



Waterwatch & EstuaryWatch
Citizen science in
Victoria's waterways

Mallee

Regional Report

2019-2020



Environment,
Land, Water
and Planning





Victoria sustains a vibrant history of community-based environmental monitoring and citizen science programs, including the Waterwatch and EstuaryWatch programs. These programs are instrumental in informing waterway management decisions while strengthening community engagement and fostering environmental stewardship and advocacy. Catchment management authorities, water authorities, local government and other delivery partners play a crucial role in facilitating the programs.

Through the EstuaryWatch and Waterwatch programs, citizen scientists are supported and encouraged to become actively involved in local waterway monitoring and on-ground activities. Citizen scientists involved in the 2019-2020 programs contributed a total of **232,580** hours to care for our waterways, equivalent to 31,011 volunteer days. This contribution provides an economic value of the 2019-2020 volunteer effort of **\$9,707,889**. For more information, see the Waterwatch & EstuaryWatch Citizen science in Victoria's waterways Annual Achievements Report 2019-2020.

Aboriginal Acknowledgement:

EstuaryWatch and Waterwatch proudly acknowledge Victoria's Aboriginal community and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely. We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people and communities to Victorian life and how this enriches us. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards the equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice.

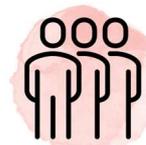
If you are interested in participating in citizen science in your region, please contact Mallee CMA on (03) 5051 4377 or visit <https://www.malleecma.com.au/>.

Regional Stats



8

Event Participants



4

Active Groups



50

Active Sites



42

Active Volunteers

Watching Wetland Birds to Give Back

The Water for Birds project aims to harness the power of citizen scientists to collect data on the presence of birds at various water bodies in the Mallee catchment.

Retired flora and fauna consultant and Maryborough local, Garry Cheers, frequented the Victorian Mallee for much of his professional career. Now he's joining other like-minded people as a citizen scientist, to volunteer and give back.

Earlier this year, Garry took part in the Mallee Catchment Management Authority's (MCMA) Water for Birds workshop at Birchip. Armed with new bird spotting scopes, tripods and birding field guide books, the volunteers learnt bird monitoring methods sourced from BirdLife Australia's Atlas and Birdata.

"I saw the workshop advertised and I thought perhaps it's time I gave something

back. The day was to show people how to do the monitoring, which is really good." Garry said.

Garry praised the MCMA workshop, which he said helped engage people with an interest in the environment to put their birdwatching experience to good use. "Even though I've done this sort of thing a lot before, I needed to see how the partner agencies wanted me to monitor birds."

Workshop participants decided what wetland or waterbody they would monitor and where there are gaps. Garry, who has always loved being out in the bush and wetlands, now drives to an area each month to conduct monitoring. "I've made a good living out of doing that sort of thing for 35 years. I feel it's time to put something back in. And I need something to do now I'm retired," he said.

The data collected from the Water for Birds project will increase local understanding of the benefits of environmental watering for the Mallee and Wimmera waterbodies. The MCMA will also leverage the bird data to report on the outcomes of specific

environmental watering events. "I do it already now, and I do a bit of photography. I go away for three or four days, but this will be going to a project, which is really interesting." Garry expects to see a variety of birds that rely on wetlands in the Mallee catchments to appear in the monitoring data. "Without the water, they won't be there," he said.

"I've made a good living out of doing that sort of thing for 35 years. I feel it's time to put something back in."

**Garry Cheers,
volunteer.**



Garry Cheers at Cronomby Tanks. Credit MCMA.

Elders Reconnect with Country in the Name of Science

For Robinvale Aboriginal elder, Aunty Rose Kirby, the National Waterbug Blitz was an opportunity to reconnect with Country while learning about the world of aquatic macroinvertebrates.

Aunty Rose joined other elders, freshwater ecologist John Gooderham and the Mallee Catchment Management Authority (MCMA) at Hattah-Kulkyne National Park to take part in the national program.

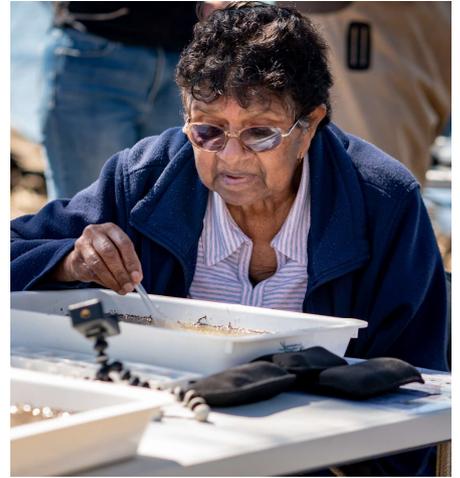
The program mobilises citizen scientists to take an active role in netting, identifying and recording macroinvertebrates in their local waterways to paint a clear picture of the health of aquatic ecosystems across the country. "You see those things about, in the water, but you don't think about them, you don't know what they do or how they survive," Aunty Rose said. "They're good for the environment, but I didn't realise how important they were."

Aunty Rose, who's been involved in Aboriginal education for much of her life, said having young Aboriginal students join the field trip helped pass the knowledge to the next generation. "They've already asked me when they can do this again," she said. "It was fantastic, just being out bush. I felt like taking off my shoes and paddling out there!"

Euston elder, Aunty Margaret Hannah, said the Waterbug Blitz reinforced the importance of all living creatures in an ecosystem and caring for places like Hattah-Kulkyne National Park. "If we didn't have these places, where would we go? It's a food chain for all our other little animals," she said. "I'll take away a lot of knowledge."

The National Waterbug Blitz helps the MCMA understand how environmental flows influence the range of species present in Mallee waterways. The data collected at Hattah-Kulkyne National Park, and other sites across the region, contributes to the site's environmental water management plan, which builds a picture of how the

wetlands respond over time to environmental water activities.



Aunty Margaret Hannah discovering macroinvertebrates. "It's a food chain for all our other little animals." Credit MCMA.

"If we didn't have these places, where would we go? I'll take away a lot of knowledge."

Aunty Margaret Hannah.



Aunty Rose and John Gooderham at Hattah- Kulkyne National Park. Credit MCMA