



FLINDERS RANGES EDIACARA FOUNDATION

MAY 2025 UPDATE

Two of our team are elected to prestigious Societies

Distinguished Professor Mary Droser joins the National Academy of Sciences (USA) and Professor Hugh Possingham has been elected to the Fellowship of the Royal Society (UK), the oldest scientific academy in continuous existence.



Distinguished Professor Mary Droser

Mary is an inaugural member of our Foundation and has been pivotal to its success since 2018. We all wish to congratulate her on this prestigious appointment. The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is the highest-profile scientific organisation in America and membership in it is a career-defining honour. Although outstanding contributions to science are a prerequisite, entry to the academy is only possible via an election by peers.

Mary's work as a palaeontologist involves the study of complex early life on our planet. For decades, she has been a frequent traveller to the fossil beds at Nilpena Ediacara National Park, where she and her students have discovered ancient animals previously unknown to science.

Typically, fossil research involves the removal of specimens from the field for further study at a museum laboratory. Here however, Mary and her team excavate fossil beds and progress their research in situ. Fossil beds are re-assembled like puzzles and retained for study in the field, intact and carefully preserved. What emerges is a more complete, contextual picture of the species that appeared during the Ediacaran period, some 555 million years ago.

In 2022, Mary received the prestigious NAS Charles Doolittle Walcott Medal. The medal, part of the academy's Award in Early Earth and Life Sciences, is only presented to one scientist in the world every eight years. Some accolade.



Professor Hugh Possingham FRS

A member of the Foundation's Impact Council, Hugh is Research Professor, School of The Environment, University of Queensland, Australia. He is honoured for his contribution to mathematical ecology and nature conservation research, which includes the co-development of a conservation planning tool, Marxan, used in more than 180 countries to create systems of protected areas.

As a Professor of Mathematics and Zoology, Professor Possingham has received numerous awards and fellowships including the Australian Maths Society Prize and the first Fenner Medal from the Australian Academy of Science.

He has co-authored about 1000 research papers and supervised hundreds of early-career researchers.

Hugh's recent impact in ecology policy and advocacy includes his role as Queensland's Chief Scientist (2020 to 2022), founding membership of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists and the Chief Scientist of global conversation organisation The Nature Conservancy (2016 to 2020).

He is also Co-Chair of the Biodiversity Council, Chair of the Board of TERN (Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Network), Chief Scientist of Accounting for Nature, and Vice-President of Bird Life Australia.

Save the date – Saturday 26 July, 5pm to 7pm

Our Foundation is six years old this year, and to celebrate with our donors and supporters we'd be pleased if you could join us at the South Australian Museum on Saturday 26 July.

Distinguished Professor Mary Droser will be with us to provide updates on the latest field work discoveries and Deputy Premier and Minister for the Environment, the Hon Susan Close will discuss future exciting plans for the Park.

As a special fundraiser, we will be auctioning the right to the stabilisation and ongoing maintenance of a fossil bed precinct.

Professor Chris Daniels, one of our best known and much-loved science communicators will act as our special MC for the evening.

Activities at the Park

Tours

This year, the National Parks and Wildlife Services has increased the number of weekly tours offered, with tours now being delivered five days per week. Staffing has increased, with three staff now working solely at the park. It's an exciting time, with visitor numbers in 2025 doubling compared with the first year of operation in 2024. A new tour bus is on the way and upgrades to visitor infrastructure are continuing with support from the Foundation.

The Rangers on park are also hosting a number of significant tours, with a 38-strong 'Tasting Australia' event delegation travelling to the park for a hosted tour during May. Among them was University of Adelaide Professor John Carty, who said, *"the Ediacara tour experience was really moving – surprisingly so for most of the people who never knew it existed."*

Park Projects – Supported by the Foundation and our generous donors

- The geological timeline walk extending from the Blacksmith's Shop to the Woolshed and the new bench with the Ediacaran fossil plinth will be installed later this year.
- Upgrade works at the Shearers Quarters, including new floors, air conditioning, and kitchen upgrades are also underway and nearing completion.
- Fossil bed sponsorship plaques have now been installed at all sponsored beds. Mary Droser is working on a "Sponsorship Certificate" for each of our sponsors.
- Work to assess the feasibility of moving the large fossil 'Fun Bed' to the park Woolshed is continuing.
- A new and updated audio visual 'Welcome to Country' in the Blacksmith's Shop has been upgraded and is working very well.

Ministerial Testimonial

We asked the Honourable Kyam Maher MLC, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Public Sector and Special Minister of State for his views on visits to the Park.

He responded at length: *"In my role as a Member of Parliament and a Minister in the past two Labor Governments, I have made countless trips around our state, and my visits to Nilpena Ediacara National Park have always been a highlight.*

As a kid I spent countless long road trips with an Arlo Guthrie cassette playing on repeat. Whether I liked it or not at the time, I became familiar with his songs – and eventually grew to appreciate them. So, in the spirit of Guthrie's famous line, "You can get anything you want at Alice's Restaurant", it seems fitting to name a fossil bed this rich in Ediacaran diversity after such a place.

The site itself is truly extraordinary. When I first visited in 2017, I was with American science educator and presenter Bill Nye. He was so blown away by what he saw that he could not stop talking about it – and even went onto include photos and stories from that in his later presentations.

It's incredible to think that here in South Australia, you can visit and even touch fossils that date back hundreds of millions of years – evidence that offers insights into how life developed on Earth - and maybe even beyond".

(For those of you who haven't yet visited the Park, Alice's Restaurant Fossil Bed is the centrepiece of the historic Blacksmith's Shop where an immersive audiovisual experience brings the Ediacaran seafloor fossils to life.)

What are our priorities for the next two to three years?

Helping to facilitate the work of research teams.

The dedication and work of researchers on park has clearly influenced many visitors to give their generous support to Foundation projects. All of these projects leave a significant and enduring legacy, providing and improving Park access and amplifying awareness of Nilpena values through interpretation and education.

Education and learning

Promoting and supporting education is a key function for us and we are particularly pleased that our Ediacara Teacher Scholarships are funded to continue in July. A huge thank you to the donors who made this possible.

These sought-after scholarship places are given to educators who demonstrated strong curriculum links, practical classroom ideas and a clear willingness to share their learning with others. They require an input of \$15,000 annually and are co-ordinated by the South Australian Teachers' Association (SASTA) on our behalf.

The Foundation also plans to support the production of three more '*Fossil Rock*' educational videos for younger people. The star performer will again be the lovely Lucy Rasheed and her colleague and friend Kylie Claude from Fastbreak Films will be the producer. Series one has been a huge success and has a great many followers. SASTA has created junior primary teacher resources based on the three videos. How good is that! Please view them <https://www.seastarrock.com/fossilrock>

We plan to raise \$72,000 to produce episodes 4 – 6 and hope our grant applications will be successful. They would provide fifty per cent of the funding amount required, so your support (any amount, large or small) to make up the difference would be greatly appreciated.

Fossil bed stabilisation

Nilpena's unique status lies in the fact that its fossils occur in situ as whole communities on excavated beds. Researchers can understand them in context and visitors can be allowed the privilege of viewing a working research site. This is the only place in the world where such a dynamic excavation of fossil beds has been achieved.

Here in South Australia, we have a host of preserved animal communities revealing the dawn of animal life and all of its intricacies, interactions and dynamics. Ensuring these fossil beds are conserved and maintained in what can be a harsh field environment is essential.

Six of the forty high priority fossil beds have been stabilised.

We're grateful for the fact that eleven beds from our original brochure are already sponsored by Foundation donors with the stabilisation work on five of the beds still to be done.

Currently, three beds from the original campaign await sponsors. It should be noted that donations can be spread over three years.

Of course, any subsidy to the costs involved in maintaining stabilised beds would be welcome.

Support

We invite you to make a tax-deductible gift of any amount via our website

<https://ediacarafoundation.org/support/#donate>

Please let us know if you would like your donation to be directed toward a specific project.