

21 May 2026 Jane Rusden Exhibition: Kate's address

Introduction

- **Good evening, everyone. My name is Kate Millar**, and I'm the CEO of BirdLife Australia.
- It is so exciting to be joining you today on the beautiful lands of the **Dja Dja Wurrung people** and would like to begin by acknowledging them as the Traditional Owners of the Country. I pay my respect to their Elders past and present, and to any First Nations people here tonight.
- **I am honoured to be here** for *Jane's Life on the Wing Exhibition* and to join with you to celebrate her incredible work. Looking around I see a room full of enthusiastic and like-minded people. Art lovers, nature lovers, Castlemaine locals, BirdLife members, friends and family!

The unbreakable connection between people and nature

- I would like to talk briefly about **the unbreakable connection between people and nature**.
- Some of us are lucky and have families or friends that sparked our passion for nature as children. **My parents**, who are here tonight were avid bushwalkers and nature lovers. For me, a formative moment in my own journey as a nature lover was on a family holiday in Port Campbell on Victoria's Great Ocean Road, when I was lucky enough to see glow worms for the first time. I was just a kid at the time, but it was in that moment, gazing up at their faint glow, that I was suddenly struck by the breathtaking beauty of nature – and I decided then and there that whatever my future held, it had to involve working in and caring for the environment. That image has never faded from my mind.
- For others, it can be a moment of crisis and disruption. I remember being at the reopening of Mason Falls in Kinglake National Park after the Black Saturday bushfires and community members reflecting on how nature always seemed to be one step ahead of them, leading them forward in their recovery. Seeing the epicormic growth on the eucalypts, then the insects and birds returning and finally the mammals. They were in awe of **nature's resilience**, of hearing the lyrebirds for the first time and what it meant for the healing of the community.
- For anyone here tonight that was impacted by the Harcourt fires, I have worked for long time in bush fire recovery. I know there are so many competing demands, pressures and complex difficult processes to navigate. But if you had a passion for nature prior to the fires, your recovery will be strengthened by reconnecting with

the things that give you that spark of joy and sense of peace in amongst all the tough work of recovery.

How do we nurture this connection between people and nature?

- I can't emphasize enough the importance of art and creative practice in reflecting to all of us who we are, what we value, how are we connected to each other and the world around us.
- In Jane's work birds are a metaphor and tangible creatures. She reminds us of the place they hold in our hearts, culture and community.

The pressure on nature and birds in increasing

- How many Australian birds do you think are now threatened? 1 in one hundred, 1 in 50 or 1 in 10. I am sad to say that 1 in 6 Australian birds are now threatened.
- More than 80% of the once-widespread temperate woodlands of south-eastern Australia have been cleared since European colonisation, and in some areas less than 5% remains. Unsurprisingly, this has had catastrophic consequences for birds and other species that have evolved alongside these woodlands – indeed, over 50 species of woodland birds are declining and/or threatened with extinction, including some that were considered common within living memory.
- One of the magnificent birds featured in Jane's exhibition is the Gang Gang Cockatoo. If you are in a woodland and hear the sound of an old creaky door, it is the unmistakable call of a Gang Gang. It is so sad that these cheeky, charismatic cockatoos are now also on the threatened bird list.
- BirdLife Australia's vision is a future in which birds and nature are valued, conserved and restored, sustaining a healthy planet for the benefit of all people. Art that draws links with the natural world plays a powerful and irreplaceable role in this.

Enjoy this special opportunity

- I am fortunate to have art in my home that brings me joy every day. They are like old friends that remind me of the things I value, the moments that were special and the talented artists that were generous enough to bring their work into world
- Thank you to Jane for inviting me to be a part of this evening. Jane is generously donating part of her sales to BirdLife which is a testament to who she is as an artist and a person.
- It the support of people like Jane and yourselves that makes it possible for BirdLife to deliver our incredible work. I am confident that together we can put birds and nature on a path to recovery.