

ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2025

Next Talk

Thursday 14 August, 7.30 pm.
Wildlife First Response Training for NSW Firefighters.

Speaker – Mick Armstrong, NPWS.

Face to face at Nguluway Ngurang
Seniors Village Hub, North Room
(Opposite side of carpark to Harris Farm)

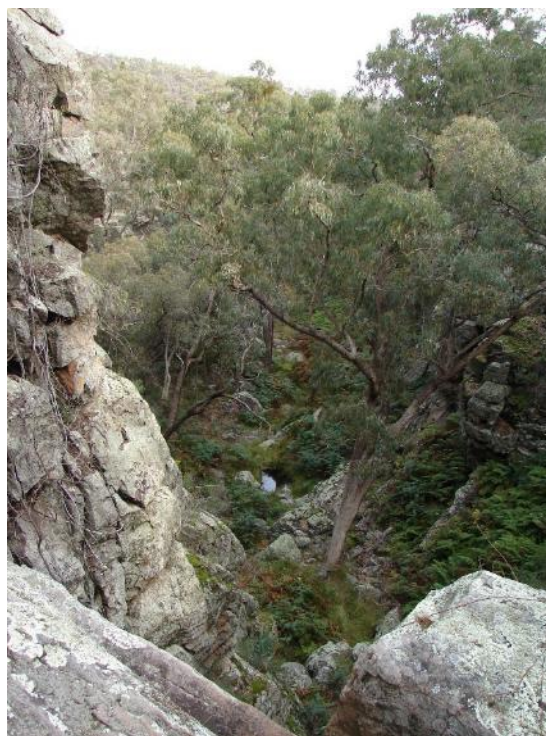
Committee Meeting – 6.30 pm.

Excursion

Sunday 17 August
Mingham Springs, if dry.
Crown land west of Manildra.

Next Excursion - Sunday 17 August, 9am.
Mingham Springs – dry weather plan.

We hope to go to Mingham Springs, which is on vacant Crown Land to the southwest of Manildra. Access is through the Mandagery Precinct of the Southwest Woodlands Nature Reserve. At Mingham Springs there is a gorge that has an unusual diversity of ferns and wonderful views down the gorge.



Mingham Springs gorge, July 2008.
Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

Next Meeting

Thursday 14 August, 7.30pm.
Wildlife First Response Training for NSW Firefighters.

Speaker – Mick Armstrong, Team Leader
Fire - West Branch at NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service.

In this role Mick oversees the planning, coordination, and delivery of fire management programs and operations across the western region of NSW. Following the devastating 2019–20 bushfire season, the NSW Bushfire Inquiry acknowledged the need for an increased focus on wildlife response in bushfires and other natural disasters. The Inquiry proposed that the government develop and implement a policy for injured wildlife response, including guidance for firefighters on handling injured wildlife. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service is leading the implementation of this recommendation.

Mick will speak on the guidelines and training that is provided to firefighters on how to respond to animals that have been injured by a fire or flood. A training session was recently held at Western Plains Zoo in Dubbo.

To get there we will drive via Manildra and farmland to the Mandagery Reserve. We will park on the western side of the reserve and walk to the top of the gorge. The **Grade 4** walk is a round trip of 3kms. The first part of the walk is through open woodland, but it becomes much more difficult about 150m from the gorge where there is a scramble down rocks to get to the top of the gorge. We **will not** be walking into the gorge. A stop may be made in the Nature Reserve to look at birds and plants.

As the track through the reserve can become boggy, access may not be possible if there is lots of rain between now and then.

Meet at the Orange High School bus bay at 9am to carpool. High clearance vehicles will be needed with 4WD preferred. This will be a full day excursion so please bring lunch, water, and any essential medications you may need. As we will be having lunch at the gorge you will need to carry your things in a pack. Please wear closed walking shoes and suitable clothing.

If it is too wet an alternate location will be chosen. This may be the Boshes Creek State Forest NE of Orange to look at the recovery of *Acacia meiantha* following a control burn a few years ago. If the location needs to be changed details will be publicised.

Last Talk, 10 July. Is *Wahlenbergia* ‘Mt Canobolas’ a new species?

Speaker - Dr Colin Bower, botanist and ecologist.

Report by R Stapleton, photos by Colin Bower.

What do you do in retirement after you have just published a book on orchids of the Central West? For Col it was a deep dive into the unknown territory of the *Wahlenbergia* genus, and more specifically the flat-flowered (rotate) species. This was largely prompted by Dick Medd’s observations many years ago that some of the bluebells on Mt Canobolas were unusual. Col was also frustrated with the lack of capacity of the scientific community to study plants that seemed different and that this incomplete knowledge hampers our ability to argue against threats to places like Mt Canobolas.

Col explained that the volcanic origins of Mt Canobolas had created an isolated inselberg above the surrounding lowlands. Like Mt Kaputar it supports remnants of sub-alpine vegetation on its upper slopes where there are ideal conditions for the evolution of new endemic species. While Mt Kaputar has 19 endemic species Mt Canobolas has 10 (5 vascular plants, 4 lichens, 1 invertebrate) and counting.

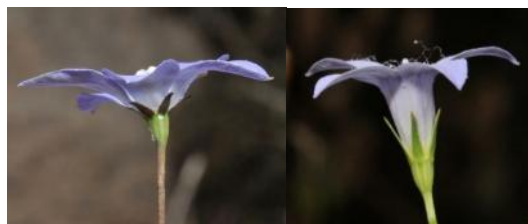
In 2021 he began investigating the unusual tiny bluebell, that he referred to as *Wahlenbergia* ‘Mt Canobolas’. It grows mainly on exposed rock plates with shallow soils. It was first keyed out by Dick Medd to *Wahlenbergia planiflora* subspecies *longipila*, a species that

grows on the NSW northwest slopes, but it seemed a poor fit.



Wahlenbergia ‘Mt Canobolas’ in a rocky habitat.

The three described flat-flowered species differ from other *Wahlenbergia* species which have a longer corolla tube.



Left – a flower of a flat-flowered species and right a flower of a long corolla tubed species.

As Col had no deep knowledge of the genus he spent over 12 months investigating records and references to the flat-flowered species. He also travelled to many places to collect and study the plants. A setback was finding that the specimens he had preserved had shrivelled making it difficult to do measurements. He thought perhaps he should stick to orchids but the more he looked the more he began to understand bluebell diversity, biology, and ecology. This is when he had the first inklings that all was not well with the current state of bluebell taxonomy and that the Mt Canobolas Bluebell was distinctive.

His next step was to apply a method used in orchid research of sticking flower specimens down on a white card with Magic Tape™. Research on *Wahlenbergia* in Africa, where the genus is centred, showed that style structure, particularly the numbers and positions of glands, was important. A new macro lens allowed him to photograph the tiny styles of the flowers and see that species seemed to differ widely.

Col assessed 31 characters (morphological attributes) including leaf (10), presence or absence of hairs (6), fruit (3), flower (3) and style (9) features. A total of 80 specimens were measured from 17 sites, including 4 on Mt Canobolas. Later he found plants of *Wahlenbergia* 'Mt Canobolas' at the old Bloomfield golf course.

He explained that flowers go through male and female phases. Initially the style is male and is covered in pollen released by the stamens (photo 1). This pollen is taken by bees (photo 2) when the flower opens. The late male phase of the flower, before the stigmatic lobes unfold, reveals the presence of one or several whorls of prominent glands (photo 3). The female phase is when the stigmatic lobes open and the flower hairs can receive pollen (photo 4) from other visiting bees. This process prevents self-pollination.



1 - style covered in pollen released by stamens.
2 - a bee taking pollen from the style.



3 - late male phase showing prominent glands.
4 - female phase with stigmatic lobes open.

Some statistical analysis of the morphological features added further evidence that *Wahlenbergia* 'Mt Canobolas' was a distinct species that was apparently restricted to the Mt Canobolas Volcanic Complex.

This species:

- Had a unique style in the late male phase with glands below the style head (right).
- Had unique leaves which have a fleshy texture,



downturned leaf margins and elliptic shape.

- Leaves are also much shorter, narrower, and more crowded than other flat-flowered species.
- Were xeromorphic, meaning adapted to the harsh, dry conditions of the rock plates in summer. This allows them to flower through summer into autumn.

The final step of this research is the official recognition of the new species by the publication of a scientific paper in the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens journal *Telopea*. Col will describe *Wahlenbergia* 'Mt Canobolas' as a new species. He is proposing to name it after Dick Medd as its discoverer, and for his and Jenny's tireless efforts in protecting the biological values of the Mount Canobolas State Conservation Area.

Once it is officially recognised, this will become the sixth known vascular plant species endemic to the Mount Canobolas Volcanic Complex. Col has estimated there are less than 1,000 plants and that they are part of the Endangered *Xanthoparmelia* lichen community. If his research is accepted, the species would likely qualify for listing as a Vulnerable species.

Col concluded by saying this unique bluebell reinforces the biological importance of Mt. Canobolas as an inselberg with significant endemic biodiversity. It also highlights how little we understand about the full diversity of Australian flora, when a species as distinctive as this can go unrecognised until now.

In response Dick thanked Col for recognising him and Jenny in naming the species as well as acknowledging that Col is an excellent scientist, naturalist and observer. When asked where to next Col pointed out that he had discovered so many differences between the *Wahlenbergia* plants he had collected he had many more years of work to do to understand and describe even more unique species.

Last Excursion, 13 July 2025.

Ironbark Track, Conimbla National Park.

Report by Rosemary Stapleton.

It was a longer than usual drive for an excursion but well worth it to walk the 4km circuit of the Ironbark Track in Conimbla National Park. The showers the day before meant the air was clear and the patches of moss

were green and glowing along many parts of the track. A group of seven from Orange were joined by Gooloogong local Tracee Burke, who we know from her work with Mid Lachlan Landcare. After a safety reminder we headed along the single file track. Sadly, most of the flower stems of *Bunochilus stenosepalus*, the Narrow-sepal Leafy Greenhood, near the start of the track had been nipped off.



A Narrow-sepal Leafy Greenhood bud that hadn't been eaten. Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

Almost immediately we came to a heathy area where the plant diversity was surprising. The Early Wattle, *Acacia genistifolia*, and the Ruby Urn Health, *Melichrus erubescens*, with its shiny drops of nectar were flowering. There was lots of discussion of the plants with Tracee, Marita, and Cilla sharing their knowledge with all of us. Cilla focused on the birds and one of the first birds she heard was the Spotted Pardalote. She also saw two Varied Sittella here, a rarely seen vulnerable species.



Tracee, Cilla, Tony, and Penny on the track. Photo Patrick Driver.

Further on the understorey was more open so we could see orange and yellow fungi. There were many patches of Greenhood orchid rosettes and Mosquito orchid leaves with the occasional unopened flower spike appearing.

As the track wound up onto the sandstone ridge and plateau there were scattered Grass Trees, *Xanthorea sp.*, and different shrubs. Tracee took us to a large Sour Bush, *Choretrum candollei*, a plant not often seen that was in flower and had a few tiny fruits. There were also a number of Xanthoreas with their skirts recently burnt. This was of concern as there could be a risk of a smouldering fire spreading beyond the plants. Tracee alerted Jen Dodson, the NPWS Ranger, and Jen has done an inspection.

As the number of *Allocasuarina diminuta* increased the chewings of Glossy Black Cockatoos were seen in five places along the track. Some of the branches of these spindly small trees had been broken when these relatively large birds had been feeding. Those looking at the ground also saw unusual 'plate-shaped' scratchings, which are likely to have been created by Painted Buttonquail. They scratch and rotate in a circle when feeding.



Top – Glossy chewings of Allocasuarina. Bottom – Painted Buttonquail scrape. Photos Rosemary Stapleton.



It was time for lunch, so we headed down to the Cherry Creek lookout. The view into and across the gorge was wonderful with the different shades of green of the Eucalypts, Callitris and wattles and the patches of orangey cliffs and rocks. Around the lookout were scattered small mint bushes, *Prostanthera decussata* that will be covered in purple

flowers in spring. The information board here is an excellent guide to the flowers seen along the track.



Top – Cilla, Penny, and Tracee at the flower information board.

Bottom – view along the lookout and gorge.

Photos Tony Caine.



Walking west to the Cherry Creek Management Trail the focus changed from plants to birds. There were small groups of honeyeaters flying around the tree canopy. Cilla and Patrick managed to identify the beautiful Yellow-tufted Honeyeater and the harder to identify White-naped Honeyeater with its red wattle above the eye. But we were brought to a stop by the 'strangled' calls of some Glossy Black Cockatoos. As they flew away, we caught a glimpse of the bright red-orange tail panels of one bird. We spotted more, this time a little closer, on the management trail making a total of ten Glossies seen. It was also surprising to see a small flock of ten Peaceful Doves feeding across the broad sandy trail. They have a pale blue eye ring and scalloping on their upper breast. They are usually seen in twos or threes. Many *A. genistifolia* shrubs were in flower along the trail as were some of the Mugga Ironbarks. Different footprints in the sand were

noticed as were patches of moss and liverworts, almost too small to photograph.

All agreed this was a very special patch of woodland and well worth another visit in the spring when many of the shrubs and orchids will be in flower.

Cilla's bird list included Peaceful Dove, Glossy Black Cockatoo, White-throated Treecreeper, Noisy Friarbird, White-eared Honeyeater, White-naped Honeyeater, Red Wattlebird, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, Yellow Thornbill, Striated Thornbill, Varied Sittella, Golden Whistler and Pied Currawong.



Glossy Black Cockatoo. Photo Patrick Driver.

Note: A check of the new and improved long-drop toilet at the Wallaby Picnic Area showed that some fittings still needed to be added. The ground around it has been cleared and it will take a while for the ground cover to return.

OFNCS Committee News

Welcome to new members Josie Lowe and Peter Tattersall.

Committee members Jenny and Rosemary have been involved in planning activities to be held in September. Jenny will be at the Sustainable Living Expo on September 21 promoting the value of living sustainably to help protect biodiversity. September is also the CW LLS Biodiversity Month and Rosemary, Nigel, and Nick King, from ECCO, are planning activities to involve and inform the community on the importance of biodiversity.

Certificate of Appreciation

Before Col started his presentation in July Geoff spoke about the special contributions of one member to the Society. Much to my surprise he was talking about me. I was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation. The citation on the certificate said:

'For outstanding contributions to the Society since accepting positions as Secretary (2015) and Newsletter Editor (2019). Rosemary has established firm connections with CWEC, ECCO, NPWS and CCA, as well as our local Indigenous Community. She has enhanced both her own and our members knowledge in a wide range of topics, most notably Aboriginal artefacts and the world of mosses, and liverworts.'

In thanking Geoff I said how I valued working with knowledgeable scientists such as Dick, Col, and Alison Downing, as well as enjoying the company of other members. My retirement in 2018 coincided with the fire on Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas. I have been lucky to be involved in all the post fire surveys, both because my eyes have been opened to so much nature I didn't see before and to get a little understanding of what 'walking on country' means.



Geoff Selwood and Rosemary Stapleton with her Certificate of Appreciation from OFNCS. Photo Helmut Berndt.

Talk and Excursion

Thursday 11 September – NPWS Parks and Reserves in the western part of the Central West - management and highlights.

Speaker - Jen Dodson, Ranger, NPWS West Branch covering reserves from Eugowra to Condobolin.

Sunday 14 September – excursion location to be decided at August committee meeting.

Spring Creek Quarterly Bird Survey,

20 July 2025.

Report by Rosemary Stapleton.

The waterbirds were far off towards the western bank as Cilla and I started the bird survey. Frost was still along the track and the edges of the road that were in shadow. Scanning the birds revealed the usual coots but also rafts of the smallest grebes. Were they Hoary-headed or Australasian? Cilla used the zoom lens of her new Nikon camera and concluded the rafts included both species.

What was exciting was counting 26 Blue-billed Ducks, easily identified when the males lifted their blue beaks from under their wings. This is a much higher count than usual however the record is probably 52 Blue-bills on 19 July 2009. Four Great Crested Grebes were also loafing, and both species of small Cormorants were resting on dead branches along the edge of the reservoir.



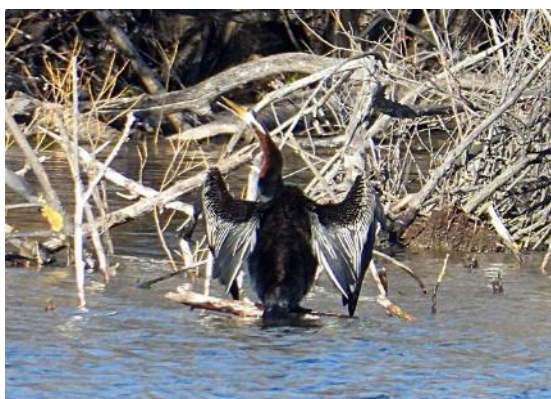
A raft of grebes, two coots and a male Blue-billed Duck in the background.

Photo Cilla Kinross.

As we walked down the road there were none of the land species we usually see; no Superb Fairywrens, scrubwrens or rosellas. However small numbers were counted further along the road. The honeyeaters, Grey Fantails, Silvereyes and Reed Warblers had obviously gone to warmer places. What sensible birds!

On the way to the dam wall a pair of Black Swans flew past as did three Great Cormorants. A small flock of Silver Gulls were dropping to the water surface, presumably to catch small fish or other morsels. Dusky Moorhens, including some immature birds with no orange and yellow beak, were quietly resting in the leafless willows beside the bank. We spotted several Whistling Kites flying overhead, often being harassed by Australian Ravens or

magpies. As we walked back a pair were lazily circling overhead.



A male Darter or Snake-bird drying its wings. Photo Cilla Kinross.

We spotted two Rakali. One seemed to be hunting and returning to a small stump in the water and eating what it caught.

The final species count was 24, down on the number we would often see.

New signs indicating the lure and fly-fishing zone have been erected. The large one at the gate lists what is permitted and not permitted. I was surprised to see a man launch a kayak at the entrance. Later at the rowing pontoons he showed Cilla a lure and line he had retrieved from one of the stags in the water. Anyone who thinks lures aren't as dangerous as baited hooks just has to see the range of lures that have been collected at Ploughman's Wetland.



The sign about fishing at the entrance to the reservoir. Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

Correction to July Newsletter

Jane Paul has asked for a correction to be made to the report she wrote on our visit to Burrendong Arboretum. A corrected copy of the newsletter is on the Field Nats website at <https://orangefieldnats.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2025-july-ofncs-newsletter.pdf>

The last part of the third paragraph should read *'Excitement of the day was Jada spotting a White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, finally identified from a photo by Rosemary. What a wonderful sighting to be privy to. Below the Lookout I sighted a small flock of birds that were probably honeyeaters. The Lookout is also known for Hooded Robins which are seen there frequently but no luck today.'*

Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas Update

Recent windy weather, including the east coast low, has brought down many trees and branches in the SCA. However, the rain and foggy conditions has meant there is lots of fungi to be seen. The mosses and liverworts are also refreshed after a dry start to the year.



The tiny Cannonball Fungus, in different stages of development, on a log along Towac Way. Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

Peregrine News from Cilla Kinross.

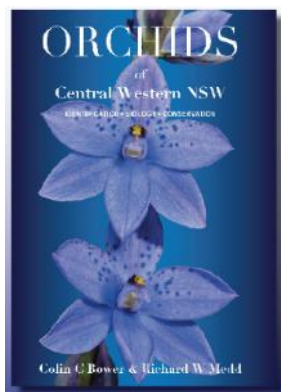
Mating is increasing in duration and frequency up to 10 seconds, three times a day and that will continue to increase until egg-laying mid to late August, when it can be up to 18 seconds, 14 times a day.

Gift giving in the form of prey has also started, but every year Xavier (below) seems to forget that a) Diamond doesn't like starling much and b) he's actually supposed to hand over the prey and not scarper with it as soon as she appears (as happens here)!



Reminder – Orchids of Central Western NSW; identification, biology and conservation.

With the spring orchid season approaching it is a good time to buy a copy of this book by Col Bower and Dick Medd.



Financial members of Field Nats can purchase one copy at the wholesale rate of \$20. Additional copies sell at retail price of \$35, with \$11.50 postage. An order form is at centralwestorchids.com. For members it may be possible to organise for you to pick up your purchased copy at an OFNCS meeting.

A list of other outlets, including Collins Booksellers in Orange, are on this website above.

Dates for your Diary

Capertee Planting – 15-17 August.

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1Bjxc8RudY/>

Booking info and tickets [here](#)

Voices from the Valley – a free screening of a short film, organised by ECCO.

7:30 pm Wednesday 20 August at the Nguluway Ngurang, the Seniors Village Hub. This film tells the story of Wollar and the Mudgee region, where locals have spent over two decades resisting the devastating impacts of coal mining. Their battle continues with a proposed 10-year expansion plan that threatens Koala habitat, 624 hectares of endangered woodland and puts four species at greater risk of extinction. It will also jeopardise our climate targets.

<https://www.nature.org.au/voicesforthevalley>

BIGnet (Bird Interest Group Network) – is a collective of bird clubs in NSW and the ACT that come together every 6 months. They are meeting in Cowra on 13/14 September. An

evening 'Bird in the Club' event will focus on the impact of SGARs (Second-generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides) such as Ratsak. Details in the next newsletter.

**Capertee Bird Festival
19 – 21 September 2025**

For more information and to register, visit www.caperteevalleybirdfestival.com.au

Cowra Woodland Bird Surveys – the last 2025 date is 18–19 October. All survey weekends start with a briefing and get together on the Friday night.

New surveyors with some birding experience are always welcome and will be teamed with experienced surveyors to learn the ropes. Please email Jayden Gunn at cowrabirds@birdlife.org.au or 0409 679 360.

The **Aussie Bird Count** is on again from **20-26 October 2025**. Check out [the 2024 Results – Aussie Bird Count](#).

Sightings around Orange

If you see anything interesting, please email orangefieldnats@gmail.com or post to Facebook.

Birds

While not local Murray Fletcher and Vicki Glover came across a large flock of largish birds swirling near the water tower in Brewarrina in mid-July. Murray said *'They were about the size of cockatoos but dark and were making more of a cockatoo noise. When we found the tower it had a number of white cedar trees covered in berries and about 100 Red-tailed Black Cockatoos munching through them (below). It's fabulous to see such a beautiful bird in such numbers.'*



Three Wedge-tailed Eagles were circling overhead on Coates Creek Road after checking

out the fire trails in Mandagery Nature Reserve on July 19. Two **Jacky Winters** were hawking from the paddock fences.

Varied Sittellas, a vulnerable species, were seen on Gum Ridge Trail in the SCA by Patrick Driver on 20 July (below).



Plants



The Early Wattle, Acacia genistifolia, seen on the Ironbark Track, Conimbla NP.
Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

Creature of the Month

New Holland Mouse

Pseudomys novaehollandiae.

Report by Rosemary Stapleton.

The New Holland Mouse, also called pookila, is a small burrowing rodent native to Southeastern Australia. It features as Creature of the Month as there was exciting news this month that it had been found again in Goobang National Park. It was last recorded there 28 years ago, in 1997, during biodiversity surveys. Nadia Nieuwhof, from Zoos Victoria, undertook the recent surveys in Goobang setting out 91 camera traps and doing some live trapping, to obtain genetic material. (You can read Nadia's interview at the ABC link below)



From

<https://australian.museum/learn/animals/mammals/new-holland-mouse/>

The mouse lives in open heathlands, woodlands and dry sclerophyll forests with a heath understorey, grasslands and vegetated sand dunes. It is a social animal that digs extensive systems of burrows that several individuals live in during the day. At night it comes out and feeds on seeds, leaves, flowers, fungi and invertebrates. Through their burrowing they play a large role in soil health, nutrient recycling and decomposition of leaf litter.

This native mouse is similar in size to the House Mouse, *Mus musculus*. It has pale grey-brown fur with light grey underparts and pale feet. It can be distinguished from the House Mouse by its tail which is longer than its body length and is dark on top and pale underneath. The New Holland Mouse has larger rounded ears, larger eyes and lacks a notch on the inside of the upper incisors. It has also been said to lack a 'mousy' odour. Population densities are often highest in heath vegetation regenerating 2-3 years after fire or in areas with large floral diversity.

Goobang NP is an atypical habitat and the most western location. The mouse was usually found in coastal locations from southern Queensland all the way to Tasmania. However, since European settlement it has had a large range contraction and is now only found in fragmented populations. Between 1999 and 2009 it disappeared from many known locations. Earlier this year it was listed as a vulnerable species in NSW and is listed as endangered in Victoria and Tasmania. At a Commonwealth level it is vulnerable.

Its [threatened species profile](#) lists the threats to the New Holland Mouse as:

- Loss and modification of habitat

- Weed invasion and Phytophthora.
- Inappropriate fire and disturbance management.
- Predation by introduced predators, such as cats and foxes.
- Competition from other rodents, including the introduced House Mouse
- Potential climate change.

Nadia and Zoos Victoria are working with partners as part of an Australian Government Saving Our Species Program. If there is low genetic diversity in the Goobang population, they may undertake conservation breeding programs to add new genes to the local population. Other major threats will be tackled under a new conservation framework being designed in NSW, including ways to improve management of native ground cover and alter fire regimes.

Suggested activities to assist the species are:

- Habitat should be managed to include the entire range of vegetation succession stages.

- Protect and actively manage known sites by adopting appropriate fire regimes and introduced predator control.
- Learn to distinguish the New Holland Mouse from the introduced House Mouse.
- Practice responsible pet ownership.

References and Further Information

[New Holland Mouse - profile | NSW Environment, Energy and Science](#)

<https://australian.museum/learn/animals/mammals/new-holland-mouse/>

<https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/species/pubs/96-conservation-advice.pdf>

https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-07-12/pookila-new-holland-mouse-rediscovered-goobang-national-park/105517896?utm_source=abc_news_web&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_campaign=abc_news_web&utm_content=mail



OFNCS excursion group before walking the Ironbark Track, Conimbla National Park, 13 July 2025. Left to right – Marita Sydes, Penny Todman, John Zimmer, Tracee Burke, Patrick Driver, Tony Caine, and Cilla Kinross. Photo Rosemary Stapleton.



OFNCS at Conimbla Lookout in 2006 - Left to right - Suzanne Bower, Joyce Lawson, Jenny Medd, Vicki Glover, Jane Paul, Dick Medd, Bernie Huxtable, Colina Huxtable and Col Bower.
Photo Murray Fletcher.

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Orange Field Naturalist & Conservation Society acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, including the people of the Wiradjuri Nation, and we pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

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