

**BOOLCOOMATTA RESERVE EXPEDITION  
17-29 SEPTEMBER 2006  
BRIEF LEADERS REPORT**  
*Written by Duncan MacKenzie*

In September 2006, SEG undertook a biodiversity survey of the recently purchased Boolcoomatta Reserve, situated in the north of South Australia, just west of Broken Hill. The purpose of the research was to establish scientific benchmarks for future work and to assist managers in reserve planning.

There were 45 participants who included 13 students that were subsidised by the Nature Foundation SA and a private donor. Camping was somewhat 'luxurious' when compared with most SEG expeditions in that we had the use of Boolcoomatta's shearers quarters, the main house and a number of work sheds. Food was prepared in two kitchens and all meals were taken in what had been the houses large billiard room. Teams took it in turns to produce the meals each day under the watchful eyes of Peter Trevaskis, 'chef extraordinaire'.

Running an expedition of this size requires careful planning and a keen eye for detail. Participants were divided into teams of 6 and left for the field at 6.30am each day. Teams were rotated throughout the scientific disciplines so that expeditioners received a variety of experiences during the expedition.

The expedition established 16 permanent biodiversity monitoring sites across the range of the Reserve's vegetation associations. Each site was opened and operated for four days and nights to survey reptiles, mammals, birds, invertebrates and vegetation. During the night, bats were surveyed using a variety of methodologies and spotlight surveys undertaken for the nationally threatened bird, the plains wanderer.

*SEG 2007 Calendar is provided as an insert to this issue of SEGments*

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In addition to collecting field data, the 'science shed' was a 'hive of activity' with expeditioners analysing data, processing specimens and preparing two plant herbariums - one to be retained at the Reserve for future researchers and the second to be lodged with the State Herbarium. The archaeology and history teams ranged across the Reserve studying both the Aboriginal and European occupations.

SEG expeditions aren't all hard work and on the last days, after the biodiversity work was completed, a ridge top hike of about 15km was undertaken by one group while another group visited nearby Bimbowrie Conservation Reserve and Old Boolcoomatta. It was on Old Boolcoomatta that Sir Douglas Mawson took many of his geology students on field trips. On the way back to Boolcoomatta, the group called in at dusk to some high rock outcrops to look for yellow-footed rock wallabies with a number being sighted.

The data collected is still being collated and analysed, however, early indications are that the expedition has been very successful in establishing some impressive benchmarks for the species surveyed. Twenty-seven species of reptile and one frog species were recorded. Mammals included two dunnart species, Bolom's mouse, five bat species and a possible increase in range for the eastern grey kangaroo.

The bird group compiled an impressive list of species including a number that were breeding. Of great interest was the number of active wedge-tailed eagle nests that were recorded in the study area. At least seven nests contained young and some had two young, indicating a good breeding year with ample food supplies. *(Report is continued on page 2)*

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**Extracts from an Expeditioner's account  
of Boolcoomatta 2006**

*Written by Rose Beager*

**MINNAWARRA BIODIVERSITY PROJECT  
Autumn Survey 12-16 April 2007**

The autumn survey will start soon, coinciding with the start of the school holidays. It will be an opportunity for young people to be acquainted with native animals of the southern Fleurieu.

Traps will be opened on Thursday 12 April, so the survey will be underway when school breaks up the next day. They will be closed again on Monday 16 April.

"Minnawarra" is situated along Springmount Rd, Myponga, between Hindmarsh Tiers Road and James Track, adjacent to and across the road from Springmount Conservation Park.

Registration is necessary before joining the survey for insurance purposes, so please notify Richard Willing if you are interested in participating in the survey. Ph. 8558 6381 or 0408 807 517.

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***Boolcoomatta Reserve Expedition report  
cont. from page 1***

The next step is for expedition leaders to complete data analysis and produce written reports which are then collated into an overall comprehensive expedition report. Data collected is also entered into the South Australian Biological Database.

The expedition leader and scientific leader was Duncan MacKenzie and other scientific leaders were Loraine Jansen, mammals; Adrian Sherriff, reptiles; Peter Bailey, invertebrates; Jim Allen and Nicholas Birks, birds; Denise Noack, vegetation; Dennis Matthews, bats; Keryn Walsh, Jude Bonell and John Love, archaeology and history; Logistics were provided by Trent Porter, Alun Thomas and Bruce Gotch.

Boolcoomatta was one of SEG's most successful expeditions with all participants thoroughly enjoying the experience - a number have expressed interest in joining the 2007 expedition.

We arrived at around 2:00pm to complete chaos. Anne and I were allocated a bedroom in the homestead to share with another lady called Gina.

Anne and I were roped in immediately to prepare dinner which was Apricot Chicken. Dinner was very tasty but a bit light on. By 8:00pm we had been fed and watered and everyone retired to bed around 9:15pm.

**Day 1:** We should have been going out to check mammals but as they had only been able to dig one line of traps instead of 8 yesterday, we were made redundant! I am very glad we were because some of the young people said that the work was like digging holes in concrete. Even with the help of a posthole digger and a crowbar, they only managed to get another two lines in.

We took a walk to a nearby dam where we saw a maned duck and family and quite a few birds. We then went back to the homestead for lunch and later took a walk to another dam where a lone grey teal was swimming. By this time it was hot so we went home and had a shower. Showering was only to be done every second day as the dams are pretty low on water. After dinner we watched the processing of bats. Some only weighed 3 grams. The species and sex of bat was recorded, if female it was noted if they were pregnant.

**Day 2:** We were on vegetation survey work today. It was blowing a gale and very dusty. The sites to be surveyed were already marked by Bush Heritage and we had to find their marker and then measure out a quadrat of 30m x 30m. The first site was mainly saltbushes and pig face. We went through the site collecting samples of everything we could find including tiny grasses within the quadrat. When the collection was finished we had to have two samples of each species - one for the Herbarium and one for Boolcoomatta SEG records. Each one is labelled with a number and then pressed in newspaper and cardboard. By the time the wind was too much we took the specimens back to the science shed to press and identify.

In the shed there was another group who had trapped small reptiles and insects and were processing them. One of each species

had to be euthanised and dissected, so we ducked out for this process.

We were supposed to go out again in the afternoon but the weather had deteriorated so badly, all events were cancelled. We made some opportunistic sightings, ones that are just outside of a quadrat area, and we found a tiny pink flower which Denise, our leader, pinpointed with her GPS.

**Day 3:** We did bird watching today with Nicholas Birks who is apparently very well known in the photography world and has marketed a series of postcards called Wildflight. Our first site was low vegetation and there seemed to be no birds at all. I was filling in the forms and missed seeing a white winged wren, which I have only seen once before. We clocked up eight species, one of which was a field wren much to Nick's delight as it was a new one to him.

We have to stay one hour on each site and the second was in a creek line. We saw an eagle's nest with one white fluffy chick inside and Mum sitting on the edge. Over twenty bird species were seen at this site.

Later we were given a tour by John of the shearing shed, which was very interesting. The sheep were taken off Boolcoomatta in 2005. The shed had facilities to shear 12 sheep at once.

**Day 4:** We were up early to check for mammals and bats. We retrieved a painted dragon, a bearded dragon and a couple of skinks and in the bat trap there were five. If they were a common species they were measured, weighed and recorded and then set free. If it was a new species, unfortunately the specimen was taken for a sample.

At 4pm we went out again to check traps and pitfalls. Another bearded dragon was caught but as these are quite common, he was set free. The bait was missing from another trap and had to be replaced. On our travels, we passed a copper mine which apparently has some very deep shafts in places. We returned to the camp about 6:30pm and on the way saw another eagle's nest with a chick.

**Day 5:** Today we were on archaeology. First we went through the shearers shed where we found one or two treasures like the chalk they used to mark the sheep and two old porcelain insulators. Jude was our leader and she told us the history of the area. Next

to the shearers' quarters we found lots of interesting things, including thick glass bottom of bottles.

Apparently the Aboriginal people in the region loved to find these so they could chip away to get at the indentation at the bottom which was called a 'pontill'. These were very sharp and they used them for woodwork and were able to keep several in their pockets.

We then moved on to a small brick building, which was apparently a powder magazine and another ruin which Jude thought might have been a brick water tank as it had no obvious door. We then went off to a windmill, which must have disintegrated in a storm as the blades were some distance from the stand.

We then went to a gully behind the Manager's quarters where Sir Douglas Mawson once got bogged and someone suggested he take the wheels off his car and use the big metal ones which were nearby. He did this and liked his new wheels so much, he left the old wooden spoked ones just where they were. They are to be donated to the Mawson Collection at the Museum very soon.

**Day 6:** We were up with the birds again for a photo shoot of the whole group as some people were leaving early. The photo was taken outside the shearers' shed.

We were doing the bird survey work today so had to be up early anyway. The first site was almost devoid of birds and we only saw one forked tail kite, two crested pigeons and a spiny cheeked honeyeater.

In the afternoon we went to a site on a creek with large river red gums. We saw quite a number of birds including a marbled frogmouth which Anne flushed out. There are several dams throughout the property but all creek lines are dry.

**Day 7:** We were on vegetation survey work again today. We did not find many new plants, especially on the second site which was very barren.

When we got back to the car, the group who were doing mammals told us they had caught a brown snake and two other smaller snakes. As it was the first it had to be killed, but there were some who were not in agreement with this practice. The rules however, are very strict for survey work and there is a code of ethics to follow.

At the end of the day we retired to the science shed to try to identify the plant specimens. This was not an easy task and eventually we gave up. The snake caught in the morning had been 'dealt with' and photos had been taken. It was about 5ft. long and quite a thin one.

**Day 8:** We were on mammals today and had a 6:30am start so we could pack our lunch. We had quite a successful morning as we caught quite a few native mice, a painted dragon, a blind snake and a dunnart.

At 4:30pm we set out to check the traps again, some of which are now being removed. We had another painted dragon and a couple of mice. Tomorrow is the end of the actual program and all remaining traps have to be picked up and gear put away.

**Chris's notes re: South Coast Track Walk**

Walkers on The South Coast Track have to budget for walking time and food to complete the 80 km track to Cockle Creek. At our moderate pace it took 6.5 days to walk in good weather but, if the weather turns bad, the crossing at the Ironbound Range has to be delayed until the worst of it has passed. It would be nice to include extra time for a rest day, because there are so many things of interest. For a fisherman, the Louisa River looks as though it would be full of trout, and the river is big and beautiful and a day's fishing would be an adventure – but it is encountered crossing before the Ironbound Range and if the rain comes you could be stuck.

Phil and Janet have been bushwalking companions for several years. We had decided to do a walk this year and after looking at a few options in New Zealand and Alice Springs, we chose the South Coast Track – with some misgivings from Janet who doesn't enjoy flying in light aircraft. The track is renowned for the beauty of the mountain and seascapes, but also for the muddy conditions and frequent terrible weather. In former times the access was via Scott Peak Dam and the Port Davey track, an 8 day hike through the incredibly muddy button grass plains to Melaleuca to pick up a food drop and continue along the South Coast track, 80 km to Cockle Creek. During the walk we had frequent chats to Norbert, a Taswegian of wide experience and background who now lives in Kettering, just south of Hobart. He said that the Port Davey track reminded him of a worm crawling down a long tunnel, eventually emerging in the Paradise of Melaleuca!! I suppose that in early days, walkers would also come in by boat to Cox Bight or via Bathurst Harbour. These days Tasair run regular charter flights from Hobart to Melaleuca – weather permitting. While walking we generally heard at least 3 flights a day passing over and the track has more than 1000 people wading it in a season.

**Day 9:** This afternoon's walk turned out to be a very bumpy ride before arriving at a rocky gorge, past a homestead called Kalabity where flood levels had been recorded about 6 or 7 metres up on a tree. Several youngsters climbed up to the top of the rocks but this was bit out of our league. We went on a short walk to a cave which had some Aboriginal artwork on the walls. While waiting for the others to return, we saw another Eagle's nest with two chicks in it. The chicks had most of their adult feathers with just a bit of white fluff left. We had a long journey home in the dark.

**Day 10:** The big walk is on today, but another walk had been arranged for those not involved and we left at 9:30am. Another hairy ride, again through Kalabity and on to Old Boolcoomatta Homestead. We explored the shearers' quarters and Mawon's Hut. We then had lunch and it was time to head home.

**Day 11:** Clean up day. Anne and I had been delegated to the science shed to pack all the plants specimens in clean newspaper.

We are leaving early tomorrow morning after 12 days of bliss. It is like being in another world here – no newspapers, no radio. Goodness knows what has happened in the world since we came up here.

The journey home was uneventful, stopping at Yunta and Burra and then on to Hackney Rd where there was lots of farewells. I would love to visit Boolcoomatta again in two years time to see what difference there is since the sheep are taken away.

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**Extract from South Coast Track,  
Tasmania, February 2006 Bushwalk**

*Melaleuca to Buoy Creek outlet*

Walkers: Phil Davill, Chris Wright, Janet Davill  
*cont. from last issue of SEGments*

Saturday 11/02/06

Melaleuca to Buoy Creek outlet

Janet's account continued:

I doze as it slowly becomes light. We all hurriedly dress and grab a quick drink of water before going off down to the hide. A nice gentleman is on duty and dutifully logging the birds by identifying their leg bands with the aid of a powerful telescope. A table is set up some distance away from the hide with some seed for feed scattered on it. There are only 200 recorded breeding pairs

of orange bellied parrots at present. With numbers so perilously low, they are being closely monitored. There were a few light showers while we watched the parrots and it was interesting to see the drops of water beading off their plumage. Clearly they are well adapted to the stormy environment.

These parrots breed down here in the southwest and then migrate across Bass Strait and up to the south coast of the mainland, ranging from around Melbourne and up through the Coorong. It is there that their habitat is being destroyed and they are predated on by cats and foxes. All this means their numbers are increasingly threatened. As we watch, several parrots land to feed and it is immediately apparent why they are being given a bit of attention. They are a very attractive and noticeable bird. The more educated and observant students of birds would have soon noticed their diminished presence down here. All visits of identifiable (and un-banded) birds are logged over the summer breeding and feeding season by volunteers.

The nice man tells us all about it and also tells us about the tin mining history and of a man named Deny King, who had built a house here and mined tin - and also pioneered all sorts of conservation measures. Deny King died some years back and another old couple, in their 70s, hold the mining lease at present. They still summer over as a lifestyle thing and when they finally leave, the lease will revert to National Parks and Wildlife. The King house, mine area, including Deny King's old workshop, are considered private property and walkers are requested to respect this. We are told we could go down to look at the old King house, if we want, but we do not feel like intruding to merely rubber neck. There is a poster about Deny in the bird hide and details regarding a biography written about him.

Meanwhile, blue wing parrots, a few beautiful firetails and one bold New Holland honeyeater mingle with the orange bellies. Eventually we are forced by time constraints to go back to the hut for breakfast, wash-up and packing of gear. We all manage to be ready and off down the track by 9:20am. Not exactly an early start but we are only doing about 4 hours walking today, down to Cox Bight and to the Point Eric campsite. We had thought to do this on arrival, but Wally's bird recommendations and the thought of eating the 1.2Kg meal out of Phil's already too heavy pack was appealing - so we did not.

As we approach the landing strip, we hear a 'plane landing. A young couple disembark and also an even younger pilot than ours. Phil chats to the pilot and he says it had been such a rough trip in that his head had hit the roof a few times. The young couple do indeed look a little ragged and say they are going to look around Melaleuca before heading off to Point Eric.

We get onto the official South Coast Track at 9:30am, after first crossing the strip. We skirt around some channelling from the tin mining and past the old workshop. Then it is onto some delightful boardwalk over the button grass peat bog. The track must have been very difficult before the boardwalk was installed. We are not so foolish as to think this is not 'real' bush walking. Our experience in the untracked Tyndall Range has honed in us a keen appreciation of any form of track works assistance (and a quiet reverence towards the National Park's track workers).

As we climb a little higher, we can look back to Melaleuca and the mountains beyond, especially the dominating Mount Rugby. They are very misty with small showers whipping through in front of them. We score a light sprinkling occasionally but do not bother to stop and coat up as they are so soon over, and the breeze dries our shirts fairly swiftly afterwards. We pass by Half Woody Hill, and it is indeed wooded only on the leeward half, the prevailing westerly gales keeping the windward side mostly un-vegetated.

Soon after this significant feature, we pass over the watershed divide and continue on to climb up onto the base of the foothills of the New Harbour Range on the valley's western side. The track surface is good and of white quartzite gravel. We discuss the presence of the odd large boulder strewn about on the button grass flats below us. Are they glacial erratics, or have they come tumbling down from the heights above? Is the wide valley glacial and the ups and downs glacial moraine ridges? We need to inveigle geomorphologist Jennie Bourne to walk with us to settle such questions.

We can now overlook Freney Lagoon. Beyond the coast, some of the smaller Maatsuyker Group islets can be seen, looking beautiful way out to sea. We can hear the sound of the sea breaking on the shore but the beach is obscured by a belt of vegetation. We have passed several large and deep valleys in the eastern Bathurst

Range on our left that look very beautiful too. It is a spectacular area and a great prelude to the walk. I am getting weary already. It is 11:30am and we have only been walking for 2 hours. We meet two oncoming walkers – older men, who stop for a chat. They have done the walk in reverse from Cockle Creek and will get the next available flight out. One gentleman turns out to have been a tech. at Mawson Base for the Bureau of Meteorology in years past. He seems a gloomy old codger but pleasant enough. They tip us off about an unofficial campsite further on from Point Eric, where Buoy Creek runs into the sea. Camping there would give us a small head start tomorrow and make better use of our time and energy today. They move on stating that the walk had been just terrible conditions-wise. I am mildly alarmed that someone who has been in Antarctic conditions a lot would think so. What is ahead of us? There being only one way to find out, we proceed.

Soon after that encounter, we meet two more men, pack-less and wandering along in the direction of Melaleuca. They are about our age and introduce themselves as Martin and Rob. They were in the other hut last night and are expecting the young couple to catch up and join them any old time soon. The young fellow is Martin's son. We tell them that they had experienced an awful flight in and were going to settle down by looking around before coming on. Martin doesn't appear fazed at this news and mentions that when they all get together they were going to climb to the top of Cox Bluff in the New Harbour Range (the western range of the valley). They recommended that we really should too as the view is fantastic. Martin appears to be an enthusiast – perhaps bordering on slightly fanatical, I muse. He says we will most probably camp beside each other this evening. We say, "Perhaps" We do not mention our aim to go on as we may very well be too weary to proceed from Point Eric and we are not quite sure about the wisdom of revealing our intention to camp in an undesignated spot. We part and wish them well on their climb. I feel sorry for the young couple.

The weather is a contrast of showers and overcast, and sunshine. Sunscreen is a definite must as the sunshine has a sting to it. We pass beyond Freney Lagoon (that appears to contain plenty of un-withered sedge – and I can hear the occasional bird singing). The view of the islets is ever changing as we walk on, reaching a thin belt

of tea-tree just before getting down onto the beach.

The western beach end is stony, but to the east is smooth gleaming sand all the way to Point Eric. It is now 1pm and lunch is called. We select suitable driftwood logs to sit upon and Phil gets the Trangia lit for a cup of tea. While the water is heating, we all three go for a potter about the area.

Just out to sea are big masses of swaying kelp, which keeps catching the corner of your eye so you think a seal may be there. No silkies out there however on closer inspection. Although it is quite hot in the sun, none of us succumbs to an urge to strip off and dash into the cold Southern Ocean. As we lunch, we observe some silver gulls foraging in the shallows. One is stamping his little webbed feet furiously to stir up edibles. Chris has seen a hooded plover along on the sand as well. We sip our tea and munch on cheese, vita-wheats and pickled onions and just gaze over the white and yellow rocks, white sand, blue sea, misty islands and a turbulent looking sky.

We pass a very smelly dead seal, washed up on the beach, and go past the Freney Lagoon camp site. It is very easy walking along the firm sand. We get clobbered by a heavy shower and coat up very swiftly.

We turn around to look back at the western hills and the changing view in the variable conditions every now and then. It looks to be pelting down up on the tops and we wonder how fanatical Martin and his companions are faring. We reach the beach-end and go up onto the neck of high ground that is Point Eric. It is delightfully shady in tea tree forest and other shrubs and mosses – plus the ubiquitous *Gahnia grandis*, otherwise known as Cutting Grass. Coming over the rise to the other side, we walk through the camp spot. Quite a few tent sites are apparent. There is a sign-in shelter there, as sometimes people start from here after landing in the plane on the beach. We sign in again (having done so back at the airstrip shed).

As we get down onto the next beach, we note more tent sites overlooking the sea. It looks to be a great place to camp but we feel we have the legs to go on to Buoy Creek. Norbert has bagged the farthest site and is already relaxing, ciggie in one hand and a cuppa in the other. We reluctantly explain what we will do. I think it would be good to camp near Norbert and have a bit more of a

chat. I consider he would likely be a good person to spin a yarn or two. He says he understands our reasoning and says we may catch up tomorrow then. We leave him to his solitude and contemplation once more.

We come to a rocky cliff, named Black Cliff – it was particularly black at that - and have to clamber around it while our boots suffer being inundated in shallow, salty waves. This point is impassable at high tide, necessitating a tedious and steep ‘up and over the back of the cliff’ traverse. The rock stack on the seaward side is very jagged and looks like a huge toothy fang.

Onward up the beach we amble, enjoying the beautiful views out to sea. We cross a few small creek outlets cutting across the beach. It is good to sluice fresh water over our boots after their saltwater bath. On reaching Buoy Creek outlet, it is another wade through shallow, fresh water to where we can see a track marker leading off the beach into the thick, coastal, tea tree dominated vegetation. Just into the bush, up the track a little way, is the campsite we had been told about. There looks to be about 4 tent’s worth of space and a general cook area.



Bouy Creek photo supplied by Chris Wright

Armed with fishing gear, Chris wades up Buoy Creek to start blissfully and optimistically casting away. We watch him for a while and also spot a cache of collected beach rubbish that someone has stashed into a sheltered pocket of bush. There are assorted plastic bottles, bits of plastic mesh and nylon rope fragments. Better here than floating about strangling birds, seals and dolphins. I then elect to beach comb further east. I paddle barefoot outwards and then slip my sandals back on and mooch back along the ebb line. No shells, one or two dead seabirds, one deceased penguin, one bright blue plastic clothes peg (I’ll have that) and several onions. I imagine a sack of

onions going overboard somewhere. I do see some live birds – 2 morose looking pied oyster catchers and some more hooded plovers are patrolling the shallows.

I take my clothes peg and two onions back to camp to show Phil. Back in camp, I start to cook tea – Italian tuna pasta. No trout unfortunately. It would be so good if Chris could have his dearest wish and snaffle one. I tell him I have some olive oil and will be saving all my foil lunch wrappings in preparation should he land one in the days to come.

Chris decides to try casting out where the fresh water meets with the sea. Phil and I snap away at the increasingly beautiful sunset over Cox Bluff to the southwest. I nip up the beach and am not entirely but moderately surprised to spot a wombat ambling towards me, inspecting piles of sea weed as it goes along. I stand still and it just keeps coming closer, not appearing to have seen me. When it is about a metre away, I shift and it stops dead, then turns tail and scampers away in a shower of sand. Back at camp, my late in the day burst of energy has waned and I crawl into bed.

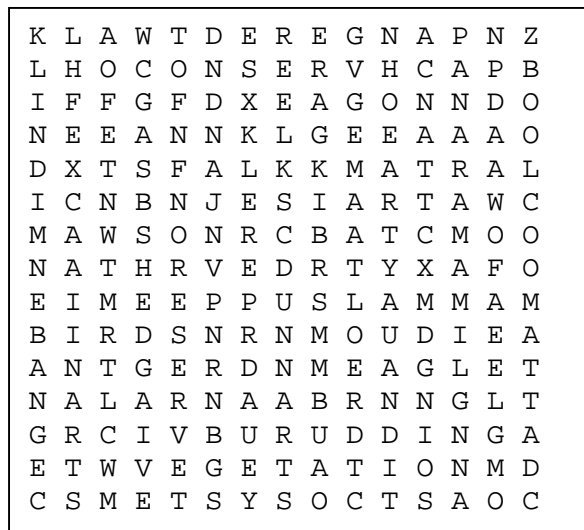
*The June issue of SEGments will include further extracts from the South Track Walk.*

### Kids Corner

The hidden words are taken from Boolcoomatta Expedition reports. The words are hidden in all directions. Can you find them all?

#### Word List

eagle	Boolcoomatta
dunnart	Mawson
reserve	shed
vegetation	birds
snake	specimen
mammals	walk





# SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION GROUP - Membership

The Scientific Expedition Group came into being at a public meeting on 21st August 1984.

Membership is open to any persons, family or organisation interested in the following aims:

- \* The promotion and running of expeditions of a scientific, cultural and adventurous nature.
- \* The furthering of knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the natural environment.
- \* Promotion of the values and philosophy of wilderness.
- \* Enabling people to learn the skills required for planning and running expeditions, and to develop sound field techniques.

Members receive regular information on SEG activities and expeditions

*Patron: Her Excellency, the Honourable Marjorie Jackson-Nelson, AC, CVO, MBE, Governor of South Australia*

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