



FILE

PRIME MINISTERFOR PRESS8 NOVEMBER 1978LAUNCHING OF "AUSTRALIAN ENDANGERED SPECIES"

Australia -- unlike many countries throughout the world -- is fortunate that it still possesses vast areas of wilderness, and, with it, a wide variety of native flora and fauna.

Australians have come to realise the inherent beauty of our countryside. They also realise that for many natural species Australia is the last sanctuary on earth -- and that we, as Australians, are the custodians of their survival.

Australia is also fortunate that it has men of the calibre of Derrick Ovington who has dedicated his life to the conservation of our natural resources. This thoroughly-researched and beautifully illustrated book by Derrick Ovington will, I trust, bring home to all Australians a consciousness of our responsibility to ensure the future of our endangered species. Books such as this are an essential ingredient in ensuring the conservation of our wildlife.

I am told that one characteristic of Australian fauna is that many animals are inconspicuous. They are naturally thin on the ground. They live in remote and thinly-populated areas, even uninhabited districts. They can live or die, flourish or decline. They can disappear from the face of the earth unnoticed. The same -- thanks to the diligence of the Australian media -- cannot be said of our politicians. Sometimes I wish this wasn't the case.

I have noted that one press commentator suggested a few days ago -- somewhat tongue in cheek -- that Malcolm Fraser, rather than being a conservationist, was "A Man of Extinction". Can I gently take issue with that?

Since coming to office my Government has been actively engaged in preserving the environment for some previously endangered species not referred to by Professor Ovington. Three that come to mind were, up until just a couple of years ago, under grave threat of extinction:- the blue collared hard worker bird; the enterprising business bird, both the "lesser" and the "greater"; and the resolute rural bird, now enjoying one of its most prolific seasons for many years.

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More recently a not so welcome species has appeared -- the noisy knocker. I believe this particular species will remain fairly isolated in an environment where a spirit of optimism, confidence and belief in the future of Australia is now returning. But turning to those species that are dealt with in Derrek Ovington's book, I believe as a nation we have begun to appreciate the existing and potential values of wildlife.

As the variety of living things diminishes, these values are eroded and the human environment suffers. It is a tragedy that for many of our native species the concern now evident in the community for their survival came too late.

I recall that many years ago -- in the late 1950's -- I expressed concern in the Party Room that the Princess Alexandra Parrot was in danger of extinction. How tragic, I thought, to lose such a rare and beautiful bird -- one with such royal plumage. Because of its beauty, the Princess Alexandra Parrot was highly prized by overseas aviarists. I was determined that this repulsive and shameful trade in birds should stop. Subsequently, I was delighted to learn in about November 1959 that the then Minister for Customs, Senator Henty, had convinced Cabinet that the export of not only the Princess Alexandra Parrot, but all native birds, should be banned. That policy still applies today.

Conservation at that time was something of a dirty word, it was not a popular issue. But the ban was a start. From it the conservation movement went from strength to strength. It now commands, as it rightly should, vast popular support.

The establishment of the Australian Conservation Foundation in 1965 was a landmark in the movement. I was proud to be a founding member.

Australia is setting high standards of nature conservation. This is evident from the leading role we play in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

Australia has signed the Washington Convention on Trade in endangered species. The Convention for the conservation of Antarctic seals, and the Convention for the world cultural and natural heritage.

Australia was the first party to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as waterfowl habitat.

Australia and Japan have signed a joint agreement for the protection of migratory birds.

Furthermore, my Government has welcomed the establishment of voluntary conservation bodies, and we have actively supported the setting up of the World Wildlife Fund in Australia.

The Commonwealth and the States are setting aside significant areas of land and sea to make sure sufficient habitat remains for the survival of native plants and animals. The largest and latest example is the Kakadu National Park which it is hoped will be proclaimed shortly.

Because of my Government's concern we established the inquiry into the Australian whaling industry. It is expected to report shortly.

Where special assistance for certain species is required, the Commonwealth Government is co-operating with the relevant State governments in joint conservation projects. This has been the case in saving the Bridled Nail-tailed Wallaby in Queensland and the Yellow-helmeted Honeyeater in Victoria.

In 1976, I launched the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service's first major campaign directed towards the protection of endangered species - a series of pamphlets on endangered animals.

The preparation of these pamphlets has involved close co-operation not only between Commonwealth and State Government agencies, but also with natural history societies and interested individuals.

I am delighted that the Service, under the direction of Professor Ovington, has extended the work even further with the production of this volume on Australian endangered species. It is to be hoped that more volumes will be written, dealing with other groups of animals and plants.

It is axiomatic that with increased knowledge comes increased responsibility. Derrick Ovington's book contributes greatly to our knowledge. Through it, I trust, future generations will judge us as having properly responded to the challenge of conserving our wildlife - an irreplaceable part of our natural heritage.

I commend this fine book to you.

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