



Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Biosphere Reserve, Australia

Rewilding at Harewood

One of the oldest properties in the South East of Victoria, Australia is home to a sanctuary of vital biodiversity. Harewood House has become a place of study and a rewilding project for Western Port Bay's endangered species.

Lance Lloyd from Western Port Biosphere Foundation and Pat Macwhirter, the custodian of the Harewood Estate, are working together on a year-long project called 'Rewilding Harewood'.

The project involves La Trobe University and Western Port Biosphere Foundation, combined with the knowledge and experience of Pat who is a seasoned avian veterinarian and has her PhD in evolutionary biology.

The aim is for the restoration of ecological systems and habitats in the area for native flora and fauna to flourish.

The Harewood site was chosen as it had already shown evidence of providing a rich ecosystem for native animals and vegetation.

The property sees an extraordinary activity of endangered species; specifically, the Growling Grass Frog and the Southern Brown Bandicoot. Alongside frogs and bandicoots, Harewood also has had evidence of the presence of the endangered Swamp Skink, Jezebel Butterflies and even Lampreys.

The part of the property that is yet well studied is the microbiota, things like fungi and bacteria, and invertebrates, the ecosystems of insects and arachnids.

Finding out more about the small-scale world in Harewood could reveal the unique pillars which uphold this unique biodiversity as insects, fungus and bacteria are critical in such things as food chains and soil life.

Each of the endangered species in Harewood require invertebrates as food. Professor Heloise Gibb and Dr Nick Murphy from La Trobe University are involved in finding the specific bugs which frogs and bandicoots survive off.

Further factors which make Harewood so important are both its location and its history. The property rests right by the shore of Westernport, almost exactly between Kooweerup and Tooradin. It's bordered by two estuaries, these rivers and creeks are vital biolink corridors which allow the migrations and habitats of the native species to span across the region.

http://Re-Wilding_Harewood- A Pilot Project - Western Port Biosphere



Saint Mary's BR, Saint Kitts and Nevis

Strengthening Biodiversity Credentials with UNESCO and Italian Government Assistance

Progress in promoting biodiversity credentials in St. Kitts and Nevis' St. Mary's Man & Biosphere Reserve was given a major boost with the launch of the Earth Network project in St. Mary's MAB site, financed by the Government of Italy, and overseen by a UNESCO-accredited ecological and biodiversity expert from Surinam, Dr. Haydi Berrenstein.

The Earth Network project seeks to address specific challenges associated with agricultural practices, tools, methods of cultivation, preservation, and monetization of biodiversity-led sustainable agriculture processes on the reserve.

The overall aim is to embrace better use of tropical forests, enhance the cultivation of new fruits, and combat soil erosion, explore introducing seed varieties more tolerant to heat and drought.

A final series of recommendations on transforming the St. Mary's MAB site into a sustainable and biodiversity-friendly agricultural zone will be submitted end September by Dr. Berrenstein to St. Kitts and Nevis sustainability minister Dr. Clarke.



<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/accelerating-ecological-restoration-st-kitts-and-nevis>

<https://www.sknis.gov.kn/2023/06/20/st-kitts-and-nevis-biodiversity-credentials-highlighted-at-unesco-man-biosphere-council-meeting/>

North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve, Latvia

A short film about North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve



In 2022 and 2023, national parks and biosphere reserves in Latvia celebrated significant anniversaries (Rāzna National Park – 15, North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve and Ķemeri National Park – 25, Gauja National Park – 50 Slītere National Park - 100). In honor of these anniversaries, the Nature Conservation Agency of Latvia created five short films, which present a concentrated story about each territory, its most essential nature values, specific habitats, plant and animal species, allowing viewers to realize how diverse nature is in Latvia and what splendor it holds within itself. All the short films are available on the Nature Conservation Agency's YouTube channel.

The short film "North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve - From Lake Burtnieks along the Salaca to the Sea" is dedicated to one of Latvia's largest protected nature areas. On average, the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve occupies almost 6% of the country's territory. Larger and smaller bogs have been hidden in the forests, which since 2006, together with the Estonian side of swamps, have been one of the 26 transboundary protected areas of national importance of the Ramsar, the Convention on Wetlands. Lake Burtnieks, the fourth largest lake in Latvia, is located almost in the middle of the Biosphere Reserve territory. Slight-modified moderately wet meadows and meadows of the river floodplains have been preserved around it. These meadows provide shelter and habitat for the great snipe, corncrake, spotted crane, penduline tit, and many other bird species. The Salaca River, the backbone of Biosphere Reserve, whose banks are decorated with sandstone outcrops and caves, starts its 96 – 96-kilometer course from Burtnieks to the Sea.

The short film "North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve - From Lake Burtnieks along the Salaca to the Sea" with English or French subtitles is available here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaKXCylmdV8&t=1s>.

Sharing Science & Indigenous Knowledge

Hundreds of people came together on November 29-30 for a “State of the Bay” conference, described as a Lands & Waters Gathering to learn about the ecosystem health of the Georgian Bay freshwater archipelago, to be inspired by Indigenous caretaking and learn about community action.

The gathering began with over 100 representatives from non-profit organizations, universities, seasonal resident associations, Indigenous nations, and all levels of government (Canadian, Ontario, and municipal) coming together to learn about the 2023 “State of the Bay Report” from knowledge holders and scientists. Topics included: biodiversity, water quality, the aquatic lower food web, and fish, as well as climate change impacts and cultural resilience.

The public was invited to the evening session which highlighted *Anishinaabek* culture and opened with the Little Spirit Singers, an overview of the drivers and trends in ecosystem change, and the role of Indigenous art and story from Magnetawan First Nation artist *Mishiikenh Kwe* (Autumn Smith). The evening ended with a talk called “Let’s be the Warriors of the Bay (*Mnisnoowidaa*),” given by Dr. Brian McInnes (*Waabishki-makwa*) from Wasauksing First Nation.

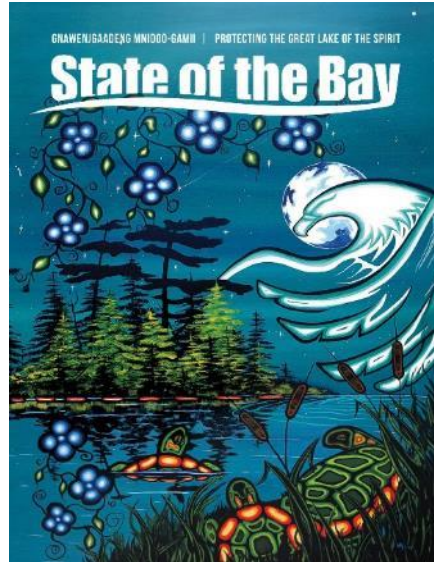
Co-hosted between the UNESCO Georgian Bay *Mnidoo Gamii* Biosphere and the Georgian Bay Anishinaabek Youth (GBAY), a dozen local artists attended including *Oshkishkode*, students from Parry Sound High School whose artwork raised money for their annual pow wow celebrations.

On November 30, partners and the public and 100 Indigenous students attended to hear youth and community leaders speak in moderated Talking Circles. In each circle, leaders shared how the organizations or governments they are working for are addressing the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. We were honoured to have the *MinWeWe* singers open and close the day with their beautiful songs. Thank you, *Miigwech*! Learn more at stateofthebay.ca.

<http://www.georgianbaybiosphere.com>

<https://www.instagram.com/gbanishinaabekyouth/>

<http://www.stateofthebay.ca>



GEORGIAN BAY
BIOSPHERE
MNIDOO GAMII



Artist *Mishiikenh Kwe* (Autumn Smith) speaks about their piece “Seasons” featured in the *State of the Bay* magazine.

Credit: GBB

Source: <https://georgianbaybiosphere.com/lands-waters-gathering-a-huge-success/>



2023 International Conference on Biosphere and Sustainability

The Palawan Council for Sustainable Development, the management authority of the Palawan Biosphere Reserve (Philippines), organized and hosted the 2023 International Conference on Biosphere and Sustainability in Puerto Princesa City in the island of Palawan from November 3 to 6, 2023 with the theme *“Going Beyond the Boundaries: Appreciating the Intricacies of Climate Resiliency and Sustainable Development.”* Major conference collaborators include the UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines, Jeju Biosphere Reserve, Asia Climate Change Education Centre (ACCEC), Province of Palawan, and the City of Puerto Princesa.

The 2023 Conference aimed to provide a platform to share the latest research and scientific studies of academic or research institutions, conducted in biosphere reserves and highlight policy recommendations aligned with the United Nations New Sustainable Development Goals.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, represented by Atty. Cleo D. Sabado-Andrada, delivered the keynote address. “It is necessary to develop science informed policies, promote sustainable practices, and the role of national programs in ocean science and protected areas as essential to environmental stewardship and the involvement of Filipinos,” according to the Secretary. Meanwhile, UNESCO-Jakarta Office’s Siti Rachmania gave a Plenary Talk, as well as Dr. Denise Margaret Matias of Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development (Germany).

One of the most notable discussions was presented by Dr. Dai Yeun Jeong, ACCEC Director (Korea), which focused on the need for countries to take initiatives toward carbon neutrality to ensure conscientious management of biosphere reserves. Dr. Neil Aldrin Mallari of USAID-SIBOL Project also gave a challenging presentation where he focused on Palawan’s vulnerability in terms of environmental degradation, highlighting the onslaught of *Super Typhoon Odette* (International Name: Rai) on its biodiversity.

The delegates embarked on three learning sites where they learned best practices emphasizing resiliency and balancing socio-economic gains with protection of natural beauty of Palawan, as UNESCO-designated Biosphere Reserve: the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park, Batak Tribal Village, and Rasa Island Wildlife Sanctuary.

The participants also engaged in stimulating paper presentations and poster competitions across three themed breakout sessions: 1) *Planet*, 2) *People & Partnership*, and 3) *Peace & Prosperity*. They were also able to establish better networks and knowledge exchange.

<https://web.facebook.com/pcsd7611>



La Palma Biosphere Reserve, Spain

The Port and Airport of La Palma collaborate with the Biosphere Reserve to avoid introducing living organisms on the Island.

La Palma Airport, the Port of Santa Cruz de La Palma and La Palma World Biosphere Reserve collaborate to raise awareness among local population and visitors about the risks of introducing living organisms to the Island, natural refuge of biodiversity.

This initiative, which is part of the Life IP Azores Nature project, aims to protect the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Island, as well as the livelihoods and health of the people who live there and of future generations.

To carry out this task, informative materials (a vinyl and two totems) have been set up at La Palma Airport in the arrivals terminal, with relevant data about La Palma's biodiversity, highlighting the importance of not moving species from one place to another. In addition, this collaboration includes training sessions for Airport staff and companies working in its facilities, which will allow them to identify high-risk species that may be introduced illegally, thus strengthening detection and prevention capacity.

On the other hand, with regard to the Port, taking into account that most of the maritime traffic between islands does not access its terminal, as vehicles enter directly to the holds of the ships, agreements have been reached with the different companies that operate in the Inland's Port. In this way, for example, the shipping company Fred Olsen, throughout August, projected on its ships, a short video on the risks associated with introducing invasive plants. This mini-documentary, created by the Canary director Pedro Felipe Acosta, tries to encourage individual and collective responsibility of travelers, avoiding the voluntary or unconscious move of forbidden or discouraged ornamental plants, which could become invasive in the future.

<http://www.lapalmabiosfera.es>



La Palma Biosphere Reserve, Spain

Published the update of the book: Sweet Potatoes of La Palma. Diversity and Memory.

The book "Sweet Potatoes of La Palma. Diversity and Memory", by the authors Jaime Gil González and Ricardo Lorenzo Rodríguez, was published last November.

This publication edited by the Canary Foundation La Palma world Biosphere Reserve and funded by the Canary Islands Government, represents a tangible improvement in terms of research work, the quality of the photographs and the edition of the original publication "The Traditional crops and their Diversity. Sweet potatoes from La Palma Island, Inventory and Identification."

In La Palma sweet potatoes were a staple crop for the subsistence of a large part of the island's peasant families, a situation that continued for a good part of the 19th and 20th centuries. Today it is a crop in decline, of which only a few vestiges remain, loaded with an important cultural and natural interest.

The subsistence crops, traditionally, have stood out due to the important accumulation of diversity and knowledge that they treasure. Sweet potatoes on La Palma have not been exempt from this dynamic, to the extent that around twenty-five varieties have been registered on the Island.

This diversity, which is still present, is an important legacy, and even more so if we take into account the wisdom of elderly farmers, whose knowledge is in many cases the only remaining witness of certain varieties that have disappeared.

For the Biosphere Reserve, the assessment of cultural heritage as well as the rescue of cultivated biodiversity, is an initiative that is in line with the entity's management plan, specifically with the action "Conservation, improvement and enhancement of natural heritage".

This entails not only the safeguarding of knowledge and its transfer, but also the conservation of rich agrobiodiversity and the recovery of varieties adapted to the territory through the support for traditional agrosystems.

<http://www.lapalmabiosfera.es>

NORTH-EAST TOBAGO UNESCO MAB ART TRAIL



The Environmental Research Institute Charlotteville (ERIC) partnered with gifted artist and Speyside High school students from the North-East Tobago UNESCO Biosphere Reserve to honour its cultural and natural heritage. North-East Tobago's natural and cultural heritage is a national legacy that all residents of Tobago respect and are deeply proud of.

Depicting the relationship between communities and the ecosystem services they depend on, 14 murals and four sculptures were installed along main roads creating an aesthetic, local art trail along the coast. This initiative increases public awareness on the BR, promotes local artistic talent, provides aesthetic beauty to visitors and residents alike, and triggers pride and the sense of stewardship.

The protection of our natural and cultural heritage is strongly linked to the sustainable economic, social and cultural development of our communities. Community-based tourism directly brings income to micro and small businesses and supports the livelihoods of many families.

The North-East Tobago Art Route is an aesthetic and long-lasting reminder for local community members as well as visitors that our outstanding cultural and natural heritage is of global significance and very much worthwhile of protection and sustainable use.

The usage of fine art, which is part of our purple economy, to highlight conservation and culture is part of the initiatives implemented under the North-East Tobago UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme and it is hoped that this first step will ignite further support to a flourishing art movement in Tobago.

The NE Tobago UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Art Trail project is a great example of multisectoral collaboration and was facilitated by art coordinator Mr Tomley Roberts, supported the UNESCO Focal Point for Trinidad and Tobago, and funded by the Office of the Chief Secretary, the Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development, the Division of Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation, UNDP-GEF-SGP, and Woodside Energy. www.eric-tobago.org

Tobago Biosphere Management Alliance: Improving Institutional Arrangements in North-East Tobago

North-East Tobago is a region that is outstanding in terms of its cultural heritage as well as its natural resources, both terrestrial and marine. The value of these assets received global recognition when the area was designated as a UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Reserve.

Over the last few years, a variety of civil society and government interventions created opportunities for consensus regarding enhanced institutional arrangements for the sustainable management of North-East Tobago's natural and cultural assets. Stakeholders agree that a transparent, participatory management approach which facilitates the development of sustainable blue, green and purple economies are critical to providing appropriate answers to many of North-East Tobago's challenges.

Based on this wide consensus, the Executive Council of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) approved the establishment of an inclusive, Multi-stakeholder Non-Profit entity as a mechanism through which enhanced institutional arrangements for sustainable management of the natural and cultural resources in North-East Tobago will be pursued. Apart from the obvious conservation objectives, enhanced institutional arrangements will assist in securing sustainable livelihoods for communities and stakeholders whose socio-economic and socio-cultural wellbeing depend on these resources.

Among other things, the THA took the bold step of mandating that this entity must have meaningful representation from Civil Society, the Private Sector and Government and that it assumes responsibility for facilitating the implementation of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MaB) programme in North-East Tobago.

With the support of the Inter-American Development Bank the governance and institutional framework for an entity called the Tobago Biosphere Management Alliance (TOBIMA) was drafted and is being currently considered for ratification at the political level. Ratification is expected by February 2024.

TOBIMA's imminent establishment promises to facilitate the transition from traditional and ineffective management arrangements to a more progressive and effective management arrangement by investing in a system which is built on meaningful participation of all sectors, genuine partnership, transparency, accountability and adherence democratic ideals.

Exciting institutional developments are anticipated in the new year.

New book on folklore of the Isle of Man Biosphere

Which holy well offers a cure for baldness? What terrifying creature lurks on Ramsey Promenade?

Folklore and storytelling and gathering are our link with the past and offer us insights into lives and locations.

A new book, 'A Guide to the Folklore Sites of the Isle of Man', has been released this winter. Published by Culture Vannin, the book is a comprehensive guide to the breadth and variety of the traditional folklore of the Isle of Man Biosphere.

Gathered from thousands of sources across hundreds of years of folklore collecting, its contents include medieval stories of vengeful saints through to ghostly figures still seen today.

The book offers one of the richest sources of traditional tales from the Isle of Man, including fairies, bugganes, ghosts, giants, witches and more.

The book's 312 pages are divided into the Biosphere's 17 parishes and offer a user-friendly guide to everyone interested in exploring the Island's landscape in new ways.

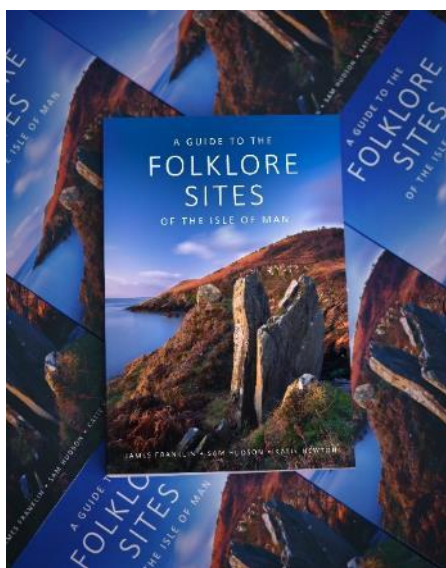
It's hoped new audiences will gain a fascination of the Island's traditional folklore by reading the book.

Written by James Franklin, Katie Newton and Sam Hudson, the book is the conclusion of five years' work in researching and locating traditional tales that stretch from the Point of Ayre in the north of the Island to the Calf of Man in the south.

As well as the folktale at each site, each entry comes with a colour photograph, grid coordinates, accessibility notes, detailed directions for sites that are publicly accessible, and references to sources.

James Franklin says: 'Folklore is a part of the fabric of the Isle of Man, its people and landscape. Getting a better knowledge of these tales adds so much to the landscape around us and the lives we live here on this Island. It has been an enormous privilege to have been able to delve into such rich sources in order to share them through this beautiful new book.'

<https://www.biosphere.im/news/new-folklore-book>



A Guide to the Folklore Sites of the Isle of Man



The book and its authors, James Franklin, Katie Newton and Sam Hudson.

Innovation Challenge has Biosphere aims at its heart



The launch of the Innovation Challenge, with Biosphere at its heart

Companies from around the world are invited to enter Isle of Man’s Innovation Challenge to find solutions for societal, political, and environmental issues.

The Innovation Challenge 2024 is delivered by the Isle of Man Government’s agencies for Digital, Finance and Business and involves business leaders from companies in the Island participating as judges and mentors.

Companies entering the challenge will develop creative technology-based solutions related to Fintech, Cleantech, and Artificial Intelligence.

As the world’s only entire nation UNESCO Biosphere, with a strong commitment to innovation and sustainability, the Isle of Man provides a perfect setting for the challenge.

The challenge is part of the Isle of Man’s ambition to create an environment that nurtures entrepreneurship and innovation and where the businesses of the future have the opportunity to thrive and grow.

The challenge was launched in November 2023 at Digital Isle, the flagship annual conference of the Isle of Man Department of Enterprise’s Executive Agency, Digital Isle of Man. Dr Richard Selman, manager of UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man, was part of the panel speaking at the launch.

Businesses can apply to take part in the challenge up to 28th February 2024 via [iominnovation.ideawake.com](https://www.iominnovation.ideawake.com).

The competition will culminate in an event in summer 2024 at which finalists will have the opportunity to present their solutions to a panel of expert judges.

As well as mentorship and support, entrants are offered networking opportunities with industry peers, potential clients and investors and will gain international exposure.

Kirree Goberman, Head of Business Development, Business Isle of Man, said: ‘The challenge will encourage innovators to work on finding solutions to issues impacting our environment and the sustainability of business operations, to explore solutions across all sectors of the economy and their supply chains, from food production through to energy.’

‘The Isle of Man is uniquely positioned to support this challenge. We have a supportive environment for businesses to trial innovative and creative new concepts before hitting the wider market and, as the world’s only entire UNESCO Biosphere nation, we have set ambitious net zero targets, including committing to total decarbonisation of our electricity by 2030.’

<https://www.digitalisleofman.com/innovationchallenge/>

2023 International Conference on Biosphere and Sustainability

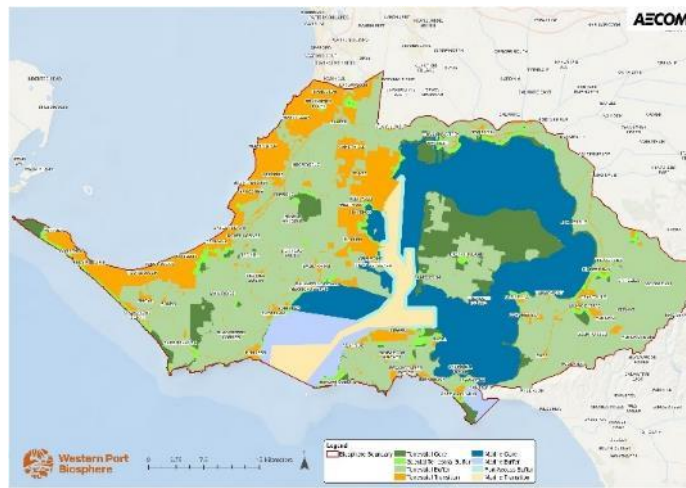
UNESCO has reaffirmed Western Port's position as the sole representative of southeastern Australia in its global network of 748 biospheres. This recognition acknowledges the progress and ambitions of the Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation, along with its stakeholders and communities, in advocating for and safeguarding the region's distinctive natural features for future generations. The Victorian Government's recent allocation of \$1.2 million towards marine ecosystems and blue carbon through the Foundation and the Bunurong Aboriginal Land Council further underscores this commitment.

The Foundation's CEO, Mel Barker, expressed delight at UNESCO's endorsement, marking the Western Port Biosphere Reserve's third decade as a member of the UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve Network. Barker emphasized the collaborative efforts of partners and communities to secure the future of Western Port, renowned as one of Australia's most appealing places to live, work, and play.

UNESCO, in its confirmation letter, commended various effective initiatives, including increased acknowledgment of Traditional Custodians, the creation of blue carbon ecosystems in partnership with Deakin University's Blue Carbon Lab, successful campaigns preventing detrimental developments, enhanced research collaborations with leading universities, and community engagement programs.

Despite this recognition, UNESCO highlighted challenges and emphasised the need for an overarching strategic plan for Western Port. Barker stressed the importance of advocating for and collaborating with government and stakeholders to develop a Strategic Framework. Western Port, home to Ramsar wetlands, diverse wildlife, and a unique marine environment, requires equal recognition to neighbouring Port Phillip Bay, which already has a management plan. A strategic plan is deemed essential to address challenges arising from the transition to renewable energy, potential mining impacts, and issues related to agriculture, residential development, waste management, and recreational activities.

Barker asserted that a strategic plan would facilitate informed decision-making, benefiting government planners, businesses, communities, and the environment. The Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation will persist in its role, providing evidence-based analysis, advocacy, and project initiatives to protect and manage natural ecosystems in harmony with community health and aspirations.



Of special significance was UNESCO's acceptance of a revised zonation map for the 2,142 sq km Reserve, which better reflects how our communities' interface with our core protected areas. We thank [AECOM](#) for its considerable contribution of expertise and technology to create this fresh perspective. This will enable better conversations on how our actions impact important terrestrial and marine ecosystems.

[UNESCO STATUS CONFIRMED - Western Port Biosphere](#)

Community Photo stories in the Fitzgerald Biosphere

The UNESCO MAB programme and network is a fantastic concept - connecting people and nature in hundreds of places around the world. Our cultures and languages are diverse and different - yet we share a common purpose and vision. And we have one story that we can all tell – Biosphere reserves can *‘inspire a positive future by connecting people and nature today’*.

Taking inspiration from Astrid Volske (Ourphotostories), the Fitzgerald Biosphere Community Collective (FBCC) and the Bremer Bay CRC brought together a day where we could combine these concepts to a group of photographically minded people at Tozer’s Bush Camp.

Astrid, a former photojournalist, showed us how you can create meaningful storytelling, guiding us through things like capturing real emotion, using good lighting and downloading various apps to help along the way. She treated us to some of her archived projects, most of which are stories of people in rural areas who become characters in their own script, on their own stage, often in their ute, workplace or home with their livestock, flowers or dogs – akin to Robert Tozer himself!

Tozer’s Bush Camp - a 700 acre property that was borne out of contemplation around farming during tough times and providing for a family – demonstrates a relatively low impact sustainable business, in a bush setting that conserves biodiversity within the transition zone of the Fitzgerald Biosphere. What’s more – academics can and have accessed his property for research and his records for data such as fire history, whilst paying tourists can affordably stay and learn about the local flora via a botanist led tour. Tozer, albeit unknowingly, is nailing the Biosphere brief.

Alongside this workshop we were able to capitalise on Astrid’s time and detour to some of our friends around the Jerramungup shire to see what makes the Fitzgerald Biosphere special to them – stay tuned to see more of our Biosphere photo stories in weeks to come!

This event was made possible by funding from Lotterywest and the Shire of Jerramungup.



Tozer with his dog



Troy Treeby at family property discussing his experience growing up in the Fitzgerald Biosphere



Dr Alison Lullfitz sharing her story about growing up and working in the Fitzgerald Biosphere

FBCC meet to celebrate International Day for Biosphere Reserves



The Fitzgerald Biosphere Community Collective (FBCC), a group of Stakeholder organisations' and community members, came together on Friday 3rd of November for our biannual meeting to discuss matters relating to our Fitzgerald Biosphere. Given there is always a lot to cover for these meetings, the day is booked out twice a year for our collective members to travel, discuss, action and network around those themes relating to sustainable development aligning with the conservation of biodiversity and reinforcing the importance of our community's within the Biosphere.

For the occasion we met at Twertup Field Studies centre, within the Fitzgerald River National Park – we meet on this day to give a nod to the International day of recognition for UNESCO's Biosphere Reserves the world over.

Journeying along the sandy track that leads us to there, we are reminded of the significant flora that we know and love about this part of the world, refreshing our purpose, we all meet together to discuss our local threats and how we can work together to progress in harmony.

After a productive meeting of formalities and lunch we 'Ground truthed' our discussions, learning more about our patch with a bush walk led by Landscape ecologist and FBCC Chair Nathan McQuoid to appreciate why this place is indeed so special to us.



Support in infrastructure, materials and equipment for the fishing community

Located on the northwest coast of Madagascar, with these 03 ecosystems: the dry semi-deciduous forest of which approximately 42% of the species are endemic, the mangrove forests which are composed of eight different species known in Madagascar and the marine ecosystem includes coral reefs, seagrass beds, steep reefs, sandy-mud seabeds and mudflats. It contains 216 species of corals and invertebrates, 168 species of fish and 3 species of marine mammals.

The mangrove forests and marine ecosystem which make the reserve a very productive place for fish. As a result, immigrants came to outlying areas.

The RB Sahamalaza- Radama Islands has benefited from a PCD 1 project since 2018. The project aims to ensure the sustainability of marine stocks through the professionalization of fishermen accompanied by the conservation of biodiversity.

This year 2023, the project activity is focused mainly on improving the living conditions of communities through the establishment of infrastructure in fishing villages in the RB and the provision of fishing materials and equipment with the aim of the diversification of their subsistence activities, the professionalization of activities related to fishing as well as the strengthening of surveillance of the Park.

Currently, four villages which have drinking water problems including the villages Antafiantambalaka, Sijoro, Nosy Valiha and Ankatafa benefited from four wells last November. 10 fishermen's associations have therefore become formal, which have acquired the receipt of their files from the association at the District level and benefited from fishing equipment such as fishing nets, longlines with its accessories.



Well in Nosy valiha



Four motorized canoes

Revitalizing Kiunga Marine National Reserve: A Beacon of Coral Reef Restoration

Situated at the heart of the Kiunga Biosphere on the breathtaking north coast of Kenya, adjacent to the Republic of Somalia to the north, Kiunga Marine National Reserve occupies a pivotal position in the ecotone between the warmer East African coral reef bioregion and the colder waters of the Somali Current. The coral reefs in the reserve have been under annual scrutiny since 1998, revealing a spectrum of ecological changes in response to various threats, both large and small in scale.

The reefs in this region experienced a 60% decline in coral cover during the 1998 El Niño event, coupled with a 25-40% reduction in coral species at specific sites. Over the years, the recovery of coral community structure has exhibited variability, with some reefs demonstrating robust regeneration while others continue to decline. The reserve faces heightened fishing impacts, with a pronounced south-to-north decrease in fish density attributed to the accessibility of migrant and large fishing communities to the south. The Marine Protected Area (MPA) encompasses a diverse array of coral reefs that have encountered numerous challenges, including rising ocean temperatures, overfishing, siltation, and destructive fishing practices, leading to the deterioration of these vital ecosystems.

Recognizing the urgency to rehabilitate these coral reefs, a collaborative effort involving marine biologists from the Kenya Marine and Research Institute, The Nature Conservancy, North Rangeland Trust, Kiunga Community Wildlife Association, Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenya National Commission for UNESCO and UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa has been initiated. The goal is to breathe new life into the coral reefs of Kiunga Marine National Reserve.

Key highlights of our restoration project include:

- a. **Research and Assessment:** In-depth research and assessments have provided a comprehensive understanding of the primary stressors affecting the coral reefs, allowing us to design targeted interventions to address specific threats and enhance reef resilience.
- b. **Coral Nurseries:** Underwater coral nurseries have been established within the reserve to cultivate fragments of healthy coral colonies. These

nurseries act as safe havens for coral fragments to grow and mature before being transplanted onto degraded reefs.

- c. **Active Reef Rehabilitation:** The crucial step of transplanting nursery-grown corals onto damaged reefs is undertaken with meticulous site selection, guided by marine biologists, to ensure the highest chance of success for coral survival and the regeneration of the reef ecosystem.
- d. **Kiunga Community Wildlife Association (KICOWA) Engagement:** The local community of Kiunga has played a leading role in rallying stakeholders and actively participating in the restoration process. Close collaboration with KICOWA has involved educating and involving local communities in various activities, from site identification to protection measures.
- e. **Sustainable Fishing Practices:** Collaborative efforts with the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Institute involve research and capacity building for fishermen, training on responsible fishing techniques, and promoting alternative livelihood opportunities to reduce pressure on the reefs.
- f) **Education and Awareness:** Our commitment to educating local communities and visitors about the significance of coral reefs is manifested through outreach programs. The aim is to raise awareness and foster a sense of stewardship toward these fragile ecosystems.

While the coral reef restoration efforts have yielded promising results, we acknowledge the challenges on the path to full recovery. With sustained dedication and collective action, the community is confident in their ability to restore the vibrant coral reefs of Kiunga Marine National Reserve to their former glory.



A total of 9 new companies from Urdaibai BR have signed up to the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism



The new accreditations were awarded during the last Permanent Forum of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (CETS, in its Spanish acronym). The event, which took place today in the Madariaga Tower in Busturia, served to present the actions carried out in 2023 and the Action Plan for 2024 in the field of sustainable tourism.

With these new incorporations, around forty companies have joined the CETS in Urdaibai BR since 2021.

The Permanent Forum is made up of a working group of 39 members committed to the sustainable development of the territory.

The Permanent Forum of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism held its last meeting of the year this morning in the Madariaga Tower in Busturia, where the actions carried out in 2023 in the field of sustainable tourism were presented and the Action Plan for 2024 was proposed.

Likewise, the event also served for the presentation of the certifications of the nine new companies that have joined the CETS, which join the 30 companies that have already been members since 2021. Among the new member companies, we find the accommodation Lurdeia and Eco Hotel Mundaka; the active tourism companies Urdaibai Experience and Noverek; and the restaurants Almiketxu, Remenetxe, Ardi Beltza, Zallo Barri and Lezika. It should be remembered that within phase III of the charter, the Genuine Euskadi travel agency is already a member.

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism is the EUROPARC Federation's distinctive mark that accredits the coexistence of tourism and sustainability in protected natural areas. The Urdaibai BR, as a CETS-accredited area, has a participation and debate body that allows it to work with all the public and private actors linked to the charter and the sustainable tourism sector in Busturialdea-Urdaibai.

The 11th Meeting of WNICBR, hosted by the Great Sandy Biosphere Reserve



Under the theme 'We Are All Connected', the 11th Meeting of the World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves was held from September 3 to 8, 2023 on K'gari, the Great Sandy Biosphere Reserve, Australia.

The meeting brought together more than 40 participants from 18 biosphere reserves, 16 countries. Among them were the three BRs, Kiunga, Kenya; Isle of Wight, UK; and Sunshine Coast, Australia, that had recently joined the Network. A wide array of experiences and practices on ecosystem restoration, blue carbon, indigenous/traditional knowledge, zero plastic, and tourism impacts were presented at the meeting.

Also, the Butchulla community, traditional owners of K'Gari Island, made a special appearance and walked the delegates through their indigenous knowledge, culture and traditional practices.

• Zero Plastic Workshop

A Zero Plastic workshop was held to identify the common challenges that islands and coastal areas had been faced with over the past five years and discuss ways to address those issues in the period of 2023-2027.

• Work Plan 2023-2027

The Workplan 2023-2027 was approved and adopted in the presence of the participating members, the UNESCO MAB Secretariat, Jeju Special Self-Governing Province and MAB National Committee of Spain. This document elaborates an ambitious roadmap for the next five years, coinciding with the recently established Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), to continue the projects and programs of the network.

The workplan consists of 11 operational objectives and 36 actions to be carried out with indicators to monitor the process of the established objectives.

The Joint Secretariats are compiling presentation articles, all our concert efforts, for the casebook scheduled to be published early next year in order to share with the entire network and beyond.