

# BUSH HERITAGE NEWS

Autumn 2012

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[www.bushheritage.org.au](http://www.bushheritage.org.au)



## The fight for Ethabuka and Cravens Peak

**What gives someone the strength to battle one of Bush Heritage's greatest natural emergencies? Lucy Ashley spoke with Karen Dermer about her experience when wildfire threatened your Cravens Peak and Ethabuka Reserves in western Queensland late last year.**

It wasn't long after Karen Dermer had put her three children, Asha (6), Clay (4) and Xavier (1) to bed before she heard the sounds of tiny feet coming back down the hallway. Asha and Clay just couldn't contain their excitement. There was a huge orange glow in the sky and they just had to tell Mum all about it.

Karen listened to her kids as they described what they'd seen from their bedroom window. Then she took a deep breath, and as calmly as she could, explained that the orange glow they could

see was the big fire out in the desert that their dad was helping to put out. Dad was very good at putting out fires and everything would be fine.

Tucking them back into bed, Karen stepped outside to take another look at the sky. Despite how close it looked at night, she knew from satellite imagery that this fire was far away. Still, it would be good to have Al and his fire-fighting crew back home safe and sound for even a few hours' rest before they were up and off again.

*Continued on page 2*

**“To see them working together – and supporting each other to help protect a place they so clearly love – was truly awe inspiring.”**

*Above: Lightning strikes started the blaze at Ethabuka Reserve  
Photograph by Al Dermer*



BUSH HERITAGE  
AUSTRALIA

*Our heart & soul*

It was a big decision for Al Dermer and his wife Karen to return to your Cravens Peak and Ethabuka Reserves last August as interim reserve managers after years away from the reserve.

No-one among the Bush Heritage staff has a more enduring connection to this wild and remote place than Al and Karen. As the properties' first reserve managers starting just after the reserves were purchased with your help in 2004, Karen and Al put several years of back-breaking work into the long, slow process of nurturing this formerly barren and dusty land, full of skeletons of trees and cattle, back to glorious life.

Al and Karen have so much of themselves invested here. Their eldest child Asha took her first baby steps in the red sand around the Ethabuka homestead. And during the fires, Zavier did the same at Cravens Peak.

Thanks to your fantastic support, Al and Karen have seen an almost wondrous transformation in the land they left a few years ago, which back then was only just showing the first signs of recovery. Several good seasons of rain have caused wetlands, water courses and creeks to fill, and for abundant bird life to return. The desert dunes are carpeted in spinifex and healthy coolabahs, creating safe havens for desert-dwelling small mammals, reptiles and birds.

Though drought will come again to this land, as it always does in the Simpson Desert, Al and Karen know that it will now be more resilient.

So when all we've achieved together at Cravens Peak and Ethabuka came under threat late last year from wildfire, Al and Karen dedicated their waking hours to fighting the fires, as well as ensuring the safety of their family and fellow firefighters.

For nearly eight long weeks, Al worked with a team of firefighters, sometimes including

as many as 32 people, comprising Bush Heritage staff from eastern Queensland and South Australia, neighbours, local volunteers and members of several Queensland government departments to control the fires and stop them spreading to neighbouring land.

Supporting the fire-fighting team at 'home base' was Karen, balancing her role as parent with countless other tasks. In the desert, she says, in situations like this you just get on and do whatever you have to do.

In any one day this meant a busy schedule of home-schooling Asha, looking after her two boys, filling the vital role of community liaison officer for the local fire-fighting efforts, and making sure that their food supplies held up for as long as needed.

"We ate a lot of potatoes, rice and cabbage," she says. "Camel curry became our night-time staple."

One of the Bush Heritage staff on the front line with Al Dermer was Mo Pieterse. Mo is our new Field Officer at Cravens Peak and Ethabuka, and you could say that his first month in his job was a real baptism of fire.

He says watching Karen and Al juggle so many vital roles so well throughout the emergency, from fighting fires one day to piggy-backing their squealing kids around the yard at Cravens Peak the next, was really something special.

"To see them working together – and supporting each other to help protect a place they so clearly love – was truly awe inspiring."

*Ethabuka and Cravens Peak reserves were acquired in 2004 and 2005 with the assistance of the Australian government's National Reserve System program and The Nature Conservancy. Bush Heritage also thanks Diversicon Environmental Foundation for assistance in the purchase of Ethabuka, and the Estate of Josephine Gay Bell for assistance in the purchase of Cravens Peak.*



*Top Right: Ethabuka homestead was Karen and her family's home for the duration of the fires in 2011*

*Bottom: The aftermath of the fires at Ethabuka*

*Bottom Left: Al and Karen Dermer with their children (from left to right) Asha, Clay and Zavier*

*All photographs by Al Dermer*



### **Thank you from Al and Karen**

Approximately 27 per cent of Ethabuka and Cravens Peak reserves burnt during the fires, but thanks to the work you've helped Al and other reserve managers do, the news is not all bad. Much of the land was burnt in patches, allowing animals places to seek refuge. New life has begun to emerge after Summer rains, preventing erosion and providing animals with shelter and food. We'll update you when the rain stops and the land dries out, allowing ecologists to access the reserves. Thanks to your ongoing support, their assessments will help to improve and refine our fire management plans. To continue your support for this important work across all our reserves, go to: [www.bushheritage.org.au/donate](http://www.bushheritage.org.au/donate)



## Scottsdale's peppery new resident

**The endangered aromatic peppergrass has a new lease on life at its new home in Scottsdale Reserve thanks to Rainer Rehwinkel and you, Bush Heritage's supporters. Kelly Irving reports.**

*Above: The aromatic peppergrass*

*Photograph by Stuart Cohen*

In May 2004, Rainer Rehwinkel found something special in his backyard. "At first I thought it was a daisy, so I waited for it to flower, then I realised it was a peppergrass – that's when I became really excited," he says. The endangered aromatic peppergrass (*Lepidium hyssopifolium*) is currently known only to exist in one other location in New South Wales. Rainer had accidentally unearthed it while establishing a garden at his new property in Bungendore.

As Senior Threatened Species Officer at NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, Rainer is one of very few people who could have recognised the native, which is a member of the cabbage family and is easily mistaken for a weed. He's travelled to over 3000 sites looking for endangered grassland and woodland sites in South-east New South Wales. Often, it's taken him days just to get to one site. "That's why it's so odd this plant came up in my backyard!" He laughs.

Rainer knew the peppergrass needed a new, more secure home. "If we ever decide to sell the house then there's no guarantee that the next owner will look after the plants." Feeling responsible for its survival, he set to work on several translocation projects to try and increase the plant's population. In July 2011, he joined forces with Bush Heritage and the peppergrass got a new address at Scottsdale Reserve.

Our volunteers played an instrumental role in the move. They planted seeds at four sites in the reserve, including three around the shearing shed in disturbed ground similar to where the peppergrass emerged in Rainer's garden. So far, of all the translocations undertaken in 2011, the peppergrass has only emerged at Scottsdale.

"I think it's fantastic that we're looking after this plant," says Enid Bentley, who along with her husband Harry spends a morning at Scottsdale every fortnight. "I'll be very

interested to see how it goes in the long term and whether it seeds."

**"So far, of all the translocations undertaken in 2011, the peppergrass has only emerged at Scottsdale."**

Scottsdale Reserve holds a very special place in the heart of many Bush Heritage supporters, including Enid, who describes herself as "one of the gardening brigade" that care for the peppergrass, along with other plants in Scottsdale's native plant nursery. A high-profile site in the Kosciuszko to Coast project area, its transformation since 2006 and its continuous maintenance is down to the care of our conservation partners, donors and volunteers. Thanks to you, the future looks bright for the peppergrass.

Yet our work doesn't stop there. Rainer says it's crucial we learn to understand what is threatening this species. "Just because it's in the reserve doesn't mean our work is done," he says. "There are lots of questions that need answers. For example, as its name suggests, the peppergrass's leaves have a peppery taste, so does this make it particularly palatable, and thus vulnerable to grazing animals?"

"Bush Heritage offers us a great opportunity to find out more," says Rainer. "We have a responsibility to try as hard as we can."

*Scottsdale Reserve was acquired in 2006 with the assistance of David Rickards, in memory of Helen Rickards, the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation and the Australian Government's National Reserve System program.*

# Around your reserves in 90 days

Your support makes a difference in so many ways. We take a look into the successes at your reserves around Australia – achievements all made possible thanks to you.

## Sunny at Beringa

What does it take to spot a rare orchid out the window of a four-wheel-drive? A keen eye and, as Keith Smith from Nindethana Seeds put it, “a self-confessed orchid nut”. Keith was with a group of Greening Australia ecologists studying vegetation communities at Beringa Reserve as part of his work with our Gondwana Link project. “I saw a bright yellow colour through the window and yelled out to the driver to stop,” says Keith. “I’d seen the sun orchid at the only other location it is known to exist, so I knew what to look out for. It also passed the ‘smell test’ – the sun orchid has a unique and possibly unpleasant, odour.” Keith reserved his excitement until the Department of Environment and Conservation later confirmed it was the rare sun orchid (*Thelymitra sp. Ongerup*). The orchid was one of 71 orchids later surveyed at Beringa, the largest population now known to exist.



The endangered sun orchid

Photograph by Keith Smith



## Here's what you told us!

Last year we asked you to tell us about yourself by filling out our supporter survey.

4,000 people returned the survey and many of you also included a donation – thank you!

Here's a quick snapshot of what you told us. For every 100 people who responded, 35 support Bush Heritage particularly for our method of acquiring and protecting land. Half of you read every word of our newsletters. Seventy percent of you are aged 55 and over, and half are retired. Forty-six per cent listen to ABC radio and 65% have a degree or post-graduate degree.

Nearly 300 of you told us something about your love for the Australian bush

– we had so much fun reading your stories. Many of you shared special childhood memories of the bush, or stories about the moment you first chose to support Bush Heritage. Thanks for sharing your memories.

“When I close my eyes, my ‘happy’ place is the memory of sunlight squinting through the top of gum trees”

Lydia, Millgrove, Vic



## Fire and flooding rain

These images were taken two weeks apart by Regional Manager Al Dermer at Cravens Peak Reserve in November last year. The rains were a welcome relief from the dry, hot conditions that made Al and his team's fire-fighting efforts so challenging (as well as a source of entertainment for his three children who loved the puddles!) For more on the Cravens Peak fires, see pages 1 and 2.



13 November 2011 at Cravens Peak



20 November 2011 at Cravens Peak

*Photograph by Al Dermer*



## Loving Liffey

Central Tasmania's Liffey valley was the destination for a group of volunteers armed with weed spray, rubber gloves and considerable patience in late 2011. Thousands of blackberry and foxglove plants were sprayed or removed from Liffey River Reserve, one of the very first places that supporters like you helped to protect, when Bush Heritage began in 1991. Field Officer Jeroen van Veen, who joined the volunteers at Liffey, says their determination is paying off. "Every year our volunteers go out there and hit the foxgloves hard. They do come back from the seed, but every year we pull out fewer and fewer – eventually we'll eradicate it altogether by depleting the seedbank." Foxgloves compete with native species such as small herbs and grasses, which in turn provide food for native animals like Tasmanian pademelons, which make their home at Liffey. Weed management is an ongoing challenge on all your reserves, but, thanks to your support and the determination of our passionate volunteers, we're giving Australia's native species a brighter future.



The Liffey River flows along the boundary of your Liffey River Reserve

*Photograph by Peter Morris*

Bush Heritage anchor regions



Bush Heritage partnerships



Bush Heritage reserves



# Eurardy through a photographer's lens

When photographer and loyal supporter Geoff Spanner looked through his camera lens in 2011, he saw Eurardy Reserve in all its glory, thanks in large part to five years of care by Bush Heritage and its supporters.

When Geoff Spanner first took his camera into the Eurardy Reserve bushland in Spring 2011 and witnessed the flourishing wildflowers, he was thoroughly impressed.

"I don't want to go over the top," he says, "but the flowering was just spectacular. It's part of Australia's only global biodiversity hotspot. The colours were incredible and it was hard to know where to look."

Geoff, a professional nature photographer, initially arrived at Eurardy to assist reserve managers with their work, but was soon also drawn to capturing the beauty of the land through the lens of his camera. Geoff likens the colourful spectacle to a coral reef on land. The swathes of brilliant red claw-flowers and grevilleas; the vivid yellow everlastings blanketing the earth; the pinks, the purples, the whites and blues; all make Eurardy a world-renowned floral destination.

"You get these incredible white blooms that are so much like coral it's not funny," says Geoff. "Others, feather flowers, are these amazing reds with tiny tentacles all over them. It just keeps going on and on."

Today, on his second stint at Eurardy, it's early morning and the light, Geoff explains, has that "soft glow only deserts have". With camera at the ready, he drives in the magnificent semi-arid country hunting the right shot.

"I want to show the tiny little intricacies of the flowers, but not take them out and isolate them," says Geoff. "I want to show that this is part of a much larger landscape."

Eurardy Reserve is located near Geraldton, in Western Australia's South-West Botanical Province, one of 34 areas acknowledged worldwide as a 'biodiversity hotspot'. It protects over 500 plant species as well as creatures such as the hairy-footed dunnart, the spinifex hopping-mouse and the vulnerable malleefowl.

Once a sheep station and tourist operation, Eurardy was under threat back in 2005

when its former owners put the property up for sale. Bush Heritage supporters banded together to buy it and in 2006 it became a Bush Heritage reserve. The improved health of the reserve today is testament to the dedication of reserve managers, volunteers and to your ongoing contributions.

According to Bush Heritage's first five-year Ecological Outcomes Monitoring Report, supporters have helped make significant improvements to the property. The activity of insect-eating and nectar-feeding birds has increased significantly across the reserve. There's increased native ground

**"I want to show the tiny little intricacies of the flowers... and I want to show that this is part of a much larger landscape."**

cover and new populations of the threatened spider orchids. And, importantly, feral goat and rabbit populations are down.

Out in the sand dune country, with the midmorning sun starting to burn and the dust beginning to stir, Geoff agrees wholeheartedly with this assessment.

"I've been visiting wild places for a long time," he says. "In places like South America, where I travelled for two years, pretty much all the wilderness is under threat. But Eurardy is just off the scale. It's very impressive."

With a full memory card of images, Geoff heads back to the property's homestead to beat the rising heat.

"It gladdens my heart day after day to see and experience this beauty," he confesses.

"It really is a privilege to be here."

*Eurardy Reserve was acquired in 2005 with the assistance of The Nature Conservancy.*



See the beauty of Eurardy's wildflowers through the lens of Geoff's camera at [www.bushheritage.org.au](http://www.bushheritage.org.au)

*From top to bottom: Photographer Geoff Spanner; Wildflowers of Eurardy; copper cups; kangaroo paw*

*All photographs by: Geoff Spanner / [www.gswildshots.com](http://www.gswildshots.com)*

## In memoriam

Colleen Boyd donated in memory of **Fay Christison**. Annette Ford made a donation in fond memory of **Stacia**. Bridgid McLean donated in memory of bush lover **Beth McLean** 1913–2011. Jenny Stokes donated in memory of **Vanessa Gough** and also in memory of **Lindsay Morton**.

## In celebration

Jean Clark donated to celebrate her grand-daughter **Bronwyn Clark's** 13th birthday. **Leonie Voorhoeve** donated in celebration of her 79th birthday. Roslyn Brooks donated in celebration of her sister Christine Mason. Cornelia Findlay donated to celebrate Karen and Chris's 50th birthdays. Stuart Brooks gave a Christmas donation for his daughter **Roslyn**. Liz Balogh and friends donated in memory of **John Reid**, a friend of Bush Heritage.



Dry sclerophyll forest at your Scottsdale Reserve

## Sowing seeds at Scottsdale

When Sue Connelly first visited Scottsdale in 2006 it was Bush Heritage's newest reserve. Six years later, Sue is one of a team of essential volunteers nursing the reserve back to health and ensuring its long-term protection.

It is a rare day that volunteer Sue Connelly doesn't tend the seed gardens at Scottsdale. She was "almost apologetic", recalls Regional Reserve Manager Peter Saunders, about taking a few days off over Christmas. "I think I did drop in there Christmas Day," says Sue. "If I haven't gone to Scottsdale, I feel I haven't done my thing for the day."

Scottsdale, a 1328-hectare reserve protected thanks to passionate Bush Heritage supporters in 2006, features colourful heathlands, box gum woodlands and dramatic, rocky hillsides, but Sue's favourite place by far is the seed gardens near the shearing shed at the entrance to the property.

The gardens represent a variety of plants and trees found on Scottsdale and the surrounding land and in many ways, also represent the future of the reserve. The rarer and difficult-to-collect plants are brought into an area where staff and volunteers can watch over them closely to collect the seeds. The plants are then grown in the nursery, ready for the long-term restoration of Scottsdale.

Sue's favourites are there – the rare groundcover *Lotus australis*, a pinky-white pea flower, and the dusky scurf-pea. She also loves kangaroo grass. "When

the first settlers came it grew up to their horses' bellies. We grow it here partly because it competes with weeds once it's well established."

Sue collects seeds, tends to seedlings in the nursery, chooses rare or declining species for planting and keeps records of progress in the gardens. She works alongside a huge army of volunteers who work in teams. Each team focuses on a different task and the skills of one team complement the skills of the others. "Their work helps your work," says Sue. "Without people controlling rabbits or controlling weeds, for example, we wouldn't have plants in the garden."

Sue's connection to Scottsdale goes back to 2006 when, as a neighbouring landholder, she was invited to celebrate the achievement of thousands of supporters, who had assisted with the purchase of the property as a Bush Heritage reserve. At the time, Sue had just bought her own property, five kilometres away, where she was working tirelessly to remove weeds.

In 2007 Sue's property was surveyed as a part of Kosciuszko to Coast, a community partnership established to create connections between remnant woodlands and grasslands in the region. "They showed me I had rare plants and birds, like the

hooded robin, and that changed the whole box and dice. I realised my property was a living, breathing thing."

In Scottsdale's early days, Sue took part in planting days, and gave talks about plants she was growing on her own property. When Sue sold her land in 2010, Peter Saunders asked if she'd like to keep on growing plants for Scottsdale and she hasn't looked back since.

"It's taking a long time to look really beautiful, and I don't know whether I'll be around to see a huge difference, but it will happen in time. Future generations will be able to enjoy what Scottsdale promises to become. The birds, the native flowers, even the grasses...I've seen native grass on the back of a hillside turn a stunning lime green just as the sun is setting. Imagine not being able to see that."



### Thanks to you and our volunteers!

In Autumn 2011, thousands of Bush Heritage supporters like you donated to our 'War on Weeds' campaign. Thanks to you, while Sue and her team were tending to the native seedlings at Scottsdale, other volunteer teams had the equipment they need to battle weeds like sweet briar and serrated tussock in a recent working bee on Scottsdale. Bush Heritage also thanks these passionate workers – volunteers like Sue and her team are vital to protecting Bush Heritage reserves.

# FROM THE CEO



“I’m proud to have joined a wonderful group of extraordinary Australians who are making a real difference to the protection of our precious bush.”

Photograph by Peter Morris

In my first few months as CEO of this wonderful organisation called Bush Heritage, I was asked what the word ‘bush’ meant to me. I had to think for a moment – where should I start? ‘Bush’ is a wonderfully Australian term. It conjures up all sorts of images: wild, beautiful landscapes; images of the outback and of tall forests, wet tropics and savannah woodlands; and

places that are somehow ‘out there’, beyond the metropolitan boundaries.

As a child I was drawn to the wild corners of my parents’ farm. We lived in New South Wales’ Southern Riverina region, which was cleared for agriculture decades ago, but there were still stands of grey box and bullock trees in hidden-away corners of the property. That’s where I could be found playing as a young boy – the bush, where the wild things were. Those days looking for thornbills and climbing trees in search of crows’ nests were the beginnings of a strong connection with the bush, one I know you share.

For me, Bush Heritage provides a wonderful opportunity to contribute to saving those precious places that remain intact but unprotected. I’m proud to have joined a wonderful group of extraordinary Australians who are making a real difference to the protection of our precious bush.

It’s quickly become clear to me that Bush Heritage’s supporters are our biggest strength – people like you, who stand resolutely to protect that bush. You come from all kinds of backgrounds. Some, like Sue Connelly, whose story you can read on page 7, spend time nurturing the land and being nurtured by it. Others, like a

supporter I met in a Sydney high-rise office building, are less geographically connected to the bush, but equally inspired by it and equally passionate about protecting it. It is remarkable the difference people like these, and people like you, are making.

The challenge of protecting our bush has also quickly become very real. In my very first week I spoke on the phone to tired reserve managers who had battled fires on your Bon Bon Reserve. I’m aware from my time as a national park ranger in Kakadu and from my work with Parks Victoria, that fire is an incredibly powerful force in shaping the ecology of our bush. So I felt thankful our team was so well prepared to fight the fires safely and effectively. It was a powerful reminder that opportunity is always accompanied by great responsibility, and of the reason that your ongoing support is so vital.

Thank you for the kind welcome so many of you have given me. I look forward to leading our shared vision into the future: a future where the Australian bush and its wildlife are protected forever.

Gerard O’Neill, CEO

Bush Heritage is a not-for-profit organisation, funded entirely by donations from generous supporters like you. If you’d like to make a contribution to our work, please fill in the form and send it to us at the address below. Thank you.

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