Dear Save The Gouldian Fund members and supporters

Once again I would like to thank all those people who are helping to save the Gouldian Finch. The volunteers who run the STGF, the volunteers who help us do the census, the Hunter Valley Finch Club members who give so unstintingly of their time for all sorts of events not least of which is helping with annual spring clean of the NSW Captive Breeding Research Centre. The clubs and the individuals who so kindly donate their hard earned cash and last but not least our corporate sponsors.

Without this huge input, we would be nothing.!

We have only been operational for approximately 5 years, but in that time have achieved a lot. When it is all happening it seems to be a slow process but when you look back at what has been achieved to date, we have actually done quite well.

Outdoor flights section of birdroom at the NSW Captive Breeding Research Centre

During our 5 years we have built the NSW Captive Breeding Research Centre which is now populated with some 3000 birds. This facility has delivered a large number of scientific papers, helped Dr Sarah Pryke to win the Woman Scientist of the Year Award - all her papers may be viewed on the STGF website.

We have built the Wyndham Conservation Research Centre which has led to many more scientific papers being published.

Most of all we have begun to get a handle on the real reasons for the Gouldian's decline. As is often the case there is no individual reason but an accumulation of items which when combined are devastating.

The biggest problem of all of course is habitat change. This has been brought about by poor fire management and by the annual incidence of accidental or deliberate wild fires which range uncontrolled through this vast wilderness.

This is changing the habitat so that only those plants and animals that can withstand constant fire survive. Overgrazing by cattle on some properties also has the same effect.

There is no definitive overall scientific data yet ..... we are working hard at it, but the hypothesis is as follows:

1: Fire and overgrazing is changing the habitat and creating a gap in the food chain, eg. spinifex grass will not seed for up to 5 years once it has been burnt or grazed and spinifex grass is possibly the earliest and therefore maybe the most important early seeding grass.

2: All the Gouldians, adults and young, in the research area are banded, and yet on the census we see very few of the adult banded birds. What is happening to them?

3: 80% of the birds we count on the census are juveniles .... and in good numbers. Yet, very few of these birds appear to survive the wet.
Is it because the spinifex is not seeding due to fire?
4: During the breeding season there is huge competition with Long-tailed Finches for nesting holes. Research has proved that there is a shortage of nesting holes and that Longtails win any holes they compete for. Is this affecting Gouldian numbers?
5: Why is there a shortage of nesting holes? The scientific work to determine why is on-going, but a possible reason may be that fire is killing off the saplings before they become fire resistant and killing the old hole bearing trees. It can take 100 years for a tree to produce suitable holes.
These are just some of the things we are working on, there is a huge amount of work taking place but most research takes between 3 to 5 years to reach a conclusion.
On the recovery side of saving the Gouldian, we have taken active steps to improve fire management, both by an initial donation to help start AWC's Eco Fire Group which now covers some 18 million acres of Central Kimberley; a donation to WWF to help start a fire management group in Northern Kimberley, and just lately an advisory role in the setting up of a fire management group in the East Kimberley.
We have also been actively involved in advising mine developments on how to minimise their effect on the environment. So, busy times!!!

Mike Fidler

Save The Gouldian Finch Open Days

Since the formation of the Save The Gouldian Fund in 2005, we have organised an annual Open Day at our research facility at Martinsville, NSW to provide interested members of the public the opportunity to visit the facility, while at the same time raising funds for Gouldian Finch research. These days have always been very successful with feedback from attendees always being very positive. The last STGF Open Day, held on Saturday, 17th October last year, was no exception with 136 people attending and over $10 000 raised!

Mike Fidler welcoming visitors at the STGF Research Facility at Martinsville. NSW

We have now decided to hold the Open Days biennially rather than annually as we have been doing. Thus, there will be no STGF Open Day held this year - the next Save The Gouldian Fund Open Day is scheduled to be held in ***OCTOBER, 2011.*** Details will be published on our website as the time approaches!

The establishment of our Conservation Research Centre at Wyndham

In 2007 the *Save The Gouldian Fund* decided to focus its research activities on the populations of Gouldian Finches at Wyndham and the surrounding area in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia. This decision generated problems that needed to be addressed. The scope and nature of the Gouldian Finch research planned for this remote area of Australia presented huge logistical problems. To be effective we needed a permanent research facility in the area. Following discussions with the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley, the Save The Gouldian Fund entered in to a 21 year lease on the old Shire Hall in old Wyndham Port. The old heritage building has been transformed in to the Save The Gouldian Fund's *Conservation Research Centre.* Now, for the first time, researchers working in this remote, rugged area of Australia have a state of the art, modern facility to support their work. They have comfortable, completely self-contained accommodation; with bunks to comfortably sleep 20 people; a modern kitchen area; showers with hot and cold running water;

The new STGF Conservation Research Centre on the main road in Old Wyndham Port

Modern, well-equipped laboratory area. Washing machine and dishwasher on left side wall

New kitchen and eating area complete with two large refrigeration units and two stove/ oven units for cooking purposes

state of the art laboratory facilities, internet access and secure garages to store equipment and vehicles; all within a large, securely fenced compound. Researchers from Macquarie University are currently using the *Conservation Research Centre* to carry out research on various aspects of Gouldian Finch ecology towards restoring the Gouldian Finch in the wild!

The new Research Centre has sleeping facilities for 20 people

Annual Gouldian Finch Census

Gouldian Finches drinking from the puddle in front of the Shire Offices. Photographer: Garry Southwell

Each year during the first week in September, we conduct our annual census of Gouldian Finches. This time of the year is chosen as the Gouldian Finches have finished breeding and formed flocks, which together with the shortage of water means they drink at the few remaining water sources making it easier for us to count them as they come in to drink. This annual count helps us to monitor the movement of the finches and the overall size of the Gouldian Finch population within our study area.

During the 2009 Census about thirty people monitored and collected data from 21 waterholes within a 25km radius of Wyndham. The count took place over four successive days. Counters were in place at the waterholes by 5.30am, with counting starting at 6.00am and ending at 8.00am each morning. The highlight of the count was the presence of over 300 Gouldian Finches near the lawn area in front of the Wyndham Shire Offices right in the middle of the town. At 6.30am each day they arrived to drink from a newly created puddle created by run-off from the automatic sprinkler system that waters the lawn at 6.00am each morning. The majority of the Gouldians arrived between 6.30 and 7.30am in groups varying in size from a dozen or so individuals, to flocks containing in excess of 50 birds. Usually by 7.30am all had finished drinking and feeding on the grassy area and departed in a north-easterly direction towards the nearby hills. Last year's census indicated that there are approximately 400 Gouldians in the Wyndham study area – the overwhelming majority of which are juveniles (about 80% of the birds counted). This number is on a par with the results of the September, 2008 census. Although this is a healthy sign, we still need to determine what happens to the juveniles during the wet season. We go into the wet with a healthy population of juveniles, but large numbers do not survive to breed the following year.

The other thing the census highlighted was how few of our banded breeding adults were recorded, which together with other measurements the researchers have made, may be indicating that the breeding adults do not survive long after the breeding season finishes.

This year we are expanding the area and number of waterholes that we are going to cover to try and get a measure over a wider area, so we shall need many additional volunteers to successfully complete the task! Ideally we would like to get 50 volunteers. At time of going to press we already have 34 volunteers, so things are looking very promising for the fast approaching September Count!

Incoming flocks of Gouldian Finches alighted in this tree before flying down to drink from the puddle on the road in front of the Shire Offices

Volunteers intending to participate in the census will need to make their own travel and accommodation arrangements. All of the relevant information can be found on the Save The Gouldian Fund website at: http://savethegouldian.org/AnnualCount.html

For further information and registration please contact
David Myers
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Peter Bradbury supports The Save The Gouldian Fund

We recently received the following brief communication from Peter Bradbury who lives at Shell Cove, NSW.

"I decided to donate $5.00 for every Gouldian that I sold this year to the Save The Gouldian Fund. So please find a cheque enclosed for $350. $5.00 per bird isn't much but it does add up. I suppose it would really add up if a lot of Gouldian breeders did it. I'll be doing it again this year and probably every year. I'd like to throw out the challenge to other Gouldian Finch breeders towards the end of the year!"

In a further email Peter provided the following information about himself.

"I first started keeping Gouldians when I was 12 (I'm now 44) back when they were the one bird that everyone told you not to get! I also bred exhibition Budgerigars. When I got back into birds about 8 years ago, I decided to keep Gouldians but to breed them like exhibition Budgerigars trying to improve them show quality wise every year. I got my original stock from the late Ron Tristram, an ex-exhibition Budgerigar breeder who was breeding Gouldians for show quality too, so that was a big head start. Apart from the Gouldians I also keep Blue-capped Waxbills and Star Finches that I'm doing the show quality thing with as well."

A prolific writer, Peter has also developed his own excellent website, *Pete's Gouldians* at www.gouldians.bigpondhosting.com

Peter Bradbury and two of his Gouldian Finch breeding aviaries

We wish to thank everyone for their continued support of the *Save The Gouldian Fund* as it strives to restore the Gouldian throughout its former range in northern Australia. Together we are making a difference!

We hope to see many of you in Wyndham at the Gouldian Count in September,

David Myers
STGF Communications Manager