

The Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn's Biodiversity Policy: Caring for creation

Introduction

Australia's plants, animals and ecosystems are under unprecedented threat of extinction from habitat destruction, the introduction of invasive species and human induced climate change. For example 39 per cent of Australia's 85 bioregions have more than 30 per cent of their ecosystems described as threatened.

Churches have played a crucial role in the survival of endangered species. In many cases this role is fortuitous, but is consistent with our long tradition of providing sanctuary to the persecuted. Discovering and promoting native species on church property can be a profound spiritual experience and a way to establish stronger connections both with creation and the wider community.

The 2007 Synod agreed (Motion NM/3 Care of species and ecosystems on church land) that inadequate management leading to the loss of listed species located on church grounds is inconsistent with our responsibility to care for creation and to preserve God's creation for the enrichment of future generations.

The 2007 Synod further recognised that: "Endangered or threatened species and ecosystems can and do occur on church properties."

The purpose of this policy is to give expression to the Synod resolution and so avoid contributing to Australia's accelerating loss of biodiversity. Mistakes can have significant legal, spiritual and social consequences; particularly as federal and state legislation protecting endangered species have strengthened in recent years.

Identifying and providing appropriate management for an endangered species or ecosystems will sometimes require specialist knowledge. This policy seeks to provide guidance in this complex matter.

It is likely that diocesan properties house government-listed species/ecosystems without our knowledge. In order that we make informed decisions and avoid potentially costly and embarrassing mistakes, the Environment Commission will explore ways to use government and community expertise to conduct ecological surveys of lands owned by the Diocese and to construct an inventory of the Diocese's environmental assets.

Biodiversity Policy

Listed Species and Ecosystems

If land is identified by government agencies as having significant environmental importance or where land managers, (diocesan, ministry units and diocesan agencies etc) become aware of listed species or ecosystems on their land; land managers will:

- (i) Inform the Environment Commission in writing; and
- (ii) Consult with the Environment Commission and relevant government agencies before selling, developing, and/or changing use of land providing habitat to listed species/ecosystems.¹

The Environment Commission/Registry will:

- (i) Add relevant ecological information about resident listed species/ecosystems to the database of diocesan land.
- (ii) Assist ministry units and diocesan agencies and other diocesan land managers to appropriately promote and manage endangered species/ecosystems on their land and abide by governmental regulations.²

Encouraging Biodiversity

To improve the biodiversity value across the Diocese, ministry units and diocesan agencies are encouraged to:

- (i) seek assistance from the Environment Commission in developing plans for the management and celebration of these special but often overlooked parts of God's creation.
- (ii) Explore ways of connecting with the wider community through the protection and care of native species.
- (iii) Contact local community and governmental organisations for further information about the identification, promotion and management of local endangered species.
- (iv) make an environmental inventory of listed plants, animals and ecosystems present on land in their care,
- (v) ensure that the environmental impact of ministry units and diocesan agencies activities receives careful consideration along with their social and financial implications (triple bottom line reporting).
- (vi) explore ways to link with local biodiversity in the way church gardens are developed and managed (see the *Green Guide for People in Parishes* for suggestions)

¹ Note: Simply changing the use of land, or land around an area with a listed species can have significant legal consequences [such as civil and criminal penalties].

² Recognising that many ministry units and diocesan agencies will require assistance and there is considerable assistance available from governments and community groups.

Supporting information

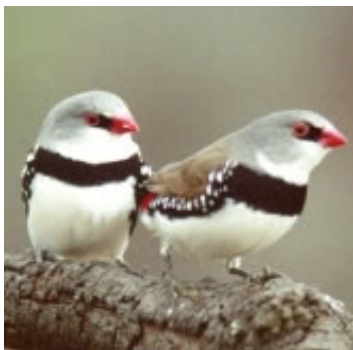
What is a “listed” species or ecosystem?

A “listed” species or ecological community is considered to be threatened with extinction under federal, state or Territory legislation. A “listed” species or community maybe considered “extinct”, “extinct in the wild”, “critically endangered”, “endangered”, “vulnerable”, “conservation dependant” in decreasing levels of threat. Different sets of terms are used in different jurisdictions. Commonwealth, State and Territory laws require certain actions by the managers of lands where such species/ecosystems occur.

What species do/might occur on land in the Canberra Goulburn diocese?

Grassy woodlands and native grassland communities used to be common but are now confined to small, often fragmented, areas as farming and towns have expanded. This means that church lands, for example old cemeteries or other undeveloped areas, have become some of the last refuges for these increasingly rare ecological communities. Some grassland communities in south-eastern Australia are more threatened than Australian rainforests.

Grassland communities can provide habitat to endangered wildflowers such as the silky swainson-pea and the button wrinklewort and animals like the diamond firetail, earless dragon species and the golden sunmoth.



Diamond firetails³
Hellen Fallow



Silky swainson-pea
Murray Fagg



Button wrinklewort
John Briggs

What assistance is available?

Government agencies and community groups offer, often free, expert assistance and award grants. For example, the NSW government has conducted biological surveys of Catholic parish lands. The Friends of Grasslands group operating in ACT and NSW conduct community based surveys of grasslands using methods designed by scientists but carried out mainly by trained volunteers.

³ If these photos are published (eg online) permission will need to be obtained from the photographers.

What law/s protect listed species/ecosystems in Australia?

Federal: The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, latest amendment 2007, currently under review. This act provides for both criminal and civil penalties.

ACT: The *Nature Conservation Act 1980*

NSW: The *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*

St Mark's Theological College and the endangered grassland ecosystem.

An example of the close cooperation possible can be seen at St Marks where the grassland is managed under an agreed plan developed with the advice of the ACT Dept of the Environment by a group of volunteers.

Further information

Federal EPBC Act: <http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/index.html>

Friends of Grasslands community group: <http://www.fog.org.au/index.htm>

ACT Government (2005) ACT Lowland Native Grassland Conservation Strategy. Action Plan No. 28. [Particularly Appendix 5.3, page 112]

http://www.tams.act.gov.au/live/environment/native_plants_and_animals/threatened_species_and_ecological_communities_in_the_act/grassland_conservation_strategy

Department of the Environment and Heritage (2006). Species Profile and Threats Database, Department of the Environment and Heritage, Canberra. Available from: <http://www.deh.gov.au/sprat> .

Environment ACT, Wildlife Research and Monitoring Section, Environment ACT

Building a Better relationship with Our World: A green guide for people in parishes. (copies distributed to all Parishes, or see:

<http://www.anglicansharepoint.org.au/Public/Documents/Environment/Resources/Environment%20Handbook.pdf>