

## NOTES from NARACOORTE CAVES

Deborah Carden

### Bat Recovery Programme

On 30 December 2012, after a break of nearly three months, we started the thermal image monitoring again of the Southern Bentwing Bat (*Miniopterus schreibersii bassanii*). Kristen Lear finished her 2011/12 Fulbright year at Naracoorte in October where she had recorded bat movements in and out of the maternity cave with thermal imaging cameras. The student who been arranged to take over for summer was not able to come but we are fortunate in having graduate Tara Avery arrive to continue the monitoring.

### Fence change and 'buffers'

The fence was enlarged in June 2012 using a biodiversity grant obtained by Friends of Naracoorte Caves (FONC). With the fence further out many bats seemingly exit the cave lower to the ground before they flit over the fence, swoop towards the ground before going off into the night.

The FONC grant paid for three 12m long 'buffers' which were made-to-measure from shade sail cloth. Along top and bottom are eyelets which will be used to attach the buffers to the top of the fence and anchor to the ground. The idea of this is to mitigate injury of juveniles hitting fence. Now the fence is further away they might not hit it and we may not need all the buffers. We will probably put up one buffer along the back fence where it can also act as a back-drop for the thermal monitoring instead of the existing corrugated iron. Like the corrugated iron the buffers are cream in colour - the thermal camera picks up the bats better from a light background than from dark.

We are expecting juveniles out any day. Guides have said they've spotted what they think are young ones so some may be on practice runs already. I noted via the thermal camera that there is a lot of 'out-in-out-about' type of activity going on for around an hour or so around the cave entrance at the moment.

We cannot see the juveniles in the cave so we can't ascertain this year's numbers. As in the previous two or so years the mothers have tucked themselves up into an aven they've favoured, to give birth. The thermal monitoring will help ascertain the 2012 recruitment.

### Evening Bat Tours

For the summer evening bat tours I have been putting a portable light out to the left hand side of the bat cave. When the fence was altered our bat specialist advisers suggested we should not put a light back on the fence where it had been for several years. However, we need some light so the evening visitor experience is meaningful - the portable light is a trial to find the best spot for a permanent fixture. The bats do not seem



Top. New fence around the old at Bat Cave. Photo: Deborah Carden

Middle. Friends of Naracoorte Caves Anne and Allen Attwood, and Mick Dennis (leaning on fence) inspecting the new work. Photo: Deborah Carden

Bottom. Bat's eye view of Bat Cave. Photo: Steve Bourne

perturbed by this light - two nights ago they spent a lot of time swooping across it catching insects. Tours are running till 25 January 2013 we have some time to observe and determine the best light position.

We are interested in bats and lights regarding Blanche Cave. This cave is part of the evening tour and when that part of the tour is on lights are on too, but bats happily fly into the cave (I know they're happy - they sing as they flit past one's ear).

### **Naracoorte Caves Strategic Planning - update**

The strategic planning for the coming decade is moving into its final stage. Shannon Architects have been commissioned to prepare the final Master Plan document. Key stakeholders will be invited to nominate representatives to provide their organisation's input to the Master Plan.

### **Organisational Restructure**

Like most State government departments, the one responsible for Naracoorte Caves National Park and World Heritage Area has been restructured during the past two years, and more is expected. It is now the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources. Park maintenance at Naracoorte shifted to the ranger operations area in November and is settling well into its new regime.

### **Summer season**

We are busy as is usual at this time of the year. In preparation we ensured staff were 1st Aid trained or refreshed, we did fire evacuation practice, adventure caving risk assessments, geology training, food handling and knife sharpening training - the latter was for cafe kitchen staff.

Before the Christmas break we had a really lovely staff jam session in Blanche Cave, organised by guitar playing guides - stage, microphones, amplifiers and tuneful karaoke - others may question that description of our singing but it was very good fun.



*Left. Naracoorte Caves' staff jamming.  
Above. Distorted sound??*