

CLOSERange

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Rearranging the Rural Landscape

“It is unlikely that protected areas will be able to conserve biodiversity if they are surrounded by degraded environments that limit gene flow, alter nutrient and water cycles and produce regional and global climate change that may lead to the final disappearance of these ‘island parks’. Protected areas need to be part of broader regional approaches to land management”.

Parks for Life: A report of the IV World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas 1992

The wonderful decision to remove cattle grazing from the Alpine National Park perhaps asks further questions about the accepted paradigms of land use across rural Victoria and indeed Australia. “Thus Australia has an exceptionally fragile environment, damaged in a multitude of ways incurring enormous economic costs. Some of these costs stem from past damage that is now irreversible, such as some of the forms of land degradation and the extinctions of native species. Most of the types of damage are still going on today, or even increasing or accelerating”.(Diamond)

Agriculture in Australia is worth some 4 billion dollars in export earnings, well behind the big earners of mining and tourism. The books do not seem to add up when we look at the costs to the environment and the recovery costs of agriculture. The current estimates to the run agriculture every year is a \$373 million for animal pests, \$600 million for flies, and ticks of livestock, \$200 million for a pasture mite, \$2.5 billion for other insect pests, over \$3 billion for weeds. Not to mention the explosive costs of erosion and salinity to the true values of our soils. (Diamond)

It turns out that 80% of Australia’s Agricultural profits are derived from less than 0.8% of its agricultural land, virtually all of it in the south-western corner, on the south coast around Adelaide, in the south-eastern corner, and in eastern QLD...Most of Australia’s remaining agriculture is in effect a mining operation that does not add to Australia’s wealth but merely converts environmental capital of soil and native vegetation irreversibly into cash (Diamond)

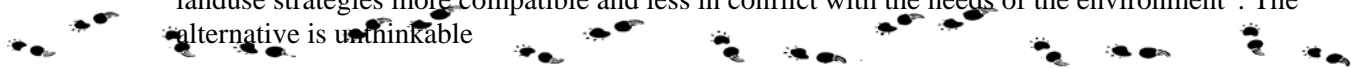
It has been further suggested that maybe the Goyder line for agriculture is moving further south and east. Peter Cullen professor emeritus of the University of Canberra and leader of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists has suggested that “as much as 10% of Australian land under primary production was unviable...These regions are the ones with their hands up for drought relief..There are many areas that are normally quite OK but every now and then and put their hands up (for drought relief). But the ones that require (drought relief) two to three years out of every ten, it seems to me we should be saying they probably shouldn’t be there in the first place...the land could be turned over to less intensive pasture or taken permanently out of cropping rotation.” (Weekend Australian 28/5/05)

Michael Archer and Bob Beale in their book ‘Going Native’ call for “ a kind of revolution...towards ecologically sustainable development...a society that lives as though it truly intends to stay forever, rather than just a bunch of blow-ins pillaging whatever they can...by looking at ways of making current landuse strategies more compatible and less in conflict with the needs of the environment”. The alternative is unthinkable

Collapse. How societies chosed to fail or Survive by Jared Diamond (2005)



News
of the
new
VRA
Team



Presidents Report. August 2005

A few words from the President

Hi everyone

Well, my first proper presidents report – very exciting...

First and foremost I want to thank Elaine Thomas for her commitment and hard work over the last few years. Elaine has really set the association up to head into the future with new goals and direction, enthusiastic members and some money in the bank. Elaine and I have worked closely together over the last couple of years and not only is she a valued friend but have always kept us all rational, practical and focussed - something that I hope will continue.

Our new committee (see below) has got into things already with our first committee meeting held at Churchill Island last month. The meeting venue and lunch was graciously provided by the Phillip Island Nature Parks and hosted by one of our new committee members, Pete Cleary. A number of areas to progress arose from the meeting including a new look CloseRange, some potential commercial sponsorship opportunities, next years IRF Congress, our financial strategy and improving membership. On this last point the VRA had a room at the last Parks Victoria Staff Conference and Awards Day at which we had many enquiries, some memberships renewed and a couple of brand new members – thanks very much to Felicity Brooke who organised the booth.

There are a number of areas for us to get involved in over the next 18 months – locally, nationally and internationally. We have contributed submissions to issues such as alpine grazing and will continue to involve ourselves and make comment on local issues that are important to us. What issues do we get involved in? It's hard to make a blanket decision so we need to take it issue by issue and ensure that whatever it is, it is something we understand and is relevant to our objectives and charter. The good thing is that the VRA is recognised as a key stakeholder by many and we will work hard to build on that.

Internationally we have the International Ranger Federation 5th World Congress in Scotland next June. This will be an amazing experience for all who attend and I encourage you become a part of this three yearly event. The VRA will be sponsoring a couple of delegates and also hope to sponsor an international ranger to attend. There are also potential links with rangers in Indonesia being explored with possible opportunities for members to work on projects in both Lombok and Kalimantan. I will keep you updated as things progress.

Don't forget we are an organisation of volunteers so what we do whether locally or internationally completely depend on the interests and enthusiasm of the members – so get involved.

Fiona Smith
President

The new committee :

President – Fiona Smith

Vice-President – Andy Nixon

Secretary – Sam Nester

Treasurer – Ion Maher

CloseRange Editors – Glen Jameson, Miles Stewart-Howie

Membership Secretary – Annie Leschen

Elected Representatives – Elaine Thomas, Sean Willmore, Peter Cleary, Corrina James and Libby Jude.



Ranger Experiences in North America

Let the Hoodoo Cast its Spell

Tamara Karner, Ranger Marysville



Hoodoo – 1. pinnacle or odd shaped rock left standing by the forces of erosion. 2. To cast a spell

Hoodoo’s of Bryce Canyon

1. Ancient sedimentation: rivers and streams deposit iron-rich limy sediment in an ancient fresh water lake system.
2. Deformation and uplift pull apart, move and tilt layers exposing older layers
3. Differential erosion: water erodes, scouring, abrading and gullying occur. Softer older layers are loosened and are carried away. As water expands and freezes within cracks layers peel off and carve out vertical hoodoos.

Bryce Canyon National Park is famous for its hoodoos and it was one of my favourite parks in Utah. I hadn’t heard much about Bryce Canyon except the “you have to go there!” from other travellers that had actually ventured out of LA, Vegas and the Grand Canyon Area. Renting a car is the best way to get to the park as it is in southern Utah miles and miles from anywhere. We decided to stay in Cedar City about an hour west of the park and visit for the day.

What impressed me about the park?

1. Friendly happy people on the gate that whisked me in with one swipe of my National Parks Pass. Great value at US\$50 and allows you into hundreds of parks many times over for the year.
2. I receive a park planner in newspaper form. It has all the information and services, ranger-led activities, maps and walking track info and some interesting articles about how Bryce Canyon was formed and park management issues faced by the park. Fantastic!
3. Parking at the visitors centre! What a novelty in mid-summer to roll up and find a park spot. There is even the option to park outside the park and ride the free shuttle in if you don’t want the hassle.
4. From the car park a free shuttle bus with a knowledgeable driver takes visitors round to the key viewing areas of the canyon.
5. Canyon viewing areas were clean and safe and I know out of the rangers control, but the view was magnificent, (this is coming from a geologist) those rocks are something else!
6. The walking tracks around the rim of the canyon were well maintained, signposted and there were even interps boards. Wildflowers were in bloom, wildlife was just naturally posing for all my photos, the weather was stinking hot and there were visitors everywhere. Coincidentally 1.7 million people visit the park annually.
7. Although there were heaps of visitors the facilities (like loos) were a plenty, the shuttle buses came every 15 minutes, there were public phones, camping sites, lodging (cabins) food services, showers



and laundry, post office, ATM, internet... the list goes on.

Bryce Canyon National Park is definitely worth a look if you find yourself in Utah.



... For more information www.nps.gov/brca

Experiences in Africa

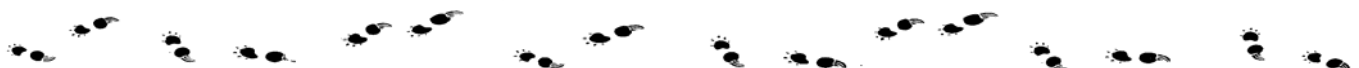
From the King's Hunters to Park Rangers by Peter Cleary

Kibali National Park is nestled in the rainforests of Uganda and boasts 13 species of primates. It is famous for its populations of chimpanzees and the ranger-led tours to track down our closest cousins, proved to be a history lesson as well as an exciting experience.

Overlanding through Africa is the essence of adventure. As independent travellers, sourcing correct information about when and where buses depart from and pushing the boundaries of personal space and comfort become part of the journey. To get to Kibali N.P. involved catching the 4:50am bus, occupying the last few seats in the back, as it was the only bus going that day. Ten minutes after we were on board the whole bus was packed to the doors, with people sleeping on their feet. At 11:00 we got off at Mbarara, to transfer on to a postal van for the next 5 hour leg of the trip. This was a smoother ride as this vehicle had suspension and was well regulated ie. the price was fixed so an attempt to negotiate a half decent fare was not required and passengers were not crammed in until no more could physically fit.

Munching on bananas and cashews bought from local venders who besiege any bus that comes to a halt, we crossed the equator and passed through Queen Elizabeth National Park spying giraffes, warthogs and bushbucks in the nearby scrub. For our final leg, we transferred to a mutatu (which is a minibus that serves to carry twice as many visitors as it can as it pumps plumes of exhaust smoke into the air) and arrived at the park in total darkness; compounded by the fact that it was a new moon. The driver dropped us off and stated the campground was 200 metres up the track. Our guide book had not mentioned anything about leopards in this immediate area, so we confidently trundled off.

We were greeted by the ranger on night watch who seemed delighted to find 2 backpackers wandering in at that time of night and boy we were delighted to see him, because local knowledge is priceless in the wilds of Africa. He asked if we were hungry but being quite bugged after the long day of travel, we really desired some rest. We were glad to arrive at the well-grassed area to pitch our tent. We did take him up on the offer



of his lantern to aid us and as long as we remembered to drop it back in the morning, he was happy too.

After a deep sleep, we were woken to a like a lot of rustling outside our tent. A little curious to see what our new home was like and who was about, I was amazed to see a troop of baboons frolicking all around us. I turned to Michelle dozing, "Check this out!" There must have been 30 or 40 of all sizes. Young ones were chasing and trying to knock each other out of the trees, adults were playing and grooming their babies and the mature males tried to copulate with any unsuspecting female. One resourceful baboon had found our bread which we had accidentally left out, whilst the large alpha male sat astutely, keeping watch. They entertained us for 45 minutes with their antics, before retiring to a nearby abandoned tree-house for their morning nap.

The main reason we came to Kibali National Park was to view chimps in the wild which according to the backpacker telegraph, came highly recommended. The park had gone through a few recent changes to their treks with group sizes being reduced from 6 to 4, and the price had gone up 150% to \$US50. With visitor numbers increasing by 100% in the last 3 years, the tours were in demand and luckily we found some vacancies on the next day. It is interesting that they call this a Primate Walk, as there is no guarantee you will see chimpanzees. So our afternoon entailed a little research in the quaint visitor centre, followed by several card games of 500.

Later in the afternoon, we thought we might do a little walk and explore a bit but were told we were not allowed. In Africa everything has a reason and our enquiries turned up that too many visitors had become lost in the thick forest; especially if they became distracted by following the wildlife, not to mention the grumpy elephants and buffalo that call this place home.

At 08:00 the next morning, we met our ranger guide, Silver, who was taking us in to the jungle to find the chimps. As we headed out Silver explained all about the local plants and their uses: food, aphrodisiacs, medicines for curing tuberculosis. There were also the soldier ants that were so plentiful if you fell over they would carry you away, the jumping spiders that give you a paralysing bite if you step over their holes, whilst preparing us to move quickly if we heard the chimps. He told us he had heard some activity this morning in this area so some could be nearby. The forest was dense and dark.

Suddenly, there was a spine-tingling screech that would have woken the dead and we beelined through the forest straight to the source. Excitedly we tripped and scrambled, before coming across some chimps descending out of the trees, on to the forest floor. There was one male, a female with a back young and a maturing female. I was very taken back by their size, as a male can weigh up to 65kg. Silver explained that chimpanzees are very aggressive towards each other and the initial screech was to warn of an intruder, however as the chimps recognized each other, they calmed down and decided to go for a morning feed. We followed the chimps for about 600 metres through the undergrowth and it appeared that they were wanting for us to keep up as they seemed to stop and wait for us at times.

They ascended into some palm trees to get fruits for brunch and we gazed from below for the next hour watching their acrobatics and antics. All along, Silver explained all their particular behaviours and how the Rangers were trying to habituate another group of chimps over yonder in a bid to protect more of this area and provide local employment. We left the chimps after the allotted time and headed back for lunch.

On our way out, Silver explained that as a boy he used to hunt in these forests with his father to provide meat for the King. Years ago, young boys would go hunting, mainly for antelope, in preference to school, as it was a quite prestigious. Whatever was collected, two thirds would go to the Kingdom and one third to the hunter's family. Hence, Silver knew the forest like the back of his hand and his knowledge of the area was precise. Today, many of the older rangers come from that hunting era and now take visitors into the jungles to share their understanding of the environment.



We spent the next few days chatting to the rangers in Kibali about their work, what research was going on and of course, hearing their stories of the rangers and their experiences. It was interesting to see that there are 4 pieces of rope incorporated into their uniform to apprehend poachers.

That morning was one of the highlights of our tour in Africa. It was not only great to see these creatures in their natural habitat but also to realize the history and see how attitudes are changing to aid their protection. Increasing visitor numbers and the associated conservation fees are putting the future of all the primates in Kibali National Park in good stead.

Experiences in Wildlife

Rare moth discovered at Craigieburn Grassland.

By Fiona Smith

The rare Golden Sun Moth was recently rediscovered at Craigieburn Grassland. The significant and opportunistic discovery was made by Merri Creek Management Committee technical officer Brian Bainbridge who then had the identity of the moth confirmed by the museum and notified parks staff.

The Golden Sun Moth (*Synemon plana*) is a small diurnal moth found in grasslands and grassy-woodlands dominated by *Austrodanthonia spp.* with which it has a specific habitat relationship. The adults, of which the females are semi-flightless, have a wingspan of less than 3.5 cms. The moths emerge from the *Austrodanthonia spp.*, after about 2 years living as larvae, for only 2 days in November-December, appearing only on warm sunny days.

According to local invertebrate biologist, Beverly Van Praagh, the discovery is highly significant and represents the largest area of actual and potential habitat for the species. This may also be the largest known population.

The Golden Sun Moth is listed as threatened under *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and as critically endangered under the *EPBC Act* and is only known from five other populations in Victoria. Until the rediscovery at Craigieburn it was thought to be extinct in the Port Phillip area. A survey was conducted in December last year with another survey scheduled for December this year in conjunction with the Friends of Merri Creek.

Craigieburn Grassland is 400 hectares of threatened grassland and grassy-woodland and is located on the Hume Highway north-east of Craigieburn. It is managed by Parks Victoria's Grassland Area.

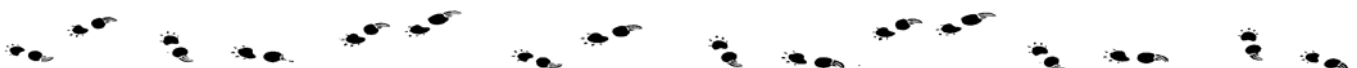


Golden Sun Moth

Synemon plana

(female bottom left, male top right)

(illustration by Sarah Reglar from ACT Government (1998))



Experiences in Enforcement**Enforcement...is it worth it?
Ranger Miles Stewart-Howie Marysville**

On Monday the 20th of January 2003 I wrote up a woman (the legal definition is '28 year old Female') for a Total Fire Ban breach. You'll probably remember that time. Most of you were up in the Alps fighting fires. It was the day after Canberra burnt and several people had lost their lives. The time was 10am when I arrived at this lady's camp site in the Marysville State Forest and the temperature was already over 30 degrees. The smoke coming down from the Alps fires was so thick that it stung your eyes (from about what...say 200 kilometres away) and I had to drive with head lights on. The CFA had declared a state-wide TFB for the day and temperatures were expected to reach the high 30's. Most radio stations were running half hourly updates on the fires in Canberra and Victoria, and regular TFB warnings. When I interviewed the woman and her boyfriend I had to ask her to turn off her car radio so we could hear each other. Both parties were from Kinglake, so you can't even blame city ignorance. The camp fire in question did not even comply with standard CF&L fire regulations (it was on flat ground within 1 metre of metre-high bracken fern and wire grass).

You getting the picture? Not much room to move here.

My statement of interview went through to DSE prosecution branch and they decided to charge both the lady and her boyfriend (that's '32 year old Male') with '*...lighting a fire on a day of TFB*' and '*...allowing a fire to remain alight on a day of TFB*' (as well as the *Conservation Forest & Lands Act* camp fire offence). These are under the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* and each charge carries a penalty of up to \$20,000 or 2 years in gaol.

Police were unable to serve either the summons and / or a warrant was issued for their arrest. In September 2004, '32 year old Male' was pulled over by traffic Police, arrested, bailed and summonsed to court. After not appearing at court on the allotted date he was then also charged with '*...fail to answer bail*'. It took some time to get to court again as both parties gave creative addresses. The diligent department prosecution officer (Gavan Knight), in spite of his heavy work load, chased this through and got it to court.

In the Ringwood Magistrate's, both parties pleaded guilty to all charges. The Magistrate imposed penalties as follows:

32 year old Male - \$200 for failure to answer bail and \$200 for Total Fire Ban breach

28 year old Female - \$200 for Total Fire Ban breach (which she is working off in the Kinglake Opp Shop on a community service order).

The next time I come across an enforcement issue like this, I will be thinking very carefully. I'll be remembering the pain in the pit of my stomach when I realised what offence I had to book this lady for. I'll be remembering the paper work. I'll be remembering how much sleep I lost thinking that I could be putting someone in goal (deserving or not, you still lose sleep). I'll remember worrying about having to take the stand in court. I'll be remembering 2 ½ years of having this hanging over my head. I'll be remembering all the other stressful interviews I've done, in the bush, on my own, when the offenders are being evasive or aggressive. And most of all, I'll be thinking of just how little \$200 buys you now days.

Should I head on in and start interviewing, or should I drive past, and let this person threaten my park, my town and everyone in them?

What would you do?



One week later

OK. A week has passed since I heard the Magistrates findings and I wrote the above article for Bushy Tales. I've calmed down a bit and I've had a chance to think about this.

Yes, everything I wrote above is true, but in my dismay at the small sentence these two people received I failed to see the whole picture. Let's examine this:

What is enforcement NOT about?

Enforcement is not about revenue raising. I once heard that every \$100 PIN costs \$300 to process. I don't even get to keep the money anyway (hey...now there's a good idea!). It's not about stinging them as much as possible, or getting 'em into court. That's just the pointy end.

Yes, we need to have teeth, we need to be able to inflict HPND (Hip Pocket Nervous Disorder) or refer them to court *if all else fails*.

What is the enforcement about?

For me it's two things. One is educating people about what is not acceptable behaviour and why. The other is about getting them to comply and not repeat the offence.

I remember one time with my old boss (Ian Roche) driving away from a particularly frustrating interview with four mouthy 18 year olds. They had mucked up. When interviewing, they had given us lip and spectacularly failed the 'Attitude Test', but we couldn't actually book them for anything. So we had given them a warning. I was gnashing my teeth at our 'failure' to get a result when Ian said, "You gotta remember, people don't like to be hassled. They may have been smart arses but they know we're watching now and they won't come back."

My lesson was that these young guys were too slippery to book, too full of testosterone, ego and booze to be educated, BUT we got them to comply, and they didn't come back...not the best possible result, but a success none the less!

My lesson with '28 year old Female' and '32 year old Male':

Both of these people now have a record. If Mr '32 year old Male' was ever arrested again, it's very unlikely he'd get bail because he has a history of failing to answer bail. If either of them got caught lighting a fire on a TFB again, chances are they'll be in it very deep. Also, they have had this hanging over *their* heads for 2 ½ years too, they've had the indignity of being served a summons and they've had the stress of fronting up to court. Before lighting a camp fire in the future, my bet is they'll be thinking VERY carefully.

So, I repeat my question:

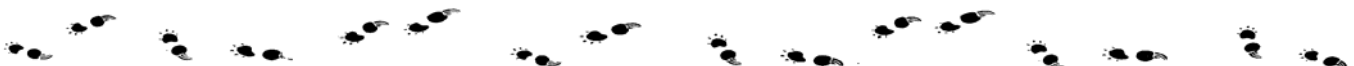
Should I head on in and start interviewing, or should I drive past, and let this person threaten my park, my town and everyone in them?

Call me a sucker for punishment, but I'm goin' in (sounds like a line from a spaghetti western movie. "Cover me boys...I'm goin' in!").

What would you do?

Disclaimer:

All comments in this article are mine and mine alone. Any similarity between these comments and anyone else's' comments, be they authorised, unauthorised, Arnold Schwarzenegger's, Chief Clancy Wiggum's or John Wood's (you know, the sergeant from Blue Heelers) are purely coincidental. Any offence caused by said comments is intentional and unlikely to be withdrawn.



Experiences in Australia

By Maria Laura Iribarren (Mela),

HOLA! I'm Maria Laura Iribarren (Mela), from Argentina. I work as a seasonal fire-fighter at Parque Nacional Los Glaciares in the southern part of Argentina, and during the last 3 months I've been working as a volunteer with Parks Victoria, here in Australia.

In the beginnings, when I met Fiona (Smith) the first time in Patagonia, it was really like a dream for me to imagine this possibility, to come over and to be able to have this experience in your parks. Because, unfortunately, due to our economic situation in Argentina, it is not possible for me to afford the cost of the travel.

Now I'm more than happy. This has been a useful, interesting and amazing experience for me. Mainly because I'm planning to enter to the "Rangers School" (the formal training for rangers in Argentina) just when I come back; and I've used new technology alongside the rangers and all the crew, that I am not able to get in Argentina in this moment. During my stay I've been working primarily at Organ Pipes National Park, Woodlands Historic Park and the different areas that belong to "Grassland Unit". I visited many others Parks, protected areas and beautiful places around Victoria, too: Wilsons Promontory National Park, Brisbane Ranges National Park, Macedon Regional Park, Phillip Island (Koala Conservation Centre and Penguin Parade), Melbourne Zoo and more.

I was very enthusiastic in learning about the threatened species and pest animal management, about the "prescribed burnings", as well as participating in many of the tasks that you carry out day-by-day in the parks. Some of these activities included:

- Planting native trees and grasses.
- Bandicoot trapping.
- Fox control
- Sugar Glider and Bat Monitoring.
- Building and fixing fences
- Working in the nursery
- Sunshine Orchid monitoring program
- Walking in the trails
- Taking a lot of pictures to show at the park in Argentina, and more.

I spent a wonderful time at "The Prom" with Mick and Elaine and all the staff, walking around the forests and the beaches, appreciating the environments, spotlighting and visiting the Lighthouse. I could learn too much about the tourists' management, the effects of the fires in the bushlands, the Wombat monitoring and I increased a lot my "bird list" of /knowledge of birds in Australia.

I thank the many people of Parks Victoria for this fantastic opportunity, specially to Fiona, Mick and Ely, the members of Victorian Ranger Association, and all the friendly, helpful and "patient" (for all the questions I ask every time!) Staff of Organ Pipes NP and Woodlands Historic Park, that made me feel part of their team.

I had a lot of fun, too! Improving my English with everybody and trying to learn the most popular Australian expressions!.

I really hope to be able to benefit someone any day to come and share experiences at the parks in Argentina, in the same way that Fiona and other people helped me to come here.

Hasta pronto y gracias por todo...

Mela

Note:

Mela's airfare and accommodation was fully sponsored by a VRA member. If you would like to make a donation to help out this member recover some costs it would be greatly appreciated.

Please send a cheque or make a deposit to the VRA (as per the membership payments) marked 'money for mela'. You will be issued a receipt if required





Mela drilling a fence post and doing nursery work with Clive at Organ Pipes NP

Ranger Profile – Looking Up and Looking Down – Sam Nester

Samantha Nester Ranger , Maryborough

Employment history

I joined Parks Victoria in 2000, Yarra Ranges NP, and Melbourne city office, Box-Ironbark Parks

What is your conservation Hobby Horse?

Threatened species, especially Tuans- global issues think globally act locally

Who is your most admired conservationist?

International rangers who are doing things with minimal resources

What is your environmental epiphany?

Been into the bush since I went bushwalking as a kid

How did you get into conservation / land management?

Studied arid zone ecology at Uni fell in love with the desert, then lucky enough to live in aboriginal community mostly in S.A., where I increased my love of bush by being taught by people who really know the bush

What is the most unfortunate roadkill you've seen?

The Emu that I hit, feathers everywhere, Emu oil all over the windscreen, not good for vision

What is my favourite administrative procedure?

None...getting funding at the start of the financial year

What is the worst scar that you have left on the landscape?

Getting a car stuck on a log in Landsborough after not looking where I was reversing, then chopping the log up, finally trying to find resolution by giving it a home in my garden

What are you currently reading?

“How to read the weather” , “How to paint Scapes”

What is your favourite conservation tool?

People

What were you in a previous life?

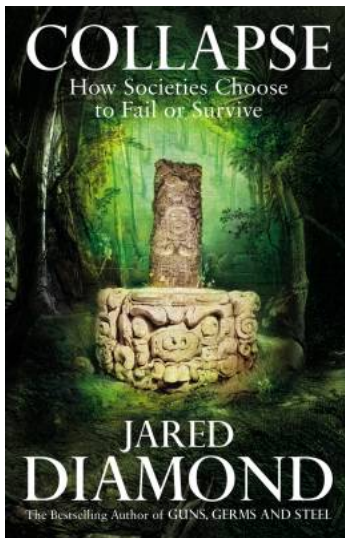
A wedge tail eagle in the desert



Blue Tongue Reviews

*Collapse. How societies chose to fail or survive.
Jared Diamond(2005)*

One wonders if environmentalists suffer a kind of myopic, one-sided view, only seeing the Earth through their particular vision and that everything that occurs, or is thought to occur, is interpreted through the prism of their view. Do they write a biohistory of the world that conveniently wraps up the entire world into one explanation- that it is all to do with environmental conditions? Or, are they actually on to the real story, the one that underpins the intrinsic nature of life on earth?



Jared Diamond completes an epic chronicling of the human species with 'Collapse' which is his fourth book. Diamond's first 'The Third Chimpanzee' looked at the rise of the human species as it evolved from its simian beginnings. The second book 'Why Sex is Fun' explores on the evolutionary forces that have shaped the unique aspects of human sexuality. "Gun Germs and Steel" is essential reading, a biohistory of the last 13,000 years and exploring the question- "why did history unfold differently on different continents, and for different people"?

Jared Diamond is well aware of the problem of one sidedness and manages to steer a solid course through such 'mind-fields' by writing a broad based study on a range of human civilizations that illustrate his main thesis. It is written in a clear and lucid manner with plenty of examples to understand the processes that he is concerned with. It is certainly the case with many indigenous societies that environmental knowledge is paramount and the key to survival and central to their world view, something which they don't apologize for, or retreat from.

Jared Diamond presents a thorough examination of several past societies drawing on information from a wide range of disciplines and tries to explain why some of these civilizations failed and why some survived. Diamond has a five point framework. 1. Environmental damage inflicted by humans 2. climate change 3. Hostile neighbours 4. Decreased support from neighbours in trade and other ways 5. How societies respond to problems

"It has long been suspected that many of the mysterious abandonments (of civilizations) were at least partly triggered by ecological problems : people inadvertently destroying the environmental resources on which their society depended. This suspicion of unintended ecological suicide – ecocide – has been confirmed by discoveries made in recent decades by archaeologists, climatologists, historians, palaeontologists and palynologists (pollen scientists)".

There is a scary chapter on China in which the possible implications for the environment of the earth of China becoming a first world nation. China has all the reasons in the world to aspire to become as affluent as the western nations, that is the western dream, however due to its population, first world status for China will double the human impact on the earth's resources.

The Australian chapter is a great overall view of the nation and its fragility is especially noted when it is compared to other fragile soiled nations such as Greenland and Iceland. I worry about his apparent mixing up of Blue Gums and Mountain Ash. When you know he has made such an obvious blunder on a local subject then you wonder how many other things he may have made a mistake on? Regardless a great



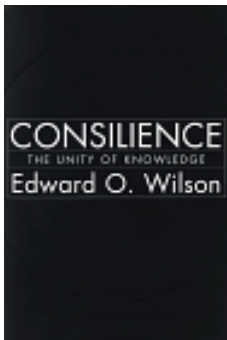
informative and stimulating read.

Consilience. The Unity of Knowledge (1998) Edward O. Wilson

Edward Wilson is a renowned scientist who presents a book on the ultimate domination of science. Wilson believes that through science we can come through any problem we set for ourselves.

Edward Wilson's premise in *Consilience* is that a common body of inherent principles underlies the entire human endeavour. "I believe that the Enlightenment thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries got it mostly right the first time," he says. They assumed a lawful, perfectible material world in which knowledge is unified across the sciences and the humanities. Wilson uses the word "Consilience," to cover the links between all the great branches of learning and he argues that we can indeed explain everything in the world through an understanding of a handful of natural laws.

Wilson searches, digging deeply across the sciences to illustrate his discussion about ideas, evolution, knowledge and the human endeavour to come to terms with our existence and place in the universe. One such idea was a process called *gene-culture coevolution*. In essence, "the conception observes, first, that to genetic evolution the human lineage has added the parallel track of cultural evolution, and, second, that the two forms of evolution are linked. In gene-culture coevolution as now conceived by biologists and social scientists, causal events ripple out from the genes to the cells to the tissues thence to the brain and behaviour... By interaction with the physical environment and pre-existing culture, they bias further evolution and culture... What is truly unique about human evolution, as opposed to chimpanzee or wolf evolution, is that a large part of the environment shaping it has been cultural". ..Palaeolithic egalitarian and tribal instincts are still firmly installed. As part of the genetic foundation of human nature they cannot be replaced.



Wilson explores religions which he suggests are analogous to superorganisms. They have a life cycle. They are born they grow, they compete, they reproduce, and, in the fullness of time, they die. They express the primary rule of human existence, that whatever is necessary to sustain life is also ultimately biological. One wonders if God was a construction to replace the position of spiritual connection that humans originally had when they were living within the constraints, and completely immersed in, nature.

For Wilson the answer "is clear; synthesis. We are drowning in information, while starving for wisdom. The world will henceforth be run by synthesizers... The future of liberal arts lies, therefore, in addressing the fundamental questions of human existence, head on"...

Sometimes you wonder what a world would look like run entirely on scientific principals. It may be a little unfair to say it but the belief that scientists have in their ability to 'know' and control the world seems to run not a little short of just another form of megalomania. Disappointingly, Wilson also suggests that nuclear power should be used to power the needs of humans because of the damage done to the earth through the burning of fossil fuels, without mentioning the problems associated with storage of wastes, the problems of nuclear accidents and the possible use of enriched uranium for non peaceful purposes. It's a big call for a biologist and one that I am uncomfortable with, or am I just suffering a kind of myopic, one-sided view?

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