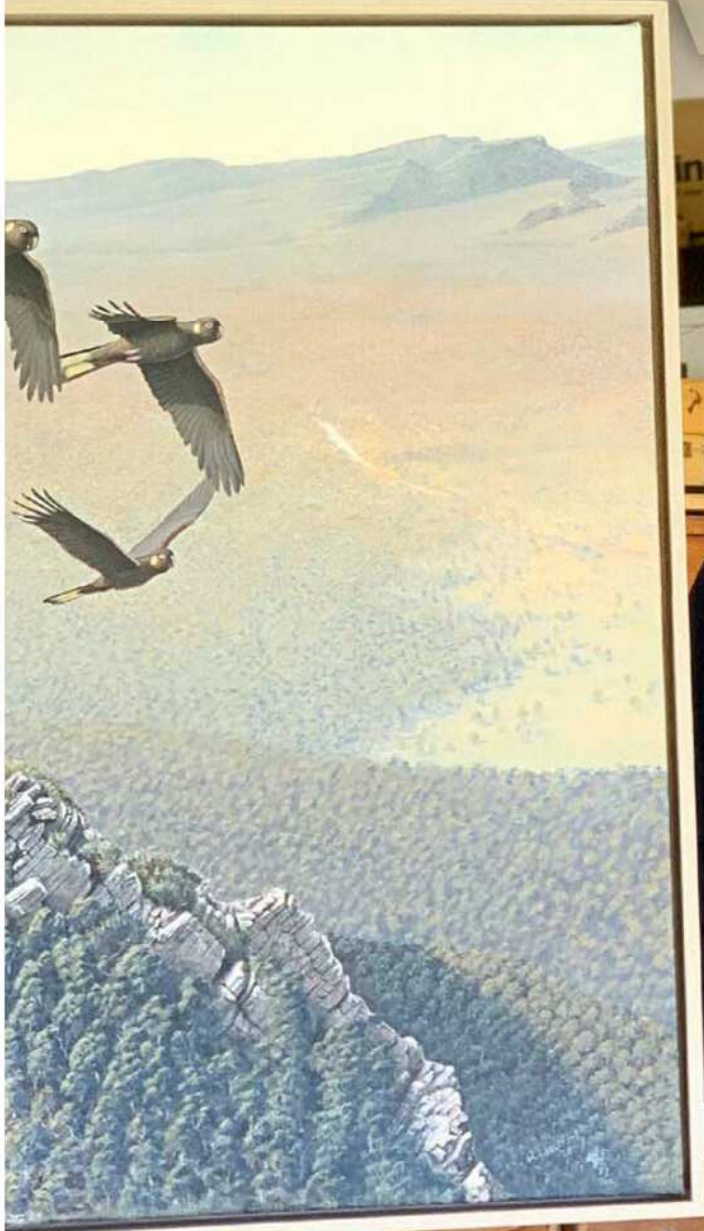


Times

LIVING



A lifelong love OF ART AND WILDERNESS

Well-known artist and conservationist Richard Weatherly shares the story of his eventful life in a stunning new book. The Wallington resident spoke with Kylie Oliver.

WEATHERLY'S LATEST WORK *takes flight*

BY KYLIE OLIVER

One of Richard Weatherly's standout childhood memories is of being held aloft by his grandmother as a shark swam dangerously close in the shallows of the estuary at Barwon Heads.

The creature flashed past in pursuit of a fish and a young Richard was delighted by his bird's eye view of nature in action.

"It was very interesting – it was real jaws stuff," he recalls.

"Someone yelled 'shark, shark' and Rosemary grabbed me by the arms and held me up and I saw the thing go whipping past.

"My sister was furious because she saw the fish it was chasing and I saw the shark."

That extraordinary experience in nature was a sign of things to come for Richard who went on to become an accomplished environmental artist, spending more than 50 years observing birds in their natural habitats around the globe.

"WHEN YOU ARE ON THE LAND YOU TEND TO SEE A BIRD AND WANT TO KNOW WHAT IT IS."

His lifetime of adventures and insights – along with his stunning paintings and sketches – have been collated in the soon-to-be released book titled *A Brush with Birds: Paintings and stories from the wild*.

Images in the superb hardcover book have been drawn from a body of work dating back to the 1960s and document his time spent in Europe, Africa, America, Antarctica, Papua New Guinea and many parts of Australia.

Some of that work will also feature in an upcoming exhibition to be held at The Hive in Ocean Grove, which opens on Saturday and runs until December 13.

There will also be a book signing at the gallery on November 21.

The Wallington resident, who studied history at Cambridge and has worked

alongside artists such as Charles McCubbin, admits he was initially reluctant to write the book.

"I was sitting here in the studio and the phone rang and a woman's voice said 'I'm a senior editor at a publishing company, would you be interested in writing a book about birds?'," he remembers.

"I'm inherently pretty honest so I said 'no'."

Richard was eventually persuaded to take on the project and, in typically modest fashion, says he is satisfied with the result.

"It's really a meandering through my life picking up on things that actually teach us lessons - or taught me lessons anyway," he says.

"It is about my experience in learning to paint birds and where I've done that and the interesting people I've encountered.

"And secondly, it looks at the scientific side and what learning about the science has led me to in terms of understanding conservation and habitat management."

Richard, who grew up in the Western District, received an OAM in 2015 for his lifetime contribution to the visual arts, the environment and conservation.

He was the foundation president of the Society of Wildlife Artists of Australasia and was made an Honorary Associate in ornithology at the National Museum of Victoria.

His creative career has run in parallel with that of being a fourth-generation sheep farmer on the family property, Connewarran Station, located just outside Mortlake.

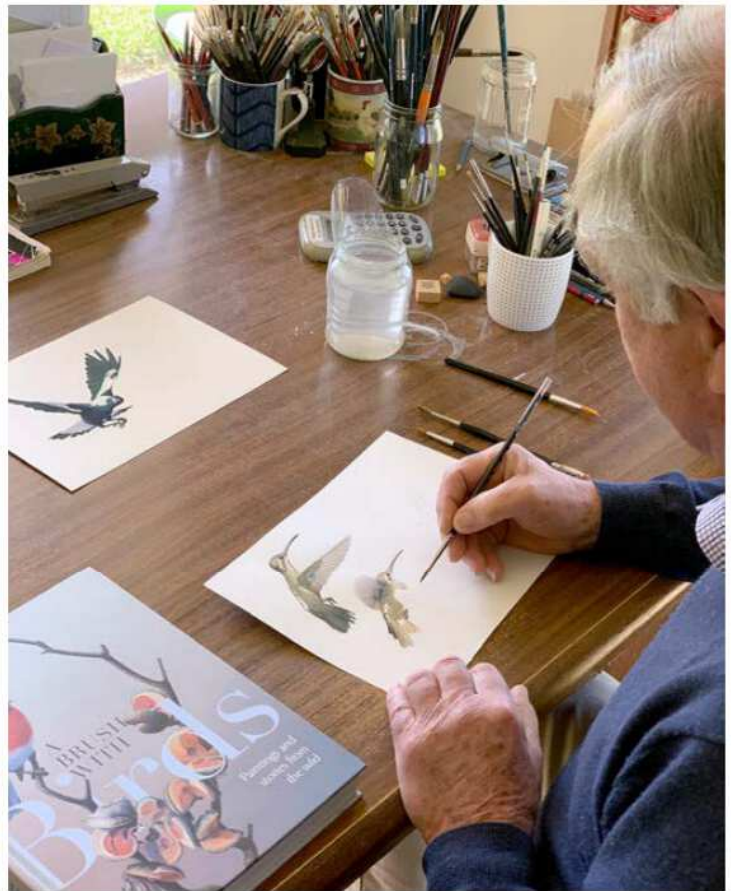
Richard and his wife Jenny were married in 1976 and spent more than 35 years as custodians of the property, undertaking an award-winning regeneration project which included seed planting more than 1.5million trees.

"It's quite a creative process, farming, because we were in many ways very lucky because we started with a place that was a blank canvas in need of development," he says.

"It's a bit like painting - there's always things that go wrong.

"The way to look at something that goes wrong is 'how can I make something out of that so it is something that went right?'"

Richard says his appreciation for the natural environment was nurtured from a young age thanks to a father who



Richard Weatherly OAM, pictured at home in his Wallington studio, is preparing for the release of his book and an upcoming solo exhibition at The Hive.

encouraged him to be curious about the world around him.

"You'd be going around the paddocks with your father and he would say 'oh, I wonder what all those birds are feeding on, let's go up and see'," Richard remembers.

"When you are on the land you tend to see a bird and want to know what it is.

"My grandfather kept a bird list and he had 111 species, my father had 148 species and we had 207 species by the time we left.

"Anything more than 200 is a lot."

Richard still makes regular trips to Connewarran which is now run by his son, Hamish, who is continuing the family tradition as leaders in the merino wool industry.

Richard and Jenny's daughter, Skye, also works in the family business.

As he takes a moment to leaf through the pages of his book while sitting in his light-filled studio, the artist points out a few of the feathered subjects who

are among his favourites including the kingfisher, falcon and the wren.

Richard might have taken some convincing initially but he concedes *A Brush with Birds* presented him with the chance to reflect on a wonderful career that has taken him from the ice cliffs of Antarctica to the arid beauty of the Simpson Desert.

It was also an opportunity to acknowledge the many people from different fields of endeavour who were part of the journey, including his wife Jenny who sits at the top of the tree as his greatest support.

"Art is a very selfish pursuit and Jenny has been absolutely fantastic," he says.

"Some people are natural nurturers and carers and Jenny is one of those.

"I'm sure I'd have been nowhere if I hadn't had her behind me."

Richard Weatherly's *A Brush with Birds* exhibition starts on Saturday and runs until December 13. Find out more by visiting thehiveoceangrove.com.au.



The Hive gallery

Join internationally renowned artists:

Sculptor **LUCY MCEACHERN** launching her newest work
Artist **RICHARD WEATHERLY OAM** with an exhibition of original works that accompany his latest book

"A BRUSH WITH BIRDS"

Opening Saturday 31st October 1-4pm
Book Signing Saturday November 21st.

41 Smithton Grove, Ocean Grove
thehiveoceangrove.com.au



Richard Weatherly OAM

Lucy McEachern