

Invitation to the COOTS Group

The COOTS Group is the Conservation Group of the Australian Plants Society (SA Region) and has been an active part of the Society since the very early nineties and continues strongly to this very day. Prior to this the Society, which was known as the Society for Growing Australian Plants (SGAP), had no conservation group at all but did do quite a lot of plantings in several areas.

My name is Jeff Reid and I am the co-ordinator of COOTS which stands for 'Conservation Of Our Threatened Species'.

Why did I take on the conservation work you ask? I have been asking myself that question for a very long time now and really I am not sure that I can answer it. I do know that the work that we do is very important and I do not know how our environment would be if groups such as ours were not doing the work that we do.

It mainly began back when I first became involved with the Society. There was a SGAP collaboration in place at the time with the Four Wheel Drivers Association at the Coorong National Park at a project called "Potters Scrub".

Together we planted quite a large area with indigenous plants which many of us grew at home for the project. It was great for the image of those 4WD Groups at the time.

When the 4WD group decided to give the project away we were left with the option of reducing the size of the plantings or move to another project. I put a lot more serious thought into having a conservation group around that time and, coincidentally about the same time, the Society held a workshop at Black Hill to plan a strategy for the future of the Society. Members came from all over the state and with a facilitator and many sheets of butcher's paper, discovered that four key factors were needed to improve the Society's image. They were:

1. The need for a bigger focus on conservation i.e. to form a Conservation Group.
2. To create an Education Group to target schools.
3. A need to form an active Publicity and Marketing Group.
4. To restructure the Administration of the Society, utilising the Country Groups expertise.

Unfortunately all that came from all that effort was the formation of my Conservation Group, the COOTS Group, and I am pleased to say that it still is very active today. Shortly after this I began to get involved with the Port Parham project.

I started to study the native species of that particular area and to my horror I discovered that many of the species were rated as endangered for that area. What was worse however was that many of the endangered species were quite common in other areas! What this meant was that over the years farming, land clearing and other practices had wiped out much of the beautiful native species and all that was left was a few remnant pockets of very threatened vegetation. This fact really hit home with me and from that time I was committed to play my part in restoration and revegetation work wherever I could.

It wasn't long before the Pine Point Project began and the massive undertaking, known as the Lands End Project that I am involved in at Cape Jervis, closely followed that. After those came the Airport

Project, Lower Light and now our latest project is to do some restoration and revegetation work on the Hope Valley Reservoir grounds.

For the last fifteen or so years I have been involved with the Australian Plants Society in an official capacity as President of the South Australian branch on two occasions, Vice-President and Councillor over most of that period. Currently and mainly because of its size, I concentrate fully on my Conservation Group COOTS and the projects that we have.

All these projects include weed eradication, seed collection, direct seeding, tube stock growing and all other aspects of revegetation work. Sometimes surveys need to be done because in most cases there are no records of what actually occurs at a particular site. This can include mammal, bird and insect surveys as well as plant species. For those that are involved it can be extremely rewarding because the environment is being protected in so many ways.

I personally have been extremely happy with the progress made by this group but realise that we need to be much bigger to accomplish the massive amount of work that has to be done.

We must always be on the lookout for members to join this group because we run the risk of burning out the few who are always turning up to the regular working weekends and we want the work to be enjoyable rather than a chore. Over the last couple of years I have observed a particular change with most of the members within this group. Even though it is hard to describe that change I know that each of us in COOTS feel a sense of cohesiveness and a belonging to something that is quite unique.

This is a very important part of any group or organisation and it is something that I would like a lot more to experience. All of the volunteers within this group now have a firm understanding of what we are out to achieve over the coming years and believe that we have not been wasting our time in doing what we do. They also have acquired knowledge that they are passing onto others plus it will be invaluable to them for the future.

I personally feel very proud of the work that the many volunteers of the COOTS group achieve. However, it must be noted, that I don't just number those who come along to the sites because there are many others who help in so many different ways behind the scenes (e.g. growing).

At the moment we have four projects on the go and each project is quite different to the other.

Project Pine Point is devoted to the protection and the long-term survival of a threatened species (*Acacia rhetinocarpa*). There are a variety of ways that this is achieved but mainly we concentrate on removal of the pest weeds then we revegetate with indigenous species which we grow from the seed we collect from the site.

Project Lands End, near Cape Jervis is a two-pronged project. One part is to revegetate huge areas of now unused agricultural land with indigenous species which will stabilise the soils and return the area to something like it once was.

With the use of species like *Allocasuarina verticillata*, it is hoped that it may encourage the return of the endangered Glossy Black Cockatoo back to the area that they once were, many years ago. The

other part of the project is to restore a large area of remnant native vegetation that remains along the coastline also back to what it once was. This entails the removal of many pest plants one of which requires massive commitment and hard manual labour. This is the Cape Honey Flower or *Melianthus comosus*, which has infested much of this remnant vegetation.

Project Port Parham is a project that requires long term commitment to revegetating the foreshore and, in addition to that, we are reintroducing the mangroves (*Avicennia marina*) to the area. They have not grown in the area for well over 70 years. This is quite a big challenge as mangroves are not generally grown. For myself, it has been a steep learning curve, firstly understanding the ecology of this plant species and then being able to grow and plant them at Port Parham. There are many challenges to overcome before this species will re-establish itself back into the area.

Project Hope Valley is quite unique as it is a small remnant patch of native vegetation which is still largely intact, surrounded by residential homes and is situated very close to the Adelaide city centre. It is truly a native grasslands environment.

I have always understood the value of these grounds, having spent many years in this location, but have been very disheartened at the slow but inevitable loss of many of the plant species which I know to have existed there only just a few years ago.

Because of its location it has many threats and unless some positive measures are taken very soon another small remnant will be lost forever as has happened over much of South Australia. I have taken the first small steps toward this end and, with some assistance, can certainly put a halt to any further destruction and because I have watched the area slowly deteriorate over the last few decades I cannot stand by any longer and see it disappear altogether. The area is used by many of the local residents and I firmly believe that if they realised the significance of what they were walking through it would certainly change the attitude that they have at the moment. For the last two years and, with assistance from United Water, I have begun the long task of restoring the area outside the boundary fence at the north east corner of the grounds.

The area has one of those very rare last patches of remnant vegetation that contains a large variety of species like *Acacia pycnantha*, *Acacia paradoxa*, *Acacia acinacea*, *Dodonaea viscosa*, *Astroloma humifusum*, *Callitris preissii* and, in particular, the native grasses like Kangaroo grass and Wallaby grass plus the very pretty grass know as Silky Blue Grass or *Dichanthium sericeum*, which was typical of the Adelaide Plains many years ago.

The area has a few very small and highly significant plants which are nationally endangered. They are a small pea species called *Cullen parva* which was previously known as *Psoralea parva* and is now in danger of becoming extinct if not protected and encouraged to increase in number.

As you can see, each project fulfils our objective which is 'Conservation Of Our Threatened Species'.

COOTS is relatively new in the overall scheme of things and many more people are required to do the huge amount of work that must be done to remedy many of the problems that we have in South Australia. I am aware that there are many groups doing this type of work but APS needs to have a

good representation as well. I am constantly on the lookout for people willing to give some of their time to assisting with our work.

Recently, I drew up a list of the many ways that people can assist COOTS work and it was surprising to me the variety of ways just how one can help. Sure we need volunteers planting trees and poisoning the pest weeds etc. but we also need help with:

- **Babysitting plants.**
- **Thinning seedlings.**
- **Designing and making signs.**
- **Reports to be written up.**
- **Timekeeping of volunteer hours.**
- **Seed collecting and preparation.**
- **Ordering materials.**
- **Meals - preparation in the field.**
- **Preparing of budgets.**
- **Minutes and preparation of agendas for our planning groups.**
- **Growing rare plant material from cuttings.**
- **Articles and reports to be put on our web site.**
- **Setting up a "Young COOTS Group".**

The list, I have found, is endless.

Can you be involved in the COOTS projects? Volunteers are always needed to assist in this valuable work. I am always happy to assist with your inquiries. Please consider what you may be able to do that can contribute to this work because a good team will make things work much more smoothly. Please consider your involvement with COOTS in some way because you know it would be most welcome and help us do our part for the environment of South Australia.

If you would like to contact me for more information about each of the COOTS projects and much more, please take the time to visit my website. It can be found by going to the Australian Plants Society website at <http://www.australianplantssa.asn.au/> and follow the link to the COOTS Conservation Group.