

# FIVEBOUGH AND TUCKERBIL SWAMPS

## WETLANDS THAT ARE PUBLIC LANDS MANAGED FOR NATURE CONSERVATION BY A COMMUNITY ORGANISATION

*Author: Mike Schultz, Chair, Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Management Trust*

### Background to Wetland of International Importance

Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamps are Crown Land located within the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, 4 kilometres north east and 10 kilometres north west of Leeton, NSW. Fivebough Swamp is 400 hectares and has permanent water in the southwest portion of the basin, and a seasonal shallow, fresh-brackish wetland in its east and northwest. Tuckerbil Swamp is 289 hectares and is a seasonal, shallow, brackish-saline wetland.

Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamps have long been known for their diversity and abundance of waterbirds. One of the earliest to recognise the wetlands conservation values was South Australian ornithologist S.A White. In 1920, White reported to the Commissioner of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas that Fivebough Swamp should be proclaimed a sanctuary, and Tuckerbil Swamp was a good site for a reserve<sup>1</sup>.



*Above: Sharptailed Sandpipers at Fivebough Swamp; Photographer: Mike Schultz*



*Above: Fivebough Swamp; Photographer: Mike Schultz*

Though the naturalness of the wetlands has been altered since White's time, mainly due to the influences of past agricultural practice and urban development, they remain an important part of the region's landscape, for nature conservation and human use.

During the late 1970's Fivebough Swamp became known for its birdlife among local birdwatchers. Since then, both Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamps have become widely recognised as bird watching areas.

In 1995, as a part of the *Murray-Darling Basin Waterbird Project*, Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamps were surveyed. Through this activity it was realised that the Swamps were worthy of recognition as Wetlands of International Importance under the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) because of species diversity, and high numbers of some waterbird species<sup>2</sup>.

In October 2002, the Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Management Trust successfully nominated Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamps for designation as a Wetland of International Importance under the Convention on Wetlands<sup>3</sup>.

### Wetlands Management Organisations

Leeton Shire Council during 1995-97 considered proposals for the development of the eastern portion of Fivebough Swamp as a recreational lake. Leeton Shire Council shelved such proposals in early 1997. Post this decision the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists, with the advice of the then NSW Department of Land and Water Conservation (DLWC), commenced management of Fivebough on 1 September 1997.

In 1997 the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists were granted funding from the NSW State Wetland Advisory Committee (SWAC) and Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) to identify management options and implement restoration programs for the wetlands. The Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists successfully completed both projects in 1998 and 2001 respectively. They further developed management options<sup>4</sup> and completed substantial on-ground works, such as planting 10 000 local native trees and shrubs, constructing 4 kilometres of pathways, 5 kilometres of fencing, car parks and an interpretive centre for visitors.



*Above: Sunset at Fivebough Swamp; Photographer: Mike Schultz*

In 2000, the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists passed on the management of the wetlands to the Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Management Trust. The Trust is an incorporated not-for-profit community body, and membership is open to any person or organisation with an interest in the wetlands. Its membership includes Leeton urban community, landholders, local Wiradjuri representatives, industry, local government, State agencies, Murrumbidgee Irrigation, Charles Sturt University, and Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists.

The Trust with financial assistance from the World Wide Fund for Nature developed its *Management Plan for Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamps 2002* (MPFT). Among the MPFT objectives are waterbird conservation, education and eco-tourism, and acknowledgment and respect for the cultural significance of the sites to local Wiradjuri people.

## Vegetation and Water Management

During its four years of management the Trust has reintroduced grazing to some management areas of Fivebough, and maintained existing grazing regimes at Tuckerbil. Allowing cattle to graze within sections of the wetlands is a conservation management tool, providing and maintaining habitats for some species of waterbird, such as migratory waders. Management areas leased for grazing are subject to special conditions developed by the Trust to protect and enhance habitats for waterbirds.

Within Fivebough there are management areas where no grazing by domestic animals occurs. These areas are either being revegetated, or allowing regeneration to provide habitats for cryptic species such as Crakes and Bitterns, or feeding habitat for Egrets.

The entire area of Tuckerbil and the majority of Fivebough are managed as ephemeral (non-permanent) wetlands. The remainder of Fivebough Swamp's wetland area is permanent, which is maintained with treated water from the Leeton sewage treatment plant. The Trust, with the assistance of a grant from the NSW SWAC, is currently fencing parts of the permanent wetland area of Fivebough, to allow grazing outside this area.

The timing, volume, and control of water for Tuckerbil Swamp and Fivebough Swamp's ephemeral area depends on seasonal conditions and water entering the wetlands from June to December each year. Water is mainly rainfall runoff from within their catchments. The agreement for provision of water to the wetlands is between Murrumbidgee Irrigation and the Trust, as part of the management plan.



*Above: Leeton Public School; Photographer: Mike Schultz*

*Above Right: Leeton Lions Club assisting with tree planting; Photographer: Mike Schultz*

*Right: Murrumbidgee Field Naturalist assisting with on-ground work at Fivebough Swamp; Photographer: Mike Schultz*





The Trust and Leeton Shire Council have repaired and built banks for embayment of water and installed water regulation infrastructure to control water flows - all of which gives the ability to manage water for waterbirds.

### Birds of Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamps

A total of 159 species of birds have been recorded at Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamps. The wetlands are renowned for the waterbirds that inhabit the area. There are 86 waterbird and associated wetland species, of which 24 species are listed under the Japan-Australia and China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA and CAMBA respectively).

The wetlands are also important habitat for the Australasian Bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*) and Painted Snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*). Tuckerbil is also an important flocking area for Brolga (*Grus rubicunda*).

### Summary

The Trust today manages the wetlands in accordance with its wetlands management plan, knowing there is still much to put into effect in the years to come. This management is implemented in accordance with protecting the Ramsar values for which the wetlands are recognised.

### Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Trust contacts

For further information please contact:

• Mike Schultz, phone: (02) 6953 2541 or email: [mike.schultz@dragnet.com.au](mailto:mike.schultz@dragnet.com.au)

• Phil Green: phone (02) 6953 0700 or email: [Phillip.Green@dipnr.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Phillip.Green@dipnr.nsw.gov.au)



Above: A healthy Fivebough Swamp, 2003; Photographer: Mike Schultz

Left: Fivebough Swamp in 1997 before conservation works; Photographer: Mike Schultz

<sup>1</sup> White S. A. 1920 *Ornithological Survey of Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas*, report to the Commissioners of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchison M. 1995 The Latest News from the Murray-Darling Basin Waterbird Project. *Basin Bird Observer* No. 6. December 1995. RAOU (Birds Australia) MDBC.

<sup>3</sup> Schultz M., Brett P., Phillips B., & Green P. 2002 *Information on the Ramsar Wetlands*. Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Management Trust.

<sup>4</sup> Glazebrook H. & Taylor I. R. 1998 *Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamps; a review of their history, conservation values and future management options*. Report No. 105, Charles Sturt University, The Johnstone Centre, Albury.