationalists who seek an

authentic connection with nature. Through our own acquired wetland reserves and in collaboration with authorities in the preservation of State Game Reserves, Field & Game Australia's legacy has endured since 1958.

Field & Game Australia freely accepts its custodial responsibilities for these resources, because current and future generations benefit when we do our job well.



## Wetlands Environmental Taskforce

Field & Game Australia's public conservation fund Wetlands Environmental Taskforce (WET) Trust was formed in 2002 with the purpose of purchasing, restoring and maintaining wetland habitats.

Wildlife scientists admit that the loss of habitat is the single greatest threat to all native birds – and Victoria has lost more than 37% of its wetland areas to activities such as land clearing and draining since European settlement. About 90% of this loss has occurred on private land. If not for the tireless work of Field & Game Australia, WET and countless volunteers since 1958, many more areas would have been lost

through commercial development or total abandonment.

In Victoria, several species of native game birds including the hardhead, blue-wing shoveler, blue-billed duck and the musk duck have been considerably affected through the alteration or loss of habitat, reflecting a continuing need for our wetland restoration and conservation programs.

Our role as an environmental advocate and champion of wetland preservation is demonstrated through more than 20 wetland environments that we care for. In fact, 11 of Victoria's wetlands are so

important that they are internationally recognised under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Victoria's Ramsar sites are home to as many as 1,300 species of native plants and 450 of native animals, including more than 100 species of waterbirds.

Our wetlands require long-term ongoing conservation efforts from our dedicated hunter-conservationists, and this work must continue if they are to endure.







# Stepping up for the environment

**Field & Game Australia not only works for our members whose recreational activities involve a firearm.**

While the interests of many of our members include duck hunting and/or clay target shooting, there are also those who strive to conserve, rehabilitate, and improve our natural environment – not just for the native flora and fauna that depend upon it for their survival, but for the enjoyment of other members and the wider community as well.

FGA's public fund Wetlands Environmental Taskforce was formed in 2002 with the purpose of purchasing, reviving and maintaining wetland habitats, rehabilitating ecosystems and restoring biodiversity for the benefit of the myriad species of flora and fauna that call these beautiful places home – and providing a lasting legacy that can be enjoyed by generations to come.

While WET's work has been wide-ranging, few places have seen an impact as spectacular as that which can be seen at Heart Morass, near Sale in Gippsland.

The first large parcel of land at 'The Heart' was purchased by WET in 2006 – and with ownership came the full access that made undertaking the required work possible. The land had been worn down by a century of stock grazing and suffered salinity issues from saltwater intrusion – but today it exists as a shining example of what can

be achieved with a passion for the natural world, foresight, dedication – and volunteer manpower.

In the years since 2006, more land has been purchased at The Heart – and more than 66,000 native trees have been planted; 20 tonnes of pest fish species (carp) have been removed; and seeds have been collected from more than 50 native plant species for revegetation.

While Heart Morass is one of the largest projects undertaken by WET, other projects include the Australian National Hunting Archive, where the role of hunting in Australia's history and culture is the central focus of a large library and archive; and the project at Connewarre, where Field & Game Australia members have devoted hundreds of hours to construct a wetland centre for the purposes of research into wetland habitats, waterfowl nesting and breeding habits, as well as educating hunters and the wider public alike on the benefits of wetland habitats and hunter-led conservation efforts.

## Partners in environmental rehabilitation

While WET is already helping to improve habitat for our native animals and plants, it can also help businesses to lower their impact on the natural world through environmental rehabilitation.

Making a positive impact on the environment is not only good for our natural

assets – it's good for business too and may prove an enticing element in attracting new customers or retaining old ones. With "clean and green" being one of the catchphrases of the decade and climate change regularly in the news, it's never been more important for businesses to have accountability within this space.

One of our valued partners – Beretta Australia – knows the worth of such accountability and has been active in working with Field & Game Australia and WET in constructing the 1.5km-long Beretta Observation Trail at Connewarre Wetlands Centre near Geelong. Projects such as this fit with Beretta's worldwide push to be more active in the conservation arena, with Beretta Australia's managing director Luca Scribani Rossi having previously spoken about the shared values and ideals of Beretta and Field & Game Australia.

"We see Field & Game Australia as a perfect partner because they share those conservation values embraced by Beretta around the world."

If you'd like more information about how WET can help your business, phone Glenn Falla on 0427 374 334 or email [glenn.falla@fieldandgame.com.au](mailto:glenn.falla@fieldandgame.com.au)

## Donating to WET

Wetlands Environmental Taskforce Public Fund is a registered charity. Donations are tax-deductible and can be made by phoning the Field & Game Australia national office on (03) 5799 0960.



# Labours of love rewarded

Long years of hard work and dedication to the wetlands they love have resulted in well-deserved accolades for two life members of Field & Game Australia – with Geelong Field & Game’s conservation officer Tony Leen and Sale Field & Game’s Gary ‘Pud’ Howard both having been awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for their services to conservation and the environment.

## Tony Leen OAM

Tony, 75, is a keen hunter and conservationist whose involvement with the preservation of his local wetlands began about 1980 when he realised that farming and other practices were having a detrimental effect on the places he loves.

“I would travel on hunting trips and realised the significance of water for our native ducks and other water birds,” Tony said.

He said as a regular attendee at Field & Game meetings where hunting opportunities were discussed, it always came back to water levels being the driver for thriving game bird populations.

“Reedy Lake in the Connemawarre State Game Reserve was my main local hunting area, where experiencing its water levels taught me a lot ... being involved in hunting ducks also rekindled my love for birds, especially wetland species.”

Tony purchased land at Lake Connemawarre with the intention of improving the area for the benefit of native flora and fauna, and then the decades of hard work began in earnest.

“My greatest achievement was the creation of Hospital Swamps,” Tony said.

He said the area was transformed from one that occasionally flooded, to a controlled wetland environment.

While instrumental in the works undertaken at Connemawarre, Tony said they were not just his to claim, and that many others had helped bring the now Ramsar-listed wetlands up to the standard they currently enjoy.



*Geelong Field & Game conservation officer Tony Leen's efforts for the environment have been awarded with a Medal of the Order of Australia.*

“The project team consisted of a variety of people with a range of trades and skills in industry and construction,” Tony said.

“Ian McLoughlin was the surveyor who had a brilliant mind; John Leen could create and construct anything.”

Also heavily involved were project administrator and labourer Graham Campbell, concrete construction expert Normie Cobb, and all-rounders Maurie Hazel, Cliff Forster, Richard Phillips and Henry Hobson – not forgetting those others who also chipped in with sponsorship and discounted material supplies.

“I am very proud of my OAM, but more so for my fellow associates at Field & Game and Wetlands Environmental Taskforce (WET),” Tony said.

“It’s great to see a hunter be awarded; hunters are some of the early original conservationists.”

Looking to the future, there are further plans in the wind for Connemawarre.

“We are currently working on improvements to the Connemawarre WET Project with water control structures, and hope in time to be able to pump and regulate water in the drier years,” Tony said.

Meanwhile, the usual maintenance work needs to be carried out, such as weed and track management. Tony said Parks Victoria – whose jurisdiction covers the wetlands and game reserves – had very little budget for maintenance and improvements. “So, I guess we, as the main user group, will have to step forward,” he said.

“My plan is to spend more time – now that I am retired – with communicating with companies and private wetland owners for funding for habitat improvement and to obtain money from carbon offsets.”





Gary 'Pud' Howard, pictured surveying his beloved Heart Morass, has been recognised with an OAM for services to conservation and the environment.

## Gary Howard OAM

Among the recipients of the 2022 Queen's Birthday Honours was an unassuming bloke from Gippsland.

Gary Howard – known to most as simply "Pud" – has been working for the environment for much of his life. From planting trees and treating weeds to water monitoring, project planning and implementation, offering strategic input and everything in between, this Life Member of Field & Game Australia, Life Member of Victorian Field & Game, and Life Member and more than 50-year veteran of the Sale Field & Game branch has also served on the Victorian Hunting Advisory Committee and is a tireless worker for Wetlands Environmental Taskforce.

Gary is a driving force for all facets of the conservation effort and deserves every bit of recognition that has come his way – not that he'd ever admit it, preferring instead to acknowledge the efforts of the organisations as a whole and the other hard-working volunteers within their ranks.

Gary's passion for the environment and especially our wetlands, has seen him play an instrumental role in the restoration and rehabilitation of the Heart Morass wetland, near Sale, since 2006.

The 1800-hectare Heart Morass site was purchased through a partnership between

Field & Game Australia, the Hugh D.T. Williamson Foundation and West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority in 2006 and has been a pet project of Gary's since that time.

The day we spoke, Gary had been busy slashing weeds at the Heart; and, having uncovered another job that needed doing in the form of a swathe of thistles while he was at it, thought he'd better spray those out, too. It was just a typical example of Gary's work ethic – if he sees a job that needs doing, he just gets in there and does it.

Asked what he thought of his OAM, the response was pure 'Pud'.

"Well, it's an honour," Gary said, "but has anything changed? Nope, I'm still here spraying thistles and slashing weeds," he said with a laugh.

"But it is an honour ... I've been very humbled by the amount of support I've had from people from all walks of life – and people, in a lot of cases, that I haven't seen or spoken to for many many years have contacted me – a lot of old Field & Game people from the time when I was president ... which is fantastic."

Having been involved in conservation efforts for so long and having had a hand in so many projects, does he have one that stands out or that he's most proud of?

"It's a combination (of projects), but ... I suppose I'd have to say, now, it's got to be the Heart Morass," he said.

"I was instrumental in getting the ball rolling on the purchase of it and been involved all the way through ... at all levels, ever since we started," Gary said.

"The proof's in the pudding when you look at the properties and see what's happened in the way of change for the better and water quality – the Heart Morass has probably got to be the standout one."

But of course, projects of this size aren't just a one-man show, and Gary is quick to praise the efforts of those who've worked alongside him to make them happen.

"(The Heart Morass) highlights what duck hunters do, and can do," he said.

"This award, to me, also recognises the work of all the volunteers that have worked with me on this project – and all the other projects that I've been involved in – it's recognition for them, it's recognition for the association (FGA) itself, duck hunters and what we do in the conservation field.

"It acknowledges the work we do, and we achieve – and I think that's very important."







# A huge gain for Gaynor Swamp



*Rick Bertoli, Emma Cox, Riley Cox and Gary Wythe with a newly installed hen house.*

Field & Game Australia and its members are ever mindful of the role that conservation plays in ensuring that hunting remains a sustainable recreational pursuit for generations to come.

FGA's hunter-conservationist volunteers have worked tirelessly since the organisation's inception in 1958 to conserve, preserve and rehabilitate wetlands so that native species may thrive, and the wider community may enjoy all that these special places have to offer.

Earlier this year, hunter-conservationists from Shepparton and Rushworth Field &

Game branches delayed their duck season preparations to pick up their tools and successfully complete stage two of a three-stage project at Gaynor Swamp Wildlife Reserve near Corop in north-east Victoria.

To celebrate World Wetlands Day, the volunteers took part in the planned working bee under Parks Victoria's ParkConnect program, during which 10 nesting boxes were

installed that were made by students from Berry Street School with materials supplied by the Lighthouse Project, along with 10 hen houses built by Field & Game volunteers at the manufacturing site in Nagambie.

The boxes provide secure sites for waterbirds (and sometimes other native animals!) to nest and rear their young, away from predators such as foxes and cats.





*Shepparton Field and Game members ferry the new hen houses to their location.*

The collaboration with Berry Street School aims to capture the interest of students who, for one reason or another, have become disengaged with the mainstream education system. The project is something tangible where they can see their efforts making an impact in a positive way.

"It is really exciting to see the students' hard work pay off. I am really looking forward to sharing with these kids the data we collect during stage three of the project," Shepparton branch's conservation coordinator David Cox said.

"What is even better, is that the Lighthouse Project and Berry Street School can see the benefits this project has had on these students.

"The school has received another \$3000 grant to construct more nesting boxes later in the year to be used for future projects," he said.

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*Riley Cox and Gary Wythe installing a hen house.*





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Emma Cox, a teacher from the area and member of Shepparton Field & Game, also took part in the day.

"The most rewarding part of this project is that students who are disengaged from mainstream schooling are being provided an engaging and real-life conservation project that is going to make a difference to waterfowl in our area," Emma said.

"This project has been so powerful for building a sense of community in the Greater Shepparton Region. Shepparton Field & Game are growing significant connections with other organisations including Berry Street School, the Lighthouse Project and Parks Victoria. We can't wait to continue these partnerships."

On the day, Rushworth Field & Game

members also cleaned up a trailer load of broken bricks and rubble that had been dumped along the main access track.

"In a perfect world, we would not have a need for clean-up days such as this one," David said.

"However, I am grateful for our trusted volunteers who are helping look after our wetlands. Of course, it is also an excuse for a chat and a barbecue! We have formed quite a social little group."

Two weeks after the completion of the working bee, Emma and fellow Shepparton branch member Gary Wythe returned to Gaynor Swamp to complete the Field & Game Annual Waterfowl Count.

"Gaynor Swamp has a lot of grass around the edge, and it was quite hot out, so I was

pretty mindful of snakes," Emma said.

"But once in the actual wetland it was quite relaxing to get back out on the water and do our part for the count. We counted close to 1500 ducks, mainly grey teal as well as a whole range of other waterbirds.

"We had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that day to see a mother brolga and her chick feeding around one of our hen houses. Half an hour Gary and I just sat in our skiffs and watched, taking her in. I'll never forget that," she said.

"Being a hunter conservationist isn't just all about the hunting, or the ducks. I don't think many people our age would have seen a brolga up close, let alone a mother and her chick checking out our organisation's hen houses!"

*Rushworth Field and Game members cleaning up dumped rubble.*





Shepparton Field & Game volunteers prepare the hen houses for installation.



Rushworth Field and Game members installing a nesting box.





# Wounding reduction benefits birds and hunters

The Victorian Government's Sustainable Hunting Action Plan 2016-20 (SHAP) and the 2021-24 plan (SHAP 2.0) – in which Field & Game Australia have been actively involved – seek to grow sustainable and safe hunting in Victoria and the associated environmental, social and economic benefits. The plans have included a focus on developing wounding reduction action plans for game bird species.

In accordance with SHAP, the Victorian Game Management Authority formed a working group which plays a pivotal role in providing expert advice to the GMA, ensuring the successful development and implementation of wounding reduction action plans throughout Victoria.

As part of its commitment to sustainable hunting, Field & Game Australia fully supports and promotes the Victorian Game Management Authority's game bird wounding reduction campaign, Reduce Wounding.

The campaign aims to educate and equip hunters with the skills and knowledge that will allow them to be efficient and effective harvesters of game birds while reducing wounding to a minimum.

At its core, the campaign encourages hunters to: Regularly practice; have an effective retrieval strategy; not shoot beyond 30 metres; use decoys and calls; have the correct loads and chokes; and recognise that every shot matters.

By keeping hunters well-informed and regularly assessed on effective hunting practices and methods, we can significantly reduce the likelihood of bird wounding incidents.

Taking the plan a step further in recognising the significance of monitoring its progress, a robust waterfowl wounding monitoring program has been put in place which aims to track and evaluate the effectiveness of implemented actions in reducing the incidence of game bird wounding.

Field & Game Australia is proud to contribute to these important initiatives, working collaboratively with the Victorian

Government, the GMA, and other stakeholders to foster sustainable hunting practices that prioritise both animal welfare and conservation.

Together, we strive to strike a workable balance between the traditions of hunting and the preservation of our wildlife resources.

## Regularly practice

Off-season practice on clay targets improves proficiency. It's also a great way for newer hunters to meet more experienced practitioners of the craft and learn from them.

## Effective retrieval strategy

Use a well-trained gun dog to retrieve the birds you have shot, and put a bit of thought into where you are going to hunt. Try to avoid heavily vegetated areas where the dog may find it difficult to locate a downed bird.

Wind direction, where the sun is in the sky, and water flow are also important considerations when formulating a retrieval strategy.

## Don't shoot beyond 30 metres

When setting decoys in the field, step out your maximum shooting skills distance from the hide and place a decoy (decoy marker). Place the remainder of the decoys between your hide and the decoy marker and do not shoot beyond the marker. This means you only hunt within your shooting skills distance.

Practice your distance estimation skills in the field and check your estimation with a

range finder. Use landmarks such as trees to assist you in judging height and distance, and avoid the temptation to pass shoot. If they birds didn't finish by cupping their wings and putting their feet down ready to land, they weren't convinced or committed to it.

## Use decoys and duck calls

Bringing the birds to within your effective shooting skills distance through the use of decoys and duck calls is imperative to success. When done right, these things combined with proper concealment and camouflage are the key to a successful hunt.

## Correct loads and chokes

Knowing how your combination of selected chokes and loads is performing is a benefit to you as a hunter. Selecting the correct combination will improve your success and help you obtain clean and ethical kills. It takes very little effort to experiment a little and find the correct combination through performing a few pattern tests on paper, cardboard, or a pattern plate at your local gun club.

## Every shot matters

Selective shooting takes discipline. It's hard for some to pass up an opportunity, fearing that it might be the only chance they get, but often you will find another opportunity will occur and perhaps present a better result.

Having the patience to pass up birds and wait for the more perfect shot, or demonstrating that type of restraint, will without doubt reduce wounding.



# Seeking better understanding of stubble quail

During the 2022 stubble quail season, the Victorian Game Management Authority piloted a new research project investigating the age and sex (demographics) of stubble quail harvested by licensed hunters in Victoria.

Licensed stubble quail hunters mailed wing samples of harvested stubble quail to the GMA for analysis. The wing samples were then assessed by expert wildlife biologists who examined the plumage characteristics of each wing to determine the age of the birds.

Results from the 2022 stubble quail wing collection program show that approximately 60 per cent of the quail harvested were adults and 40 per cent were immature. There was no difference in the sex ratio of stubble quail harvested and assessed from the 2022 season.

Further data collected through the program showed that an average of 8.7 stubble quail were harvested per day, per hunter, during the 2022 season. Approximately 40 per cent of stubble quail were harvested on improved pasture and 60 per cent on stubble. All of the stubble quail assessed were harvested on private property and were hunted with the aid of gundogs.

In time, this annual data will contribute to a better understanding of the demographics and reproductive rates of harvested stubble quail and will assist in the development of sustainable management practices in Victoria.

Similar demographic research projects on game species are conducted around the world, including in the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Denmark.

## How are hunters involved?

During the 2023 Victorian stubble quail season, the GMA continued its research into the age and sex (demographics) of stubble quail harvested by licenced hunters in Victoria.

Licensed hunters were invited to contribute to this important research by sending harvested stubble quail wings to the GMA for analysis.



The GMA then sent each hunter a package with instructions on how to participate, including information on how to visually identify the male and female birds and how to remove the wings. They were also provided with reply-paid envelopes in which to send the wings back to the GMA free of charge.



*Hunters who indicated they would like to participate in the GMA's 2023 stubble quail wing collection program were mailed a package containing instructions on how to participate, including information on how to remove the wings.*



# FIELD & GAME AUSTRALIA

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