

NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust

Understory

Issue 12 | Summer 2024

We host delegates
at Global Nature
Positive Summit
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Connected country
helps care for koalas
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Carbon and
biodiversity benefit
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of NSW and recognise their ongoing connection to land, waters, biodiversity, and culture.

Aboriginal cultural values are connected to Country and are found in waterways, mountains, wetlands, floodplains, hills, sandhills, rock outcrops and within the biodiversity of these geological features.

These cultural values are often present on privately-owned land and are associated with ongoing cultural practices and learning.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and future and commit to genuinely collaborate and partner with Aboriginal people in private land conservation.

COVER:

Agreement-holder and property owner Peter Lloyd, left, shows NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust Regional Manager Leith Hawkins vegetation that will be protected to secure habitat for koalas.

Credit: Nviro Media



Wiradjuri/Birpai artist Wayde Clarke's design for the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust pulls together complex layers of cultural knowledge and experience from the coast, across the ranges and deep into the desert country of the far west. It uses a colour palette that speaks to a diversity of kin, habitats and species.

Important to the story of the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust, Wayde's art depicts insects, which are used as cultural indicators of the small and often unseen signs of healthy country.

Artwork credit: Wayde Clarke



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Message from the Chief Executive

Welcome to the Summer issue of *Understory*.

It always delights me to learn of the experience and energy among our landholders, partners and collaborators and this edition of *Understory*, once again, demonstrates the network of committed people who are the driving force behind private land conservation efforts across NSW.

I met several of you at the Global Nature Positive Summit and Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) events in Sydney, in October, and received positive feedback from national and international delegates who visited a Biodiversity Stewardship Agreement site located in Western Sydney, as well as from those who spoke to me after our speaking engagements.

At both events, I noted the strong appreciation for the work you all do. Delegates told me they were impressed by the tangible, on-the-ground conservation efforts happening here in NSW.

Showcasing your work, and our collective impact, at this world-first event, then following it with the connection and collaboration ALCA affords us each year, was an excellent opportunity.

In this edition, we introduce you to new agreement-holders who've taken up our celebrated land conservation model to protect koala habitat in the state's New England region, and pilot a new biodiversity and carbon offering in the Murray Riverina.

These landholders have committed to manage their properties per an agreed conservation plan, and we look forward to working with them to secure their legacy.

As we move toward the end of the year, and a season known for its climate extremes, we showcase agreement-holders have been guided by our local staff and ecologists, as well as the land itself, to embrace the regeneration of their conservation areas.

It's been an extraordinary year, with many firsts for us and our landholders. As we continue to reflect on the successes of private land conservation following the first-ever Global Nature Positive Summit, we wish you, your families and community a safe and happy holiday season and a bright, optimistic new year.

Dr Erin Giuliani
NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust

Our leadership

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust was established under Part 10 of the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*.

Under the Act, the affairs of the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust are managed by a Board and led by a Chief Executive Officer and executive leadership team.

For more about our Board and executive leadership team, visit bct.nsw.gov.au/leadership

OUR BOARD

The Hon. Niall Blair
Board Chair

Christine Covington
Board Deputy Chair

David Freudenberger
Planning and Delivery Committee Chair

John Pierce AO
Public Fund Management Committee Chair

Fiona Simson

Dr Jane Weatherley

Professor Phil Duncan

Tim King

John Maher

OUR EXECUTIVE TEAM

Erin Giuliani
Chief Executive Officer

Emily McCosker
Director Strategy and Finance

Kate Smillie and Holly Park
Co-directors Partnerships and Investment

Alan Goodwin
Director Regional Delivery

Mick O'Flynn
Director Programs

For more about our Board and executive team, visit bct.nsw.gov.au/who-we-are

Progress report

OUR CONSERVATION RESULTS

With landholders, the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust manages:



2,476

agreements for private land conservation



2.1m

hectares of privately-held land



69%

of all agreements in perpetuity

Our conservation efforts have protected:



216*

threatened species



14

landscapes not represented in the protected areas system



146

inadequately protected landscapes

NSW Government contributions:



\$200m

over four years, to financial year 2024-2025, to support private land conservation



\$316.3m

in assets held in trust to support agreement-holders protect important habitat and species



\$ 9.7m

in grant payments to help landholders deliver good conservation outcomes

OUR CONSERVATION TARGETS

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust was established under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*.

Our targeted private land conservation efforts are delivered under three key programs:

1. Conservation Management Program
2. Conservation Partners Program
3. Biodiversity Offsets Program

Conservation Management Program

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust's Conservation Management Program offers private landholders the security of annual payments to protect our state's most at risk species and habitats. Since our establishment, in 2017, paid conservation management opportunities have resulted in:



196

funded conservation agreements



140

in-perpetuity agreements



232,755

hectares protected



\$12.36m

in conservation management payments over the past 12 months

Conservation Partners Program

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust's Conservation Partners Program supports landholders to protect and manage biodiversity and native vegetation on their land with opportunities to secure grants and other concessions.



320
conservation and
wildlife refuge
agreements



461
grants awarded



52,321
hectares protected



\$7.92m
in grants paid



233
Active Biodiversity
Stewardship Agreements



89,937
hectares managed



\$25.26m
in conservation
management payments
over the past 12 months

OUR CONSERVATION ENABLERS

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust's network of private landholders share knowledge at local events to progress a commitment to protect our natural environment.

Two programs help them connect and learn:

1. Landholder Support Program
2. Education Program

All Landholder Support Program results are for this financial year.

Landholder Support Program

Landholders are at the heart of all NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust's efforts to protect and conserve our state's biodiversity. Our network of regional staff is there to support landholders in managing their agreement sites for good conservation outcomes.



33
landholder events



234
site visits to landholders



415
landholders attended
events



1,553
mail, phone or
other contact

Education Program

Educating our landholders, communities and future conservationists drives the consistency, efficacy, and legacy of the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust's conservation efforts.

The Conservation Champions program and collaboration with Landcare NSW are just some of the ways we reach and educate rural and regional communities.

All Education Program results are cumulative since 2018.



15,393
students involved in a
Conservation Champion
program



522
teachers provided with
learning resources



4,423
landholders participated
in conservation education
events

Reporting at 30 September 2024, unless stated otherwise

Our news

Global focus on nature

This month's first ever Global Nature Positive Summit was a fantastic opportunity for us to showcase the extraordinary work of our landholders.

We contributed to workshops, panels, plenary sessions and a site visit to a Biodiversity Stewardship Agreement site in western Sydney.

We followed that with two days at the always fruitful Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) Private Land Conservation conference.

The discussions we had with delegates to both the summit and ALCA conference reinforced how critical it is for us to unite Traditional

Custodians, landholders, business, non-government organisations and both government and sector peers to halt biodiversity loss and close the nature finance gap.

We were proud to be a program partner of ALCA PLC24, and congratulate the Australian Land Conservation Alliance, its members and all event delegates for an extraordinary conference event.

To learn more about how we partner visit bct.nsw.gov.au/partner.



Founder of Landscape Finance Lab Paul Chatterton; Leah Armstrong, of the International Funders for Indigenous People; NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust Chief Executive Erin Giuliani; NAB's Director Sustainable Lending James Bentley; and, plenary host Pollination Executive Director Stephanie Russo at the ALCA PLC24 conference's final plenary session.



Artist Colleen Werner's amazingly detailed work of glossy black-cockatoo feathers on leaf litter was one of the global participants in this year's Fabriano Watercolour Biennale.

Wild art in global exhibition

Conservation agreement-holder and wildlife carer, Colleen Werner, is a highly skilled and published wildlife illustrator and was this year one of 56 global artists participating in the Fabriano Watercolour Biennale.

Colleen, who has a property at Birdwood, in the Port Macquarie hinterland, rehabilitates and releases abandoned or injured wildlife with her partner Doug.

She draws much of her artistic inspiration from the natural world she's committed to protect and care for, entering a work of glossy black-cockatoo feathers into the Biennale.

Colleen's work is held in the collections of nature lovers around the world. She is a member of the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney's Florilegium Society and exhibits at the garden's Red Box Gallery.

Ancient ways for modern days

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust's *Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy 2024-2027* sets out the organisation's aspirations toward genuine empowerment of the Aboriginal people and communities it works with.

The strategy, released in July, guides staff, agreement-holders, contractors and partners in how our conservation programs can uphold cultural knowledge and weave it into modern conservation practice.

CEO Erin Giuliani said the new strategy provided a culturally-informed path forward for conservation on lands that have both cultural and biodiversity value.

"This new strategy guides our planning and conservation decisions into the future. It strives to be culturally informed, trauma-informed and healing focused," she said.

The strategy prioritises a rights-based approach to conservation, values culture and recognises Indigenous cultural authority.





Egg-citing coastal emu discovery

Conservation agreement landholder, Barbara Linley, pictured, was interviewed by ABC North Coast, following the exciting discovery of a nest of nine rare coastal emu eggs early in the spring season.

Barbara has a conservation agreement on her Clarence Valley property to protect koala habitat and has been active in coastal emu conservation for many years.

There is estimated to be fewer than 50 coastal emus left between Evans Head and Red Rock, with a small, isolated population in the Bungawalbin area.



Allandale restoration project

Our Allandale restoration project in NSW's Murray Riverina region is making significant progress.

Thanks to the generous support of major donors, we have undertaken direct seeding of the shrub layer, established restoration fencing and propagated tree tubestock.

Donor contributions will soon support the harvesting and spreading of native grass seeds and the planting of tubestock trees.

This restoration work will enhance habitat for koalas, superb parrots, and threatened woodland birds.

If you would like to accelerate and expand our conservation work by making a major gift, please email giving@bct.nsw.gov.au.

Record your koala sightings

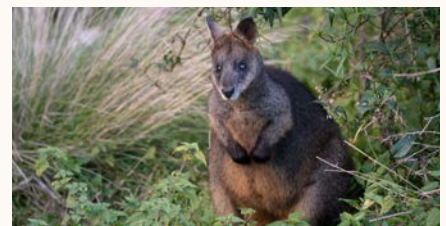
The NSW Koala Strategy and BioNet teams have released an upgraded version of *I Spy Koala* that allows anyone in NSW to submit their koala sightings to NSW BioNet.

App users can enter information about the location and condition of the koala, as well as photos and other information.

Data collected from *I Spy Koala* informs environmental managers, land managers and the community about koala distribution.

I Spy Koala is available for free on iPhones and Android devices.

Visit koala.nsw.gov.au/report-sighting



Choose a lasting legacy

We are incredibly grateful to those individuals who support us in their Will. Each and every one of them helps safeguard nature for future generations.

Agreement-holder Jane Mowatt has chosen to bequest land to the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust in her Will.

"I have chosen to leave my property to the BCT because I am deeply committed to protecting Australia's flora and fauna in every way I can," Jane said.

"My land, surrounded by Yengo National Park, is a sanctuary for native birds, wallabies, and wombats. With 80 per cent of my 22-hectare block already under a conservation agreement, this decision extends my existing commitment to nature."

Find out more by emailing giving@bct.nsw.gov.au.



The Restore Trees NSW app will help land managers plan plantings to restore habitat. Credit: David Roma/DCCEEW

Plan restorative plantings with app

Download the *Restore Trees NSW* app and use it to inspire and plan your habitat restoration projects.

The *Restore Trees NSW* app has been developed to answer common questions from land managers and community groups about what they should plant, and where, to deliver better biodiversity outcomes.

The app uses information from the *State Vegetation Type Map* to inform land managers about what native plants are best suited to the location of their project.

You can download and use the *Restore Trees NSW* app from your preferred app store.

Wild beauty connects country for koalas

Habitat loss poses the greatest threat to koala survival in NSW, but a group of private conservationists have acted to protect 1600 hectares of prime koala habitat in the state's northwest. *Story by Hannah McFarlane.*

Peter Lloyd, Leith Hawkins, Richard Bird and Gary Swanson stand deep in a gorge of the Enmore property, Wallamara, which is being managed for conservation under agreement with the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust. Credit: Nviro Media



Above: Grass trees, or Xanthorrhoea, explode from the rocky ridgelines of a conservation area that's been protected, in-perpetuity, by a committed group of landowners. Credit: Nviro Media

Left: NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust Regional Manager Leith Hawkins and landholder Peter Lloyd walk through koala country protected under an agreement attracting annual payments for year-on-year koala conservation. Credit: Nviro Media

When three friends purchased *Wallamara* 26 years ago, they realised a rare opportunity to acquire freehold land adjacent

The property spans about 2000 hectares of NSW's Northern Tablelands, southeast of Armidale, and covers land that once supported koalas. Standing with the owners in patches of untouched landscape, their passion for protecting the land and reviving the local koala population is infectious.

"We knew from a lot of records this was koala habitat, and the koalas were unfortunately wiped out, probably by bushfire," Gary Swanson, a co-director, said.

Scratch marks on the trees and tales from old graziers painted a picture of a koala's sanctuary, and the owners focused on bringing the landscape back. Stories from the previous owners, that they were kept awake at night by what they presumed were koalas, only reinforced this.

to a declared wilderness national park, and containing remnant koala habitat.

Today, a conservation agreement with the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust is seeing their goal of restoring that habitat a reality.

From its beginnings, *Wallamara* developed as a dedicated company, The Wilderness Company of Australia, with 18 family unit holders. Peter Lloyd, one of the original owners, is now a director of the company which is focused on conservation and habitat protection.

"There are so many other native species and opportunities for native animals to be able to thrive and survive in this conservation agreement."

– NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust Regional Manager Leith Hawkins



Above: Gary Swanson, Richard Bird and Peter Lloyd will protect vegetation on the Enmore property, Wallamara, with annual conservation management payments from the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust. Credit: Nviro Media.



Left: Richard Bird, Peter Lloyd (left) and Gary Swanson (front right) talk over how they'll manage the conservation work at Wallamara with NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust Regional Manager Leith Hawkins.

New England property connects to park

Steep gorges, magnificent waterfalls and local vegetation make up the property's koala habitat. With an overall expanse of 2000 hectares, 1600 have been placed into an in-perpetuity conservation agreement, with three sides connecting to the Oxley Wild Rivers National Park. It is this connection to a protected area the landholders hope will complement the aims of their conservation agreement with the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust.

"What's lovely is that you see a very well-connected landscape that has all of the attributes; water, protection, and all those other habitat management aspects that make it a good property for koala conservation," NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust Regional Manager Leith Hawkins said.

"There are so many other native species and opportunities for native animals to be able to thrive and survive in this conservation agreement."

The property's conservation agreement was established following a tender for the Armidale and Uralla Local Government Areas to protect important koala habitat. The Northern Tablelands

are considered to hold the habitat for koalas to survive into the future.

Loss of habitat is the greatest threat to koala survival and protection of areas known to support high quality patches of koala habitat is critical to support remaining koala populations. Other threats include disease and climate change.

The tender has helped the NSW Koala Strategy reach its goal of doubling koala populations in the state by 2050, with a total of 1692 hectares of koala habitat in the area now under

permanent protection thanks to NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust agreement-holders.

"This is an agreement in perpetuity, which means not only are we preserving the land for our own time, but dedicating the land to conservation, for all who may come after us," the property's co-owner Peter Lloyd said.

"Basically, it comes down to feeling good about conserving something. It's basically what a small group of people can do privately for the benefit of everyone."



The Northern Inland Koala conservation tender secured 4,148 hectares of important habitat – including 1,692 hectares of koala habitat – to be permanently protected under dedicated koala conservation agreements between private landholders and the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust.

Close to \$9 million has been invested in the tender, so far, with successful landholders from the Armidale and Uralla Local Government Areas to receive annual payments under agreed management plans.

The tender occurred on lands important to the Kamilaroi, Anaiwan and Gumbaynggirr people.



Above: Savernake's David Sloane knows every tree on the property that's been in his family since the mid-1800s and protecting them is, for him, a keenly-felt responsibility. Credit: Vince Bucello.

Landholder story

Riverina farmers' restoration vision

Two landholders have used our first ever biodiversity and carbon conservation agreements to make an investment in their properties and the region's future. *Story by Lynne Hughes.*

They might be almost 100 kms apart, but Murray-Riverina region properties Savernake and Warangee have a very special thing in common: they're both protecting native woodlands and generating carbon credits under a first-of-its-kind initiative led by the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust.

Property owners, Judy Frankenberg, of Warangee, and David Sloane, of Savernake, are among a number of the region's farming families to sign in-perpetuity agreements to protect, enhance and extend patches

of important native vegetation while generating Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs) under the Restoring Murray Woodlands Biodiversity and Carbon Tender.

The combined biodiversity and carbon opportunity has attracted the attention of private landholders with 788 hectares of threatened native habitat to protect under conservation agreements with the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust, and 141 hectares registered with the Australian Government's Clean Energy Regulator to generate ACCUs.

Judy's long-term land legacy

Judy Frankenberg has lived on *Warangee* for 55 years and started planting native trees in the late 1980s.

She said the opportunity appealed to her as a way of making sure conservation work she and her family had done over past years would remain after she was gone.

“Receiving payments to do more conservation work is a big help because there is always some cost in maintenance and pest and weed control,” she said.

“The carbon plantings will be of great benefit because not only will the trees store carbon, which is a good thing, they will also provide payments and an all-important environmental benefit to the land.

“By putting the land under this agreement, I know, even with changes that happen as years go by, we'll be able to make sure this work continues into the future.”



Above: Judy Frankenberg, of *Warangee*, and NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust Regional Manager Dieuwer Reynders have set a plan of conservation management that will continue the work Judy has done over past decades to restore native woodland trees. Credit: Vince Bucello.

“By putting the land under this agreement, I know that even with the changes that happen as years go by, we'll be able to make sure this work continues into the future.” – Judy Frankenberg

David's personal protection pledge

David Sloane's connection to the land goes back even further.

His family settled in the area in 1862, and generations have been farming and living there ever since. It's not surprising he feels a deep responsibility for the conservation of the family property, near Mulwala, on the Murray River.

He grew up at *Savernake*, a heritage-listed pastoral property of Inland Grey Box Woodlands and Sandhill Pine Woodlands.

“I used to walk around this beautiful property as a four or five-year-old among all these trees and the trees became my friends, especially the yellow box,” he said.

“I knew every yellow box in the whole area and while I walked through the forest, I had a sense of the sacred. Someone once said the forest is a

green cathedral, and that's what I felt when I was walking through.”

That childhood was 80 years ago and in the decades that have since passed, sheep were grazing across large portions of the land until a few years ago when they were removed from the western paddocks to allow the pasture to rest.

David says that in that time, and with good rain, yellow box and grey box gums have started to return to the area.

“They sprung up like weeds and at one point I tried to count them but got to 1000 and stopped because there was just too many,” he said.

“We knew if we put sheep back in there, they would eat the trees so when the BCT came along I took the opportunity to sign a conservation agreement and save them.

“Now we get an annual payment, which covers things like fencing, which is vital



Above: David Sloane looks over the health of a sapling with Matt O'Connell.

because you to have to fence off your carbon area, and other items like fire breaks and weed control.

“I would encourage everyone to think seriously about putting aside some acreage to carbon farming because it's going to benefit the next generation and the next generation after that.”



Above: Savernake's David Sloane knows every tree on the property that's been in his family since the mid-1800s and protecting them is, for him, a keenly-felt responsibility. Credit: Vince Bucello.



Above: White cypress (*Callitris glaucophylla*), a feature of Sandhill Pine Woodlands, are protected under the conservation agreements.

Landscape benefits embedded

Judy, David and the other landholders who have entered into the agreements have signed up to plant a diverse mix of local plant species.

NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust Regional Manager Dieuwer Reynders says the landholders will be able to use these plantings to earn carbon credits.

"When those plants mature, the sites will be protected forever under the conservation agreements, ensuring the carbon remains in the landscape and provides exceptional biodiversity

benefits in a highly modified landscape, she said."

"This project has had the benefit of drawing on the expertise of local landholders and experts at Murray Native Seed Services who provide locally sourced seeds in their plantings."

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust has invested \$6.31m into this program to date. Funding has been set aside in the NSW Government's Biodiversity Conservation Fund for private landholders to manage the newly protected sites in-perpetuity.



FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND BIODIVERSITY AND CARBON PILOT

In a first-of-its-kind initiative, seven landholders from the Murray-Riverina are protecting, enhancing and extending patches of important native vegetation while generating Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs) with restorative plantings and diversifying their on-farm incomes.

The Restoring Murray Woodlands Biodiversity and Carbon conservation tender secured 788 hectares of threatened native habitat, with an additional 141 hectares registered with the Australian Government's Clean Energy Regulator to extend habitat through environmental plantings projects under the ACCU Scheme.

The NSW Government will invest \$6.31 million into the conservation areas, ranging in size from 45 hectares to 272 hectares.

The tender occurred on lands important to the Wiradjuri, Wamba Wamba, Baraba Baraba and Yorta Yorta people.



Above: A diverse mix of plant species are being sown from locally-collected seeds to generate future carbon credits. Credit: Vince Bucello

Out in the field

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust's agreement-holders, partners and staff love to share the work of private land conservation across the state, as seen in our happy snaps of the past months. If you have a photo to share, email it to communications@bct.nsw.gov.au

Right: Delegates at the Australian Land Conservation Alliance Landholder Forum, held in August, at Albury, visited an agreement site to learn more about how biodiversity on the site is being managed. Credit: Holly Beer.

Below: Central West team member Sharon Cunial takes a selfie on Melanie and Steve Cooper's place, Myall Park, at Caragabal where Weddin Shire landowners came together for a Biodiversity on Farms day, run with Weddin Landcare as part of our Private Land Conservation Matters event series.



Below: Regional Conservation Officer Natalie Pearce and colleague Thomas Munro spoke to existing and prospective agreement-holders at AgQuip this August.



Above: Koala detection dog Max enthusiastically led his Canines For Wildlife trainers, Jack and Lynn, to fresh scat, confirming the presence of endangered koalas on the conservation agreement property Minimbah, near Nabiac.

Right: Regional conservation officer Cassie Douglas chatted with local conservation agreement holders Helen and Owen Huggins, and David and Val Sloane, from Saversake in the Riverina region.





Left: Students from Hay War Memorial High School marked Reconciliation Week on Country by visiting Riverina property Gayini Nimmie-Caira to learn about cultural land management and conservation with Nari Nari Tribal Council and Petaurus Education Group. Credit: Colin Elphick.

Below: Board member Fiona Simson hosted a panel at this month's Global Nature Positive Summit to discuss the role of landholders in protecting, connecting and restoring privately-held land. She was joined by conservation agreement-holders Will Hooke, and Nari Nari Tribal Council's Jamie Woods, as well as Accounting for Nature's Dr Amanda Hansson and our Board Chair, Niall Blair.



Above: Shoalhaven landholders Carolyn and Phill Bragg hosted an afternoon of tree planting as part of a farm dams workshop for Landcare NSW members and our conservation agreement-holders.



Right: Teams doing ecological monitoring work in western NSW this spring enjoyed an array of colourful wildflowers. They look beautiful and provide vital food and shelter for a variety of native birds, insects, and reptiles. Credit: Colleen O'Malley.



SHARE YOUR STORIES

We want to know your stories of private land conservation success






If you'd like to share a story of protecting species and habitat on your property, please email us, or send us a letter, with your story and any pictures you can share.

 communications@bct.nsw.gov.au
 Locked Bag 5022
 Parramatta NSW 2124

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Join an online community of private land conservationists and supporters

We share regular updates, success stories and notices of events and other opportunities on our social channels.

 @NSWBCT
 @NSW_BCT
 @BiodiversityConservationTrust
 @NSW_BCT
 Search for the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust on YouTube

Right: Ludo McFerran stands amid the natural attractions of the 40 hectares near Bermagui she's protecting with a conservation agreement. Credit: Jemma Lemmon.



Bermagui's ancient survivors saved for the future

Conservation agreement-holder Ludo McFerran's love of the land inspired her to save it for the future while honouring generations past. *Story by Jackie Yao.*

With bushfires and floods continuing to threaten the land and our communities, Ludo McFerran's story is testimony to her hard work and dedication to conservation.

Nestled at the end of Benny Gowings Road, where the Murrumbidgee River winds through the south of Bermagui lies a true 100-acre wood, or rather a 40-hectare sanctuary of natural beauty.

The river surrounds the block on both sides and is lined with huge river oak, river peppermint and bangalay trees and the occasional maiden's gum. The gullies are full of ferns and cabbage trees and the hills are blanketed with monkey gum, iron bark, coast grey box and stringy bark.

It's a block Ludo bought back in 1989, but a history of human intervention and neglect left Ludo with her fair share of challenges.

"About half the block was river flats and grazed slopes, the rest was forest, and between the block and Biamanga Mountain to the west is the Murrumbidgee Flora Reserve," Ludo said.

Features such as the ironbark cottage, cleared slopes and cleared river flats are evidence of the lasting impact of European settlers and Chinese gold prospectors' activities during the end of the 19th Century until the 1950s.

"The clearing and the effects of bushfires led to the flooding patterns that still dominate the Murrumbidgee River," Ludo said.

Faced with the challenges of flood damage and weeds, Ludo set about tree planting, fencing off the river, and initially reducing the blackberries to control the weeds.

"Over the years the floods bring down new weeds like hemlock, fireweed, stinking roger, cape ivy, moth vine and wild tobacco," she said.

"It seems that you are just on top of one when another one springs back up behind you. But it's a marvel to

see the bush repairing itself, with brush kurrajongs and pencil cedars springing up."

"Recently I've seen gang gang cockatoos back in the area, with a flock of over forty spending the summer gorging themselves."

The forest, a symbol of nature's resilience and Ludo's commitment to its restoration, is now permanently protected under an in-perpetuity conservation agreement with the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust.

"Luckily the block avoided being burned in the fires of 2020 and the Coolagolite fire in October 2023," Ludo said.

"But the future threats and my age made me think about long term protection, so I applied for a conservation agreement."

Ludo's conservation agreement was placed on her property's title late last year, and driven by her desire to protect the land for future generations, she is looking to continue her work in controlling weeds with the ongoing support of the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust.

Two Aboriginal sites on the property also serve as a reminder of the land's Aboriginal heritage and the duty we have, to ensure it is cared for into the future.

"In the house yard are two kurrajong trees, probably planted by the first Australians as they travelled between the sacred sites on Biamanga and the coast."

"I hope to also protect those trees with a heritage order. But they remind me that this was Aboriginal land which we have profoundly damaged."

"We have a duty to try and repair and to care for this land into the future beyond ourselves."

Tree species listed in our story

- Iron bark (*Eucalyptus paniculata*)
- Maiden's gum (*Eucalyptus globulus subsp. maidenii*)
- Monkey gum (*Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*)
- Pencil cedars (*Polyscias murrayi*)
- River oak (*Casuarina cunninghamiana*)
- River peppermint (*Eucalyptus elata*)
- Stringy bark (*Eucalyptus globoidea*)

VEGETATION RECOVERY AFTER A BUSHFIRE

A new guide for conservation agreement-holders has been published by the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust, authored by Australian National University Tuckwell Scholar Ella Wishart.

Ella worked alongside NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust ecologists to prepare the Vegetation Recovery After a Bushfire guide, which helps landholders in bushfire-affected landscapes identify the ways in which plant species regenerate and supports them to document vegetation recovery.

The guide can be downloaded from the Managing Your Land section of the resources hub on the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust website at bct.nsw.gov.au/resources.

Bird boon is flood's silver lining

A shared love of nature has sustained Gordon and Eirlys Farrant through fair weather and floods. *Story by Lynne Hughes.*

Gordon and Eirlys Farrant may come from two different sides of the world, but together they found their home on the Wakool River in the western Riverina district.

Gordon grew up on the family farm west of Deniliquin in NSW, and while traveling in Britain in the 1970s, he met local biology teacher, Eirlys. Their shared interest in wildlife drew them together and they are now the proud owners of *Fairview*, a 1018-hectare property outside Barham.

They moved to the property in 2000 and entered into a funded conservation agreement in 2019 to protect more than 5km of Wakool River frontage and 283 hectares of associated riverine and floodplain habitats.

Like many of our conservation agreement-holders, they have seen the natural habitats on their land subjected to climatic extremes.

The 2018-2019 drought was followed by three years of higher-than-average rain, resulting in flood levels reaching record-breaking 1955-56 flood heights.

In 2022, they received 701mm of rain: around 300mm above average for the area.

According to Gordon most of their conservation area was flooded from September 2022 to February 2023.

"We are keen bird watchers so we understand the positive outcomes that can come from flooding in this area," Gordon said.

"There was an increase in wildlife, including species such as the freckled duck, musk duck and several hatchlings of broad-shelled turtles. Also, the healthy growth of the native lignum became great habitat for other threatened birds."



Above: Gordon and Eirlys Farrant have witnessed the return of bird and other species following flood events impacting the conservation area they manage.

Gordon said, in total, the couple recorded 74 species of birds in 12 months. The numbers, he said, were much higher than normal and attributable to the rain and a strong breeding year.

"We were excited to observe two species, the diamond firetail finch and southern whiteface, which are both listed as vulnerable in NSW," he said.

It's not just the birds that are thriving. Gordon and Eirlys have also recorded an increase in the number of spotted marsh frogs and barking marsh frogs, plus two ground-dwelling species, the plains and eastern-sign bearing froglets.



Above: The Wakool River, along with its drought and flood cycles is a feature of Fairview's conservation area.

LOCAL STAFF HERE TO SUPPORT

Senior landholder support officer Nigel Jones knows Gordon and Eirlys agreement site well and has worked with them to manage the downside of years of water inundation, introduced weeds and feral pests.

"Obviously when conditions are good it's not just the native species you want that thrive," Nigel said.

"Our conservation management plans help to support landholders to undertake actions to stay on top of weeds and feral pests that take advantage of the habitat conditions post flooding," he said.

"The conservation agreement at *Fairview* is in-perpetuity so hopefully it gives committed landholders like Gordon and Eirlys a great peace of mind that their sanctuary will be well looked after for many generations to come".

Species survival at Firebird Bend

Finding a critically endangered species on their bushfire-ravaged property rekindled the energy of two committed conservationists. *Story by Candy Lawrence and Lynne Hughes.*

In 2007, when Candy Lawrence and her partner Bob moved to their remote, forested property in the Bungawalbin wetlands, they knew they had found the peace and privacy they had been looking for.

They spent the first few years at *Firebird Bend* battling weeds and pests and looking after areas of old growth timber that had not been logged.

Their conservation efforts were just starting to show good results when the 2019 Myall Creek bushfire swept through their property. In total the fire impacted 120,000 hectares of land and burned for six weeks on its path through the Bora Ridge area, south of Casino.

When Candy and Bob were finally able to take stock of their property and the surrounding community, they were devastated to see the impacts.

“The worst thing in conservation terms was the loss of both wildlife and the necessary habitat for populations to recover,” Candy said.

“For months afterwards, we’d be woken at night by the smash of yet another old growth tree toppling over and shattering any nesting hollows to smithereens,” she said.

“We lost so many huge trees, and we’re still losing them. Even as recently as last year we saw another two massive trees fall that had been hollowed out at the base by the fires.”

After years of fires, floods, clearing weeds, restoring two natural lagoons choked with salvinia and battling feral pests on their own, Candy and Bob decided to apply for a conservation agreement on 35 hectares to clear access tracks impassable due to lantana growth and get help with feral pest and weed control.

Species discovery sparks action

When a NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust ecologist visited to assess the suitability of the site, a small grove of critically endangered scrub turpentine (*Rhodamnia rubescens*) seedlings that had survived both myrtle rust and the bushfires was identified.

The discovery spurred Candy into action. She signed up to get her Bush



Top: Burning fallen tree a week post-bushfire. Photo by Candy Lawrence

Bottom: Candy and her partner Bob sought a conservation agreement for their northern NSW property to help fund bushfire restoration and protect their work for the long-term.

Regeneration certificate through TAFE and agreed to participate in the local Nature Conservation Council of NSW Large Forest Owls project. The conservation agreement followed and was placed on the property and noted on its title in 2021.

“We wouldn’t have been able to do most of our conservation work without the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust agreement. We wouldn’t have been able to afford it,” she said.

“It’s not only made the property safe for the future in environmental terms – it’s also made it so much more user-friendly for us as a beautiful home.

Conservation tenders and offers

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust’s conservation tenders and offers align to the NSW Government’s Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy.

New tenders in 2025

In 2025, the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust’s tenders will focus on local government areas of the Lower Hunter, seeking spotted gum and ironbark Threatened Ecological Communities and habitat of the regent honeyeater; regent honeyeater habitat across the state’s Central West; and, Mallee Woodland vegetation of the western Riverina.

For more information:

Coming tenders will be announced at bct.nsw.gov.au, and via our subscriber newsletter. To subscribe, visit bct.nsw.gov.au/subscribe.

Fixed Price Offer

The fixed price offer sets out NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust payments, per hectare, per year,

for eligible local government areas across the Western as well as the Central and Eastern areas of NSW.

Timeline:

The annual fixed price offer is open now.

For more information:

For full eligibility, the offer location and rates visit bct.nsw.gov.au/fixed-price-offers.



Our statewide team supports landholders to deliver real outcomes for our environment. Credit: Colin Elphick

Where we work

Our private land conservation efforts to protect our most at risk species and habitats happen across NSW, with regional staff offering localised support to help landholders meet their conservation management goals.

WESTERN

Cobar

3-5 Bradley St, Cobar 2835
PO Box 307, Cobar 2835

CENTRAL WEST

Bathurst

Level 2, 203-209 Russell St,
Bathurst 2795

Dubbo

48-52 Wingewarra St, Dubbo 2830
PO Box 2111, Dubbo 2830

Orange

105 Prince St, Orange 2800
Locked Bag 21, Orange 2800

NORTHERN INLAND

Armidale

92 Rusden Street, Armidale 2350
PO Box 1138, Armidale 2350

Gunnedah

c/o Local Land Services, 35-37
Abbott Street, Gunnedah 2380

Inverell

7023 Gwydir Highway, Inverell 2360
PO Box 299A, Inverell, 2360

Narrabri

Level 1, 100 Maitland Road,
Narrabri 2390

NORTH COAST

Coffs Harbour

Level 4/24 Moonee St,
Coffs Harbour 2450

Locked Bag 914,
Coffs Harbour, 2450

Lismore

1/26 Carrington St, Lismore 2480
PO Box 1121, Lismore 2480

Port Macquarie

Level 1/75-77 Clarence Street,
Port Macquarie 2444
PO Box 63, Port Macquarie 2444

SYDNEY HUNTER

Newcastle

Level 3, 6 Stewart Avenue,
Newcastle West 2302
Locked Bag 1002, Dangar 2309

Parramatta

Level 14, 4 Parramatta Square,
12 Darcy St, Parramatta 2150
Locked Bag 5022 Parramatta 2124

Taree

26 Muldoon St, Taree 2340
c/o Local Land Services,
PO Box 440, Taree, 2430

SOUTH EAST

Fitzroy Falls

Highlands Parks Office, Nowra Rd,
Fitzroy Falls 2577

Kiama

24 Terralong St, Kiama 2533

Narooma

Corner Graham and Burrawang Sts,
Narooma 2546
PO Box 282, Narooma 2546

Nowra

104 Flatrock Road,
West Nowra 2541
PO Box 707, Nowra 2541

Queanbeyan

Level 1/11 Farer Place,
Queanbeyan 2620
PO Box 733, Queanbeyan 2620

Wollongong

Level 3, 84 Crown St,
Wollongong 2500

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Albury

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Albury 2640
PO Box 1040, Albury 2640

Wagga Wagga

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