

RAMSAR LISTING for PICCANINNIE PONDS, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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The Piccaninnie Ponds Conservation Park was designated as a Ramsar site by Minister Tony Burke on 21 December 2012. The Ramsar treaty was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 at a convention of wetlands of international importance. It gives a framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

Ramsar Protection of the Piccaninnie Ponds wetlands ensures this diverse and beautiful wetland will be protected for future generations by an international treaty. The Ramsar Convention is the only global environmental treaty that deals with a particular ecosystem. A Ramsar Factsheet for Piccaninnie Ponds has been developed and can be downloaded from <http://www.environment.gov.au>

The Piccaninnie Ponds are one of Australia's best examples of rising limestone springs and collectively form the largest remnant of coastal fresh-water wetlands in the South East. Prior to European settlement it was part of a much larger wetland system extending from Green Point in the west, over 12 kilometres to the east discharging in the Glenelg River estuary. Over a period of time surrounding wetlands were drained such that by the 1970s a remnant of approximately 400 ha remained. This was gazetted a Conservation Park in 1974 to protect the unique wetland values. In the last ten years significant efforts have been undertaken to restore the wetland system including purchase and protection of land to more than double the area of Piccaninnie Ponds Conservation Park, and to restoration and revegetation of in excess of 100 hectares of wetlands. The Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) is planning works for improving and reinstating a further 175 ha of wetlands at the site.

The Piccaninnie Ponds are a valuable community asset and a unique visitor destination. Local groups have dedicated thousands of volunteer hours over many years to assist the site conservation and restoration program. These activities have been an exemplar for future natural resource management initiatives as far as community education, participation and awareness activities are concerned.

The wetlands are surface expressions of a much larger underground cave system of great beauty and interest, which has made the site one of Australia's premier cave-diving destinations. (See ACKMA Journal 85 for a report on cave diving at Piccaninnie Ponds. Ed.)

The wetlands at this site support 61 species of conservation significance including the critically endangered Orange-bellied Parrot; they also provide habitat for 20 migratory bird species. Over 30 vegetation associations including freshwater lakes and swamps, coastal dunes, silky tea tree thickets, and terrestrial grasslands and woodland are represented.

The 862 hectare Piccaninnie Ponds Karst Wetlands site is an outstanding example of rare fen and karst wetland types and has a range of conservation and cultural values. Local Boandik elders tell us that previous generations lived here permanently, in stone huts built close to the abundant food source the wetlands provided.

The site represents one of the few remaining permanent freshwater wetlands in the lower south-east of South Australia.

These wetlands are believed to be a drought refuge for many animals and to support native fish species that rely on freshwater to complete their lifecycle, such as the dwarf galaxias, Southern pygmy perch and Yarra pygmy perch.



Top. DEWNR Regional Manager Tim Collins addresses the crowd at the announcement of the Ramsar listing.

Bottom. Senator Don Farrell being interviewed.

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