

BUSH HERITAGE NEWS

Winter 2012

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www.bushheritage.org.au

Your wombat refuge

The woodlands and saltlands of your Bon Bon Station Reserve are home to the southern hairy-nosed wombat. These endearing creatures have presented reserve manager Glen Norris with a tricky challenge.

Lucy Ashley reports



Glen Norris has worked as reserve manager in charge of protecting over 200,000 hectares of sprawling desert, saltlands, wetlands and woodlands at Bon Bon Station Reserve in South Australia for two-and-a-half years.

Right now, he has a tricky situation on his hands.

Glen has to remove a large population of highly destructive feral rabbits from underground warren systems that they're currently sharing with a population of protected southern hairy-nosed wombats

– and he has to work out how to do this without harming the wombats, or their precious burrows.

The ultimate digging machine

Smaller than their cousin the common wombat, southern hairy-nosed wombats have soft, fluffy fur (even on their nose), long sticky-up ears and narrow snouts. With squat, strongly built bodies and short legs ending in large paws with strong blade-like claws, they are the ultimate marsupial digging machine.

“It’s important we reduce rabbit populations, and soon,” says Glen. “Thanks to lots of help from Bush Heritage supporters since we bought Bon Bon and de-stocked it, much of the land is now in great condition.”

Photograph by Steve Parish



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Our heart & soul

How you've help created a refuge for Bon Bon's wombats and other native animals

- Purchase of the former sheep station in 2008
- Removal of sheep and repair of boundary fences to keep neighbour's stock out
- Control of recent summer bushfires
- Soil conservation works to reduce erosion
- Ongoing management of invasive weeds like buffel grass
- Control programs for rabbits, foxes and feral cats.

Night, camera, action!

To see night-time footage of the wombats around their burrows, captured by Glen's hidden sensor camera, visit www.bushheritage.org.au/your-wombat-refuge.html.

You can also help Glen to keep the wombats safe while fighting feral rabbits by visiting www.bushheritage.org.au/donate.



What Glen found at Bon Bon

1,781

Number of rabbit warrens

220

Number of wombat burrows

200 million

Estimated number of feral rabbits threatening native species in Australia

Their burrows range in size from two metres to more extensive systems of up to 30 metres. They excavate them using the sharp, flattened digging claws on their front legs, and push soil and rocks out with their back legs. Once they've made some headway, they roll onto their sides and start enlarging the roof and walls.

Up to ten wombats may share a refuge, but will move between burrows and even warrens. Males can be territorial, resorting to nasty biting of the ears, flank and rump when they want to make a point.

"It's hard to say whether the wombats or the rabbits were here first," says Glen. "But you have to assume it was the wombats because they're a local native species and have probably been here for many, many years. Whereas rabbits are introduced pests."

Since their release into the wild by early European settlers, rabbits have been the scourge of the Australian bush, consuming vast amounts of native seeds and grasses, and competing with wombats and other native animals for vital nutrition. Their grazing has caused widespread damage to the land – resulting in soil erosion and enabling the spread of noxious weeds.

With your support we'll be able to face the challenges ahead

"Our wombats live in a particularly special area: a vast 26,000-hectare ephemeral drainage system called 'the labyrinth' that feeds into a series of freshwater and saltwater lakes and claypans. It's really pretty country, virtually weed-free and it attracts some amazing native woodland birds, including South Australia's only endemic species, the chestnut-breasted whiteface. We also expect to find these wombats in the rocky hills in the south west of the property, which is the next area to be surveyed."

Bon Bon is pretty much 'wombat heaven', or it will be once we deal with the rabbits.

"On Boolcoomatta Reserve, 500 kilometres from here, we've had great success reducing rabbit numbers by destroying their warrens and leaving them with nowhere to live and breed," says Glen.

"This will have a fantastic flow-on effect for native plant regeneration, and increases in the numbers and diversity of native animals the reserve protects."

"Here, because our wombats rely on their burrows as a refuge from heat, we'll have to proceed really carefully. We've just finished mapping the 'labyrinth' area, so we know exactly where the rabbits are in that part of the reserve, where the wombats are and where their burrows actually overlap. Over the next two years we'll map the other areas these animals live on Bon Bon."

So while Bon Bon's wombats keep digging away, Glen will be doing the same – working on the best way of ensuring that these very special native residents remain safe (and rabbit-free) for many generations to come in their 'wombat heaven'.

Bon Bon Station Reserve was acquired in 2008 with the assistance of the Australian Government's National Reserve System program, the Government of South Australia and the Besen Family Foundation. Thanks also to The Native Vegetation Council for support of vital conservation work on Bon Bon this year.

Thanks for a special year at Carnarvon

When the McLean family moved to your Carnarvon Station Reserve twelve months ago, they discovered a very special place – one that thrives thanks to help from Bush Heritage supporters like you.

When Bush Heritage reserve field officer, Mat McLean first drove onto Carnarvon Station he fell in love. “It’s wild country,” he says. “There are healthy bluegrass plains rising up to sandstone escarpments and all you can hear is the breeze, the birds and the noise that you make yourself – it’s awesome.”

Mat moved to Carnarvon, Central Queensland, last June, with his young family – wife, Jo, and daughters, Annie (4) and Lucinda (six). They were amazed by the vast ranges and rocky escarpments, which stretch over 60,000 hectares.

“I love the cold, frosty winter mornings, which turn into beautiful crystal blue days,” says Mat. “Then the moisture and warmth of summer makes everything bloom!”

A long way home

Yet the family have never lived anywhere so remote. “We haven’t had a mailman for eighteen months, and it’s a nine-hour round trip to get a loaf of bread,” Mat says. The area’s also had three exceptionally wet years, which makes managing and living on the reserve challenging.

Jo, however, takes the isolation in her stride and has sometimes gone ten weeks without leaving the reserve. “I think it’s exciting!” she says. “You really get to appreciate the remoteness and the beautiful surrounds.”

Her favourite pastime is an early-morning jog or walk with the children. “We’ve seen emus out in the flats with their young; red-necked wallabies lolling on the grass; and we have a resident sugar glider in one of the trees close by.”

Protecting Carnarvon’s future

Though the girls are too young to help Dad out on the reserve, they are already learning the importance of its long-term conservation. “They can identify most weed and grass species and will tell you about the impact feral animals have on the bush,” says Mat. “They *get* conservation – why burning’s important and what we, together with all our supporters, are working hard at Bush Heritage to achieve.”

For Mat, it’s been a privilege to share such a wonderful experience with his family. “Being together, watching the sun go down over the grass – this year will stay with us for the rest of our lives,” he says.



How you’ve helped protect Carnarvon

Thousands of Bush Heritage supporters generously responded to our call in 2011 to help reserve managers like Mat meet the challenge posed by excessive rainfall and floods, bushfires and a cyclone. At Yourka Reserve, 800km to the north of Carnarvon, you helped to repair roads after Cyclone Yasi hit the reserve in 2011.

This year’s heavy rains at Carnarvon, however, have continued to create problems and we’re still waiting for dry weather so we can repair the main access road. Bush Heritage volunteers have been unable to get onto and around the reserve. “So they can’t help us with vital work like our weed control program,” says Mat.

“The damage done to the roads also means we can’t access key parts of the reserve to carry out early-season control burning.” And since there is so much vegetation on the ground after three wet years, fire management is even more important than usual. But thanks to your support, Mat has done the work that will help safeguard Carnarvon against destructive wildfire by burning those areas of the reserve from a helicopter.

“Having the support to do this is essential to the survival of this gorgeous place,” Mat says.

Jo’s top spots on Carnarvon

Carnarvon has been a special place of discovery for the McLean’s. Here are Jo’s favourite spots on the reserve.



The verandah lookout

“You can see the open flats, savannah woodlands and the Brigalow. It’s

perfect at sunset when you’re listening to the dingos calling out.”



Mt Lambert

“This landmark changes so much with the seasons. It looks amazing when the cold weather frost has just arrived.”



The Channin Creek

“We’ve spent countless hours swimming, rock-hopping and discovering this creek, which runs

the length of the property. Previous reserve managers and their families knew it as a dry creek bed, but we’ve seen it flowing year-round.”

See the McLean family’s bush story told in images at www.bushheritage.org.au/a-year-at-carnarvon.html

Carnarvon Station Reserve was acquired in 2001 with the assistance of the Australian Government’s National Reserve System Programme.

Around your reserves in 90 days

Your support makes a difference in so many ways, every day, all across Australia. Here are just a few of the conservation wins you've been a part of recently.

A new home for Luke

Luke Bayley, your new regional reserve manager at Charles Darwin Reserve, has arrived with his swag and guitar (and not much else!) ready for the task of caring for the land and its animal residents on your behalf. He's kept busy getting to know the reserve and its neighbours, and has received a warm welcome from the West Australian community of Bush Heritage contractors, volunteers and locals who support his work. "The volunteers even leave me frozen dinners!" says Luke. "They're a very giving and inspirational mob. I've loved sharing time with them around the campfire and the salt lakes at sunset." Luke will return to Victoria in June to help his wife Fiona pack their furniture and belongings, and make the long drive west to join Luke at their new home with children Banjo (4) and Tanami (8).



Luke with volunteer Bob Ruscoe

Photograph by Matt Appleby



New life for Gondwana Link

In 2008, this paddock in Western Australia's Fitzstirling region was little more than that – a paddock. Now, after our Gondwana Link partner Greening Australia revegetated the area in 2008, it looks more like a tempting place for a Carnaby's cockatoo to rest a while. Bush Heritage Ecologist, Angela Sanders, will be visiting the area in Spring to monitor bird species such as parrots, which she hopes will be feeding among the three-year-old yate trees. The project has increased deep-rooted perennial native vegetation which helps to stabilise the movement and distribution of water and reduces erosion.



Photographs by Greening Australia

- Bush Heritage anchor regions ■
- Bush Heritage partnerships ■
- Bush Heritage reserves ●



The fish doctor's plan

The challenge continues for Bush Heritage's "fish-doctor" at your Edgbaston Reserve, where Dr Adam Kerezszy has been working since 2009, in an effort to save the world's most endangered freshwater fish, the red-finned blue-eye. Bush Heritage recently released a report detailing three years of science-based trials, which confirm our next step to save these little fish: a now tried and tested method of releasing the chemical Rotenone to the spring. "It's taken a long time," says Adam. "But now we're confident this is the best way to remove the gambusia without threatening all the other inhabitants of the pools, many of which are endangered themselves."



Photograph by Alison Wheeler

Well-spotted... or striped

Bush Heritage CEO, Gerard O'Neill, and Regional Manager, Steve Heggie, spotted this bandy-bandy snake while on their way to your Carnarvon Station Reserve in Queensland in April. Bandy bandies are rarely seen since they are nocturnal, and generally live underground where they exclusively eat blind snakes. They assume this pose and shuffle from side-to-side to warn off predators.



Photograph by Gerard O'Neill



Photograph by Peter Morris

The FitzStirling section of Gondwana Link traverses the 70-kilometre gap between the Stirling Range and Fitzgerald River National Parks.

Her bush memory

Genevieve Simpson remembers her mother as a woman who loved the bush. Now, a gift in her mother's memory reminds us what a difference Bush Heritage supporters can make.

Judy Wheeler treasured her memories of growing up on the Central Coast of New South Wales. Her family had a huge vegetable garden fringed by wattles and blackbutts, where she played on a swing tied to a wild apple tree. She loved the Hawkesbury River with its huge expanse of water, islands shrouded in mist and small inlets. But now much of the local bushland she explored with family and friends has been destroyed.

That's why when Judy passed away in 2010 the Simpson family decided to donate a significant sum to Bush Heritage as an In Memoriam gift. "She always talked about wanting to preserve a parcel of land in the area," says Judy's daughter Genevieve. "Every time she went back to the Central Coast there was less and less of what she had once loved about the place."

A decision to protect the bush

Judy's family decided to donate to Bush Heritage because we do exactly what Judy had always dreamed of – buying important pieces of land and keeping them in their natural state. "Mum wanted to make sure future generations had the same opportunities to enjoy what she had enjoyed," says Genevieve.

Judy's husband and two children decided on an open donation, giving Bush Heritage the ability to spend the money where it is most needed. On top of this, their untied donation was matched in full by the David Thomas Challenge, a program set up to encourage private environmental philanthropy in Australia.

Genevieve sees her family's gift as a continuation of Judy's work. "I grew up sitting on the floor of committee rooms listening to my mum talk. She was involved in heritage, the arts, local council and school committees – she was all about contributing to the community and she never sought to be paid for it. That's why we didn't hesitate in making quite a large contribution."

To see the kind of projects the Simpsons' donation might fund, Genevieve visited the reserves that make up Western Australia's Gondwana Link nature corridor.

The highlight was the view from an old farmhouse on Beringa Reserve. "It was great seeing land that had previously been paddocks now rehabilitated with vegetation, and behind that, seeing bushland fenced off and protected.

You could clearly see the different work that Bush Heritage was doing rolling down the landscape."

Genevieve sees conservation as the perfect way to honour her mother. "You know the land has been purchased and will be kept in this state for perpetuity. It's recognising lasting memory. I know the family made this decision, but I see the gift as a bequest because this is what Mum always wanted."

"Mum wanted to make sure future generations had the same opportunities to enjoy what she had enjoyed."

A lasting memory of Judy

Bush Heritage thanks the Simpson family for their generous gift to the Australian bush and to future generations. If you would like to honour a family member or friend by protecting the kinds of places they loved in their lifetime, visit www.bushheritage.org.au or call Carolyn Williams on **(03) 8610 9157**.

Thankyou

In celebration

Peggy McKinlay donated in celebration of the birth of her grandson, **William Zingel**. We also received donations in celebration of **Diana Smith's** 70th birthday! Friends of **Robert Mills** donated in celebration of his wedding. **Bruce Kennett** and friends **David and Jenny Turner** celebrated Bruce's 80th birthday with a gift to Bush Heritage.

In memoriam

Friends and family donated in memory of **Claire Roberts**, long-time supporter of Bush Heritage. Carol Simondson donated in memory of her son, **David**. Friends and family donated in memory of **Shirley Simmonds**. Margaret Allen remembered **Colin Vearmonth** with a gift to Bush Heritage.



1. Dusky hopping-mouse

Listed as vulnerable in South Australia, the dusky hopping-mouse is about twice the size of a common house mouse and is characterised by its long feet, a long tufted tail and big ears.



2. Stripe-faced dunnart

These furry little Australian marsupials have a dark stripe between their ears on top of the snout, which stretches to their nose. Their sharp-pointed molars indicate they have a different diet from rodents.



3. Bolam's mouse

This nocturnal rodent has olive-brown fur and a white belly and inhabits the arid and semi-arid areas of Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales. It is distinguishable from the common house mouse by its larger ears, longer back feet and docile nature.

All photographs by Peter Morris

Easter on Boolcoomatta

A small army of specialist volunteers rose early at your Boolcoomatta Reserve this April, to discover which creatures had wandered its dunes and saltbush plains through the night

As children across the country opened their Easter eggs earlier this year, a team of dedicated Bush Heritage scientists, partners and volunteers were already hard at work on Boolcoomatta Reserve in South Australia. Up since the crack of dawn, they were busy trapping, counting and recording the creatures that had traversed the open grasslands and desert outcrops overnight.

This was the first major survey to have been conducted on the reserve in five years. "The enthusiasm was tremendous," says Graham Medlin, the survey coordinator. "You could hardly hear yourself at night in the shearer's mess, with everyone talking excitedly about the day's events."

Corellas call at breakfast

The team, comprised of 33 adults, three teenagers and one child, rose in silence with the sun each morning for four days. They listened to the occasional raucous squawks of the corellas as they travelled in 4WDs to ten different capture sites set around the 63,000-hectare reserve.

"Boolcoomatta is such a delightful place," says Graham, an Honorary Research Associate and sub-fossil expert at the South Australian Museum, and member of the South Australian Field Naturalists Society. "It's one of the best-managed reserves in which I've carried out research."

Prior to Bush Heritage purchasing the property in 2006, Boolcoomatta was an outback sheep station. Since then, volunteers and supporters like you have helped to reduce populations of feral animals, upgrade Boolcoomatta's facilities to enable volunteers and contractors to stay and work at the reserve (including on surveys like this one) and erect exclusion plots to monitor and manage the effect of kangaroos and rabbits on the land.

"The health of the area's vegetation is a credit to Bush Heritage and its supporters," Graham says.

A haven for animals

Bush Heritage Ecologist Sandy Gilmore sounded pleased as he reached into the pitfall traps and carefully pulled out the lively and sometimes ferocious creatures that had wandered into the traps overnight. (The animals remain unharmed and are returned to their homes after being studied.)

"We found several different rodents and marsupials, as well as a large number of skinks, dragons and geckos," says Sandy. "There were dusky hopping-mice, the Bolam's mouse and stripe-faced dunnarts."

These creatures have found a haven at Boolcoomatta that is difficult to find elsewhere. South Australia has the highest rate of mammal extinctions of any state in the country, and Australia has the highest rate of any country in the world. But on Boolcoomatta, life looks prosperous. A 2010 bird survey showed significant increases in bird populations on the reserve such as redthroats and white-winged fairy wrens.

"It's very exciting," says Sandy. "But we haven't reached the end of the story by any means." With your ongoing support Boolcoomatta will continue to flourish.

Watch Sandy Gilmore's face-to-face with the feisty Bolam's mouse at www.bushheritage.org.au/easter-on-boolcoomatta.html

Boolcoomatta Reserve was acquired in 2006 with the assistance of the Australian Government's National Reserve System program and the Nature Foundation SA. We gratefully acknowledge The Native Vegetation Council for their support of conservation activities on Boolcoomatta.

FROM THE CEO



Photograph by Peter Morris

It's difficult for some of us to imagine what life on a remote reserve like Carnarvon Station Reserve, in Central Queensland, must be like – difficult to imagine the remoteness, and also difficult to imagine just how special a place it is. In April this year, I had the pleasure of visiting Carnarvon and meeting the Bush Heritage families that live and work there, protecting the reserve on your behalf.

Travelling from east to west, we moved through pastoral land, then national park and lastly, through the protected bush of your Carnarvon Station Reserve.

I couldn't help but reflect on the photos and reports showing the condition of the land when we acquired it in 2001. Stressed by drought and feral animals, the reserve was very different from now. Thanks to active conservation management combined with the incredible rains of early 2011, the land has made an incredible recovery. I watched the rosellas and the red-necked parrots in flight, and admired a red-neck wallaby as it went about its day. I was struck by the achievements supporters like you have been able to make in such a short time.

The rains, however, have also posed a significant challenge, which made my visit an eye-opening experience. Carnarvon has become a challenging place to access, both for visitors like me and for the families who live there to carry out their vital conservation work. It took 3.5 hours for us to cover the 190km from the nearest accessible town of Injune to Carnarvon homestead. By the time we had entered Carnarvon, we had travelled on a dozen different kinds of roads, the last of which was a small access track through our neighbour's property. Without it, the reserve would be inaccessible by road.

Reserve managers past and present have had an important role in garnering the support and collaboration of local communities, including these neighbours, who've generously allowed us to use this track for many months. Thanks to supporters like you, who responded to our call in 2011, we have the means to repair our own access road and are just waiting for the weather to allow us to start that work.

I watched the way the children at Carnarvon responded to Steve Heggie, the Regional Manager who accompanied me on my trip, as though he were an uncle, and I was reminded of the importance of the Bush Heritage family. Looking after the people that look after the bush is an important part of conservation, and by supporting us, you're helping to do just that.

Thanks for being part of our family.

And don't forget to read the McLean family's story about life at Carnarvon on page three.

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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Bush Heritage Australia ABN 78 053 639 115

Level 5, 395 Collins St Melbourne VIC 3000 PO Box 329, Flinders Lane Melbourne VIC 8009

Phone (03) 8610 9100 | Local Call 1300 628 873 | www.bushheritage.org.au | info@bushheritage.org.au WIN12NDM



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