

# THE FRESHWATER TURTLE TIMES



1 MILLION TURTLES  
COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PROGRAM



## Newsletter 2

May 2022

Happy World Turtle Day!

Welcome to the second of our quarterly newsletters. These newsletters provide updates on what you and the program have achieved in the last couple of months.

This edition includes;

- the official launch of the National Nest Predation Experiment,
- a summary of recent turtle ecology research findings and
- an update from one of our ever-active community groups.

World Turtle Day on 23<sup>rd</sup> May began in 2000 as an initiative of American Tortoise Rescue. This day provides an opportunity for us to honour the amazing species of turtles and tortoises we share this earth with, as well as to raise awareness of their conservation needs. Many species around the world are threatened with extinction and unfortunately the freshwater turtles of Australia are no exception.

### **1 Million Turtles Community Conservation Program**

The 1 Million Turtles team have been working hard getting the National Nest Predation Experiment ready. Ethics approval has now been granted from the University of Western Sydney and trials have been undertaken by Associate Professor Ricky Spencer's students at the University. We are now set for everyone around Australia to join the experiment. The students did find that if it's been very wet in your area, you can lose the eggs in the swampy ground. So, if you have experienced lots of rainfall recently you may need to wait until the soil dries out a bit.

We have also been developing relationships with many First Nations groups. We look forward to the sharing of knowledge and the many turtle conservation activities that will stem from this. We are keen to connect with many more groups so please let us know if this is something you, or a group you know of, would like to be involved with.

*This project is supported by an Australian Government Citizen Science Grant.*



## **National Nest Predation Experiment – Ready to roll!**

The National Nest Predation Experiment will develop a national interactive 'hotspot' map to determine region specific estimates of predation rates. This important citizen science initiative of the 1 Million Turtles Program is now looking for people with access to suitable sites to run the experiment. The sites can be by a waterway, but positions well away from water are also useful as a comparison. They will preferably be on private land where access permission has been granted, but can be on public land if working in partnership with the relevant local authority.

To start, participants will need to complete an on-line training session by watching a few short videos. They will then need to complete a quiz to ensure they are compliant with the University ethics approval process. You can access the training and all the information you will need to get started here:

[NNPE Survey \(1millionturtles.com\)](https://1millionturtles.com)

The training webpages also list the basic equipment you will need. A trail camera (aka remote sensor camera) can also be used to catch the culprit on 'film' as part of the survey. While this can be a great addition to the experiment, please note that it is not essential. We have listed a few economical options if you opt to purchase one (you can download the economical camera option guide via the NNPE Survey webpage).



*Digging holes at Paiwalla Wetlands, SA*



*Burying the chicken eggs*

At the end of the experiment, participants will submit the data of the number of eggs taken within three weeks via our 1 Million Turtles mobile app, TurtleSAT. It will then be analysed and displayed on an interactive map. It will run continuously throughout the next year so you can join at a time that suits you.

Hopefully the webpages provide you with all the information you need to get started but we are very happy to help as needed (see the end of the newsletter for how to access your local contact).

We will run a series of Q & A workshops to answer any questions you may have as you get started and to gather any feedback you have for us. The first will be held online on Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> of May at 7:00pm AEST. It will also be recorded and available to view through the 1 Million Turtles website.

Register your attendance here to receive the workshop link: [National-nest-predation-experiment-additional-tips-and-qa-session-tickets](#)

## Research Update



In order to understand turtle declines and plan conservation actions like nest protection strategies, researchers have been collecting data on turtle populations at a range of sites in New South Wales and Victoria.

In February and March 2022, La Trobe University PhD candidate Angela Simms and postdoctoral researcher Dr. Donald McKnight trapped turtles in wetlands in Albury, Wodonga, Winton Wetlands, and Gippsland.

They captured 44 broad-shelled turtles, 387 eastern long-necked turtles, and 455 Murray short-necked turtles. Excitingly, they captured juveniles of all three species, including hatchling long-necks and short-necks that were only a few days old! Juveniles were, however, far less common than adults, and some sites appeared to have largely adult populations.

Now that these baseline data have been collected, the next step is to work with the Australian Research Council grant partners: North East Water, Tiverton Farms, Greening Australia, Wodonga Council, and Winton Wetlands, to protect turtle nests at these sites. A range of nest protection strategies will be tested so that the best solutions can be identified. The researchers will keep you updated as their results come in, so we can all make use of the latest knowledge to protect turtles. Hopefully when these sites are surveyed in the future, more juveniles will be captured and we will know we are on the right track.

## **Community group update**

### Strathalbyn Field Naturalists Group and Pam Warneke at Narrung Peninsula, South Australia

After the members working bee at the private Warneke Wetlands (WW) on the October long weekend 2021 everything was in readiness for the nesting season to come. The area inside the exclusion fence was prepared with mowing and trimming. The fence out into the water was extended. And this year, areas were cleared for sand patches to be trialled at each entrance to the water.



The first record on camera was of an adult short necked turtle emerging to lay eggs at the beginning of November. The sand patches were successful in showing the tracks of adults that had passed over but had not been picked up on camera. A total of 10 adults were recorded, 6 by sand tracks and 4 on camera.

This year hatching began at the beginning of January 2022 with the first nest found inside the fence under veldt grass on the edge of the mowed area. An estimated 25 eggs were found. There were 12 live hatchlings discovered, one unhatched egg, one dead baby and a possible 11 naturally hatched that hopefully made it to the water.

A total of 8 nests have been found with varying degrees of success; from nothing surviving in one nest of 23 eggs, to almost all making a successful hatching in another.



*A female turtle caught on camera emerging from the water within the fenced area*



*Extending the fence out into the water*

By chance, two of these nests were found outside the fence. There has been no predation from foxes this year inside or outside the fence. The cameras have picked up extremely low fox presence in the area for some reason. Maybe the bounty on foxes has made them a profitable target and their numbers are being reduced. Fox baiting at the wetlands is ongoing and a possible help also in reducing numbers. It may also be they haven't wanted to contribute to selfies!

There has been an increased interest in the achievement of the exclusion fence. Paiwalla Wetlands group visited Warneke Wetlands in January. An incredible number of losses happens at their property and the only way forward seems to be a fence. Murray Bridge Council visited WW in February wanting ideas for a fence they hope to build at Riverglades which also experiences huge losses. Interaction between 1 Million Turtles program members and the Raukkan Aboriginal Community at Narrung has prompted talk of a proposed visit to the wetlands as well.

Later this year, a presentation by Professor Mike Thompson to the Australian Society of Herpetologists (ASH) on this project and the exclusion fence is planned to be part of a symposium on turtles that will be held in the Adelaide hills.



We're really keen to share the turtle conservation achievements of groups and individuals around Australia. If you would like to share your group's activities in a future newsletter please let us know via [1millionturtles@1millionturtles.com](mailto:1millionturtles@1millionturtles.com) and include 'newsletter update' in your subject heading.

## **Find out more:**

<https://1millionturtles.com> website with information about the 1 Million Turtles program, the team members who support the project, links to event registrations, videos, training modules, some of the recorded webinars, and more.

Two Facebook pages; [TurtleSAT](#) which provides updates on interesting sightings and community alerts such as red-eared sliders, and [1 Million Turtles](#) which provides general freshwater turtle information, project updates and invitations.

## **1 Million Turtles Team Contacts**

Remember that if you would like one-on-one support from a team member please contact 1 Million Turtles [1millionturtles@1millionturtles.com](mailto:1millionturtles@1millionturtles.com), include 'Need 1 on 1 support' in the subject heading, provide us with some information on the nature of the assistance you require along with your location and best contact details, and a local contact with be in touch with you.

**New South Wales/ACT** – Assoc. Professor Ricky Spencer, Ms. Geetha Ortac, Dr. Deb Bower (Armidale area)

**Victoria/Tasmania** - Dr. James Van Dyke (and NSW Riverina)

**South Australia** - Dr. Sylvia Clarke, Professor Mike Thompson

**Western Australia** - Mr. Anthony Santoro

**Queensland** – Ms. Marilyn Connell, Dr. Deb Bower

**Northern Territory** - Dr. Deb Bower

