

Beverley Maeling Overton (nee Pitt) was born and raised in Kingscote, Kangaroo Island (KI). Bev was one of five children, but the only girl, so she soon learned to stand up for herself and to keep up with her brothers. Her parents were very generous people despite their modest circumstance and her mother would often have less fortunate people over for tea. This generosity of spirit embodies the kind of person Bev has become and she has worked tirelessly to volunteer for many community organisations on KI; an Island she has dedicated much of her life to.

Bev began working locally at the age of 12 as a shop assistant after school and on weekends and after completing her schooling at Kingscote Area School, she moved to the mainland to work as a nurse at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. It was during this time she met and married Dean Overton and for a time they moved to the mid north where their two girls were born. After an eleven-year absence from KI, they moved back to KI (home) in 1971. Bev sustained a head injury from a fall, which caused her hearing to begin to deteriorate in the mid 1980's. By the mid 1990's Bev required hearing aids, but by 2015 her hearing had deteriorated so badly that she required cochlear implants in both ears. Once 'turned on' Bev was delighted to be able to hear simple things like birds singing in the trees again.

From 1972-74 Bev completed the TAFESA course *Field Identification of Wildflowers*. Inspired by this and her mentor, Ida Jackson, Bev began to pursue a career as a field botanist whilst juggling her family's needs and working for Telecom; indicative of the energy and work ethic Bev is much revered for.

In 1982 Bev set up an environmental consultancy business with her husband Dean called Environmental Realist with an aim to self-fund the mapping and recording of native and exotic flora of KI. She also began several post fire research projects across the island, both in national parks and on roadside reserves. By applying her detailed local knowledge, she gained valuable ecological insight into the recovery of vegetation communities after fire. Her familiarity with the vegetation enabled her to see both the broad and subtle changes and pick up on over 70 new botanical records for KI. Her insight into post fire recovery of native flora has been invaluable to native vegetation managers on KI both past and present.

In 1984 Bev voluntarily began collecting native and exotic herbarium specimens for both the State Herbarium of South Australia and for her own private collection, dubbed the Overton Herbarium. The collection has been used extensively to reference plant identification for the surveys she and other researchers have conducted over many decades. Since then, Bev has lodged over 4,600 specimens with the State Herbarium of South Australia and she has become best known and appreciated for her comprehensive documentation of the flora of KI. From a scientific perspective, she stands out as an amateur collector because her work is disciplined and thorough. The Overton Herbarium was formally recognised as the KI Regional Herbarium in 1999 by the State Herbarium of South Australia. Bev has also recorded over 7,660 observations/collections with the Atlas of Living Australia. This amazing amount of collection/observation data has vastly increased the level of knowledge about the vegetation on Kangaroo Island.

In 1989 Bev was involved in the Biological Survey of Kangaroo Island. This was an exhaustive survey across the whole of Kangaroo Island by the then Department for Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs with the aim of intensively mapping the flora species which grow here.

Bev has always been ardent about mapping and removing alien plant species (introduced to KI). In the mid 1990's she was instrumental in beginning control measures for Bridal Creeper (*Asparagus asparagoides*), an invasive weed which smothers native plants with its dense foliage and tubers, not only killing the plants but also removing valuable habitat for local wildlife. Along with husband Dean, she refined a method for introducing rust spores to populations of bridal creeper by making '[spore water](#)' to douse the plants in. Bev demonstrated this method not only to community groups on

Kangaroo Island, but also on mainland South Australia. This method revolutionised the way this form of biological control for bridal creeper was spread across the State ensuring a much greater impact.

Not only is Bev passionate about gaining knowledge about the flora of Kangaroo Island, but she is also very happy to [collaborate with](#) and share this knowledge with anyone that is interested. She has achieved this in many ways including guest lecturing at TAFESA, leading groups of local and international school students, regularly presenting to Landcare and other local community groups, mentoring many younger professionals, students and amateur botanists that have worked on various projects on the island, and co-publishing several books, (with husband Dean taking the photos), (*Kangaroo Island Wildflower poster and booklet*; 1985, *Kangaroo Island's Native Plants*; 2003, and *Discover Kangaroo Island's Native Plants*; 2012). She has also written a multitude of journal articles for publications such as *The South Australian Naturalist*, *South Australian Society for Growing Australian Plants Journal* and [Australian Plant Society Journal](#) as well as reports, newsletters and newspaper articles. Bev has also provided significant amounts of ecological knowledge for publications such as [Grasses of South Australia](#) and online knowledge portals such as [Seeds of South Australia](#).

Bev's in-depth knowledge of KI's flora has made her the first point of contact for researchers, students, government officials and groups interested in native vegetation such as the Scientific Expeditioners Group who sought her expertise to establish seminal post fire research in Flinders Chase National Park in 1992-93. Her knowledge is also sought by the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources to provide expert advice including involvement in workshops such the [Threatened Species Schedules Review project](#) (2014), where her specific knowledge on the location and status of KI plants was greatly relied upon to determine the regional status of plant species including species warranting protection as threatened. Bev also played an integral role during the inception of the [Kangaroo Island Nationally Threatened Plant Project](#) by providing advice and assistance with initial population surveys, [burning trials](#), major community revegetation events and ongoing personnel advice.

In 2011 at the age of 69 Bev formed a sub group of the KI Flora and Fauna club called the [KI Flora and Fauna Orchid Group](#) and began a five-year project to map/remap the 80+ known orchids of Kangaroo Island. With the efforts of this group she was able to locate and map 69 species of orchids and co-publish a book titled *Native Orchids of Kangaroo Island a Field Guide* in 2017. The remaining orchids were not able to be formally identified as no flowering plants were able to be located. Over the course of the project Bev lodged over 1,000 orchid specimens with the State Herbarium of South Australia, discovered a new species of orchid and rediscovered several orchid populations that had not been recorded since 1885. She also introduced many KI residents to the wonders of native orchids in the process.

The vast majority of this work has been undertaken on a voluntary basis. Bev's other environmental volunteering work includes Friends of Parks (25+ years of service and awarded a 20 year Certificate of Appreciation by the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources in 2014), KI Weeds Group (founding member), [KI Flora and Fauna Club](#) (founding member in 1982 and has held several committee positions since then), Kangaroo Island Animal and Plant Control Board (community member), Kangaroo Island National Parks and Wildlife Service Consultative Committee (1984 onwards), [KI Threatened Plant Recovery Team](#) member and KI Natural Resources Management Board Biosecurity Advisory Group (ministerial appointment). For her extensive contribution Bev was presented with a [life-time achievement](#) award to natural resource management on KI in 2016 and was a finalist in the Australian Government Individual Landcarer category, 2017 State Landcare Awards.

Bev's volunteering extends beyond environmental causes into many community services such as the [State Emergency Service](#) (full active service since 1969 gaining competency in Basic Rescue, Road Crash Rescue, Land Search Rescue and basic skills in Height Rescue) and the Country Fire Service (base radio operator, 1975 – 2000 when her hearing became to impaired forcing her to cease). For her

long-standing commitment to SES and CFS Bev was awarded the National Medal, gaining 2 bars, and granted a South Australian Emergency Service Ministerial Commendation. In 2015 she was given life membership with SES in recognition of her 35+ years of service. Bev also volunteered for the local branch of the South Australian Red Cross in the position of emergency services officer. The [KI branch](#) had lapsed into inactivity when Bev joined and reinvigorate it in around 2000. Bev was instrumental in getting the Red Cross emergency plan up and running again to help with logistics and catering during emergencies such as bushfires. She has been awarded 20 and 30-year medals for her service to the Red Cross.

Another of Bev's passions is local history. Bev began volunteering for KI's [Hope Cottage and Museum](#) three years ago and took on the onerous task of putting names to photographs donated by *The Islander* newspaper to the [Museum](#). She worked out the names of the people that she didn't know by either trawling through old copies of *the Islander* until she found the corresponding photo in it or when that didn't work, Bev displayed the photos at an annual Settlement Day event to see if anyone attending recognised the people. Over a two-year period, Bev was able to put names to most of the faces in the photos. Bev also volunteers for the [KI Pioneers Association](#). One of her biggest contributions to this group was the research project that she undertook with her daughter, Joanne, into finding out who was buried in the unmarked graves at the Kingscote Cemetery. Because of this research, the Kangaroo Island Lions Club was able to put name plaques on these graves. Both projects are a remarkable effort and demonstrate Bev's unbelievable knowledge of the residents of Kangaroo Island and her tenacity.

Whilst pursuing her interest in local history Bev heard many stories about past industries on Kangaroo Island and the endeavours of the Islanders to make them work – much of which was unrecorded. This prompted Bev to write a book about some of those industries titled *Salt, Gypsum and Charcoal Industries on Kangaroo Island, 1803 to 1992*.

To help her unwind after a particularly busy time Bev likes to sew quilts. Since Bev began doing this, her quilts have become treasured welcome gifts to many newborn babies. She has sewn quilts for her four grandchildren, seven great grand children and even my two children. Even in her 'down time' Bev's generosity still shines through as she has also donated numerous quilts to the Adelaide Women's and Children's Hospital.

Her involvement across so many different community services on KI means her advice and perspective is highly sought and always practical. She is a fierce and much-loved champion and advocate for the Island; its history, environment, character and community.

Bev took me under her wing when I was 14 and introduced me to the wonderful world of Kangaroo Island's native flora. She ignited a passion in me that burns just as brightly many years later. Bev's knowledge about KI's flora is unparalleled and importantly she is generous with it. I now operate my own environmental consultancy and she continues to encourage and teach me. Bev's unwavering passion for the flora of KI is undeniable as is the contribution she has made to Australia's understanding of the ecology of Kangaroo Island. Age and deteriorating hearing are starting to slow Bev down, but her mind is still as sharp as a tack and she takes every opportunity to pass on the knowledge she has gained to the next generation of ecologists/field botanists to foster their understanding and curiosity.

Bev deserves to be recognised not only for her amazing contribution to our understanding of Kangaroo Island's plants, her community leadership and mentoring but also for her 50+ years of voluntary service to a myriad of community groups and organisations. Bev is a truly remarkable person, Islander and Australian.