

## **April Gecko Guest Speaker Paul Mander**

Our guest, Paul Mander, was raised in an environment of animal care. His skills and knowledge led to his current occupation of fostering injured birds to return them to the wild. He also breeds many species of raptors and trains them for educational and environmental purposes at his Raptor Conservation and Training Centre in Nerang.

Paul introduced the packed house to Soren, a magnificent Wedgetail eagle, reared from infancy ten years ago and consequently very tame. The bond between eagle and master was immediately apparent, with Soren being very susceptible to what we would call "human" affection. He, and other similarly trained eagles, is used in managing and balancing wild bird populations. Examples include controlling bird flocks in landfills, fruit farm protection, and in Soren's case controlling cockatoos on Hamilton Island, where flocks have reached a point where the natural balance is threatened. Egyptian Ibis, not Australian natives, are reaching alarming numbers in urban areas, and eagles help control these burgeoning populations.

Soren caused plenty of interest and an enthusiastic question time. Finally it was time for the hood for him to leave, but not before flying across the room to Paul's call, several times. This demonstration of bond, a beautiful and magnificent wing span, and elegance in flight was much appreciated. Soren works in schools and in films, and his most recent role is the eagle in the Wolf Blass television commercial. With approximately 50 more years to live, Soren has plenty of work ahead of him.

We now met Aspin, a two year old Barn Owl. Her life expectancy is 30 years. Also bred in captivity, she was very tame and completely comfortable in the roomful of people. Aspin is another of the birds Paul uses for education purposes. Again, Paul demonstrated her flight, not before the softness and lightness of her feathers were pointed out for all to feel. This makes for a silent flight and a very successful predator. Barn Owls have extremely acute hearing, with an ability to filter out all sound other than the bird's immediate focus. More enthusiastic questions, before Aspin joined Soren for their return home to the Conservation Centre at Nerang.

A thank you to Paul for his very successful visit, and for finding time in a very busy workload.