



Our first reserve in Victoria

Bush Heritage fundraising team member *Kate Fitzherbert* travelled to north-central Victoria to visit our first reserve in that state

In August this year I arrived fifteen kilometres north-west of Wedderburn in north-central Victoria to explore the 344-hectare property that will become the eighteenth Bush Heritage reserve. What a delight it was for me to see a grassy woodland as it should be: grand old hollow-bearing trees, fallen timber all over the ground, rotting logs, a blaze of yellow wattles mixed with other native shrubs and grasses, and all accompanied by a symphony of bird song. There were birds everywhere!

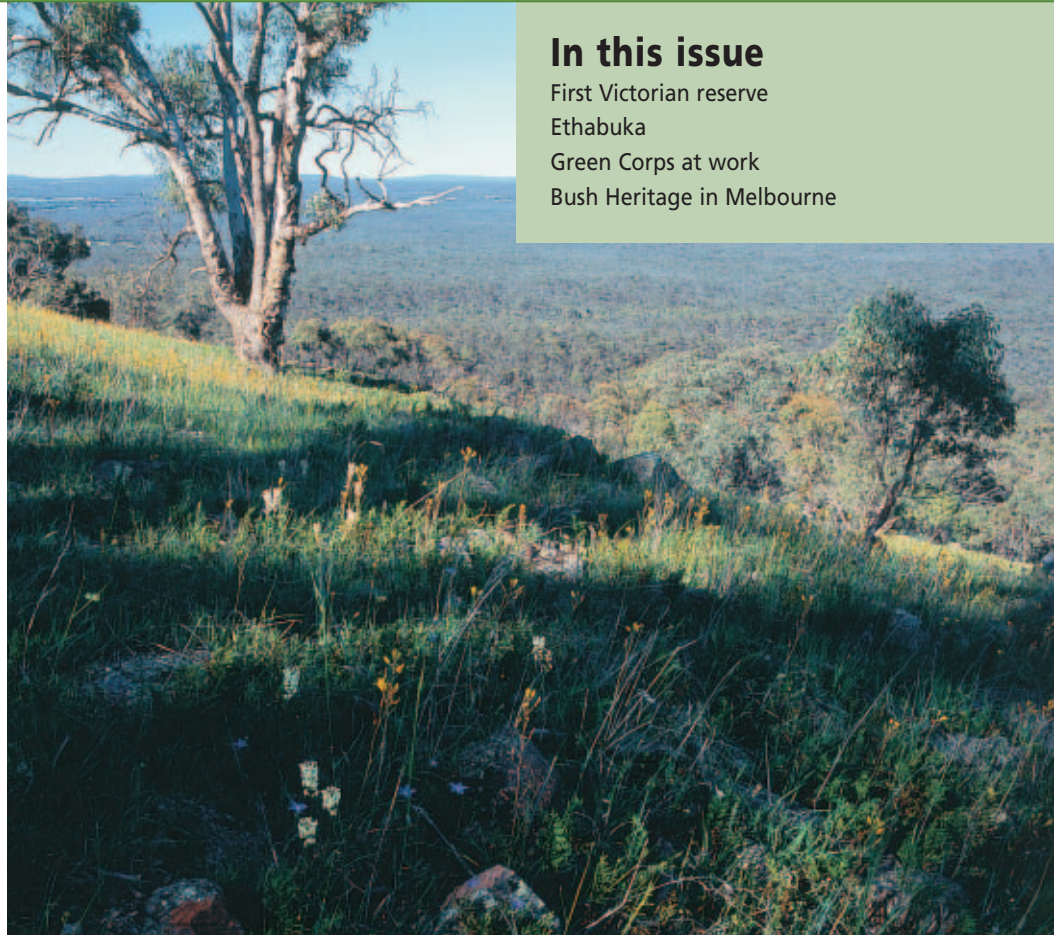
Grassy woodlands like this are now one of the most threatened plant communities in Victoria. The possibility that Bush Heritage and its supporters could protect this one was very exciting.

A very generous gift from the Judith Eardley Save Wildlife Association in Healesville has allowed us to acquire this property, which will be known as the Judith Eardley Reserve. It will form part of a complex of protected land. On its eastern, and part of its southern, boundary it abuts the Wychitella Nature Conservation Reserve, a series of blocks of remnant habitat totalling about 6300 hectares. With a protected reference area of 460 hectares to the south-east, the new Bush Heritage reserve will bring the reserved land to over 7000 hectares, not insignificant in a region where the land has been heavily cleared or modified.

LANDSCAPE

The property rises from the plains in the north, encompasses undulating foothills and climbs to the summit of Mt Kerang at 398 m. There is a stunning view from the top down over the extensive area of protected land to the grazing land beyond.

**Clockwise from top: Looking south-east to the Wychitella Nature Conservation Reserve beyond. A profusion of bulbine lilies. PHOTOS: DAVID TATNALL
Yellow-footed antechinus. PHOTO: C. ANDREW HENLEY/LARUS
Crested shrike-tit. PHOTO: ROB DRUMMOND/COURTESY BIRDS AUSTRALIA**



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The property is sparsely timbered over most of its extent with an intact understorey of native shrubs and grasses on metamorphic soils. Areas of mallee and grey box are more heavily timbered.

VEGETATION

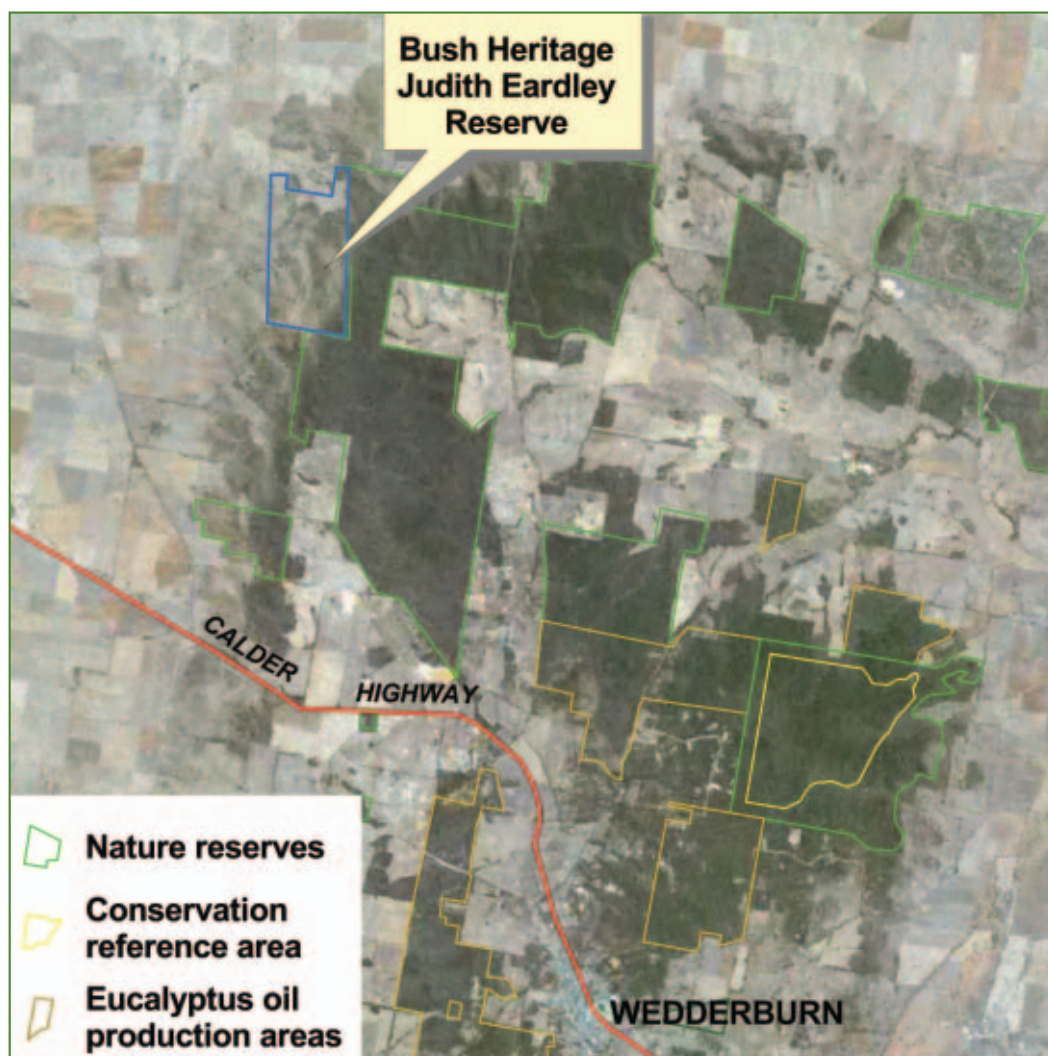
The reserve will protect five vegetation communities that are listed as threatened in Victoria. These include grassy woodland (endangered), shrubby woodland on metamorphic slopes (vulnerable) and three communities that are considered depleted – box ironbark woodland, mallee and hillcrest herb-rich woodland.

Hundreds of old hollow-bearing grey box *Eucalyptus microcarpa*, yellow box *E. melliodora* and yellow gums *E. leucoxylon* provide homes for an abundance of wildlife, from parrots and possums to tiny insects and wood-boring larvae. Patches of old red stringybarks *E. macrorhyncha* and green mallee *E. viridis* make the habitat more complex and may provide homes for species such as the nationally vulnerable malleefowl, which has been recorded in the adjacent reserve. The large number of logs on the ground is a good indicator of the quality of this habitat and also helps to explain its very high bird diversity.

In spring the woodland comes alive with native orchids, daisies, flowering shrubs and herbs.

WILDLIFE

The importance of this area for wildlife, particularly birds, cannot be underestimated. A whole suite of woodland birds now considered 'near threatened' occurs here in exceptional numbers, including hooded robins, brown treecreepers, black-chinned honeyeaters, southern whitefaces and



diamond firetails. Endangered swift parrots are likely to forage in the box trees, and the lowland section of the block is ideal for bush stone-curlews and painted honeyeaters. Bird surveys will produce a healthy and exciting bird list.

So far, the charming yellow-footed antechinus, western and eastern grey kangaroos and echidnas have been seen but mammal surveys should reveal a good list of species including the sugar glider.

THREATS AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The most significant threat to this property has been eliminated by Bush Heritage's purchase of it. Illegal commercial firewood

harvesting was under way and has removed a significant number of the hollow-bearing trunks from old trees in the most accessible parts of the property. The loss of these is tragic but does not significantly reduce the value of the property for conservation. Over most of the property, which is less accessible, the old trees have survived.

The property has been grazed by sheep but small eucalypt seedlings and saplings are thriving, suggesting that sheep grazing has been light or episodic in recent years.

Patterson's curse, horehound, cape weed, saffron thistle and wheel cactus are localised and in manageable numbers





and will be controlled by spot-spraying with herbicides. Small numbers of goats and rabbits will also need to be controlled.

THE FUTURE

There has been strong local support for Bush Heritage to buy and protect the Judith Eardley Reserve and for it to be part of the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network. Support from the local Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) staff has been invaluable.

There is also significant potential for extending the protected area through the subsequent purchase of additional blocks of private land in the district.

Reconnecting these isolated areas of remnant woodland would make a valuable contribution to regional conservation in the 'sheep-wheat' belt, the most threatened area in south-eastern Australia.

Our particular thanks to Peter Morison (DSE) and Greg Hargreaves for their assistance in achieving this purchase, and to the board members of the Judith Eardley Save Wildlife Association for their patience and generosity.

Facing page, from left: Echidna. PHOTO: WAYNE LAWLER/ECOPIX
Southern whiteface. PHOTO: ROB DRUMMOND/COURTESY BIRDS AUSTRALIA
Grey box woodland. PHOTO: DAVID TATNALL

This page, clockwise from top left: Ancient gums over herb-rich grassland. PHOTO: DAVID TATNALL
Female hooded robin at the nest. PHOTO: FRANK PARK/COURTESY BIRDS AUSTRALIA
Box woodland with green mallee behind. Looking south from Mt Kerang.
Yellow gum woodland. PHOTOS: DAVID TATNALL
Varied sitella. PHOTO: FRANK PARK/COURTESY BIRDS AUSTRALIA





Ethabuka – just add water

Bush Heritage Landscape Ecologist Phil Cullen explores the arid-zone ecology of the plants and animals of Ethabuka Reserve, Queensland

Australia is often referred to as the driest continent on Earth. This is somewhat misleading. Antarctica actually receives the least amount of precipitation of any continent but, as run-off proceeds at a glacially slow pace, water is very evident in the landscape. Moreover, Australia has vast areas of arid lands and deserts but they are not as dry nor as barren as the Namib, Atacama or parts of the Saharan deserts. In fact, Australian deserts are some of the richest landscapes in the country for their diversity of animals and plants. Our recently acquired Ethabuka Reserve in far-western Queensland is a classic example of this.

What is it that makes Australian deserts so different? Rather than being consistently dry, our arid regions receive highly

variable and irregular annual rainfall. Droughts and sudden rain events are a normal part of the climatic cycle. Rain can occur anywhere on the continent in response to rain-bearing depressions generated by tropical cyclones or by deep lows centred in the Southern Ocean. As a consequence, the Australian deserts are relatively well vegetated and support sizeable populations of animals compared to many other deserts around the world.

Our unique animals and plants are well adapted to this highly variable rainfall regime. The key to their success is their ability to survive in the generally hot, dry conditions and their capacity to respond rapidly following rain. Many desert plants tend to be woody, long-lived and slow-growing. Many have only a small number of leathery or fleshy leaves, which helps them to retain moisture. Most are capable of rapid growth when enough moisture is available, flowering and setting

seed in the space of a few weeks. Short-lived annuals are also common. They survive from generation to generation by producing large quantities of seed that can lie dormant in the soil for many years.

These growth strategies ensure that the plant species survive. The plants then provide a food resource for the highly adapted desert animals during the often-lengthy dry times. Many of the less conspicuous animals in the food chain, such as termites, are adapted to a diet of woody plant material rather than leaves and, in turn, many of the mammals and reptiles are insectivorous. Seed eating is also common amongst insects, mammals and birds. Many species do not require drinking water but gain enough moisture from what they eat. 'Boom and bust' breeding strategies among animals, and their ability to disperse widely throughout the landscape to take advantage of localised good conditions, also help them survive.

A lot of what we understand about the desert ecosystems of arid Australia comes from the studies of Sydney researcher





Dr Chris Dickman and his research team, who have been working on Ethabuka for more than ten years. Over this period Ethabuka has been a cattle station and we now have the opportunity to watch how the landscape and its wildlife responds without the influence of cattle grazing.

Matt Dell, Murray Haseler and I recently spent three weeks installing a series of monitoring sites across the property to document the expected recovery following rain. At present animal populations are very low in response to the drought and a period of severe overgrazing and wildfires that occurred before we purchased the property. In many places vegetation is now extremely sparse to almost non-existent.

During our research we were thrilled to discover areas where localised thunderstorms had already begun the process of recovery. The dune fields and the Field River in the far west are now carpeted in wildflowers and abuzz with insects

and birds. We glimpsed the dormant vibrancy of the desert when Ethabuka received about 10 mm of rain while we were there. Within a week, areas that had been devoid of living vegetation were a carpet of sprouting grasses and copper burrs. We can only speculate on the response following drenching summer rains, which will return sooner or later.

Our monitoring sites and the work of Chris Dickman and his team will now document this exciting story of renewal. One thing is certain! The resources created by this next good season will remain in the desert and not be trucked away on the rumps of fat cattle. Populations of native animals will explode and the natural desert cycles will return to Ethabuka.

Facing page, clockwise from top: Pulchera Waterhole. Out in the grassland. Sunset over Pulchera Waterhole.

This page, clockwise from top: Dune crest at dusk. Galahs and wildflowers return to the Field River after rain. Murray Haseler with a centralian blue-tongue. Phil Cullen setting up a monitoring point. Phil Cullen in a sea of grass on the Field River. Wildflowers soon emerge after rain.

PHOTOS: MATT DELL



Green Corps at work

Carl Rudd, Bush Heritage Contract Reserve Overseer for Queensland, reports on the work of the Green Corps teams

Over the past fifteen months, Goonderoo Reserve and Carnarvon Station Reserve in Queensland have benefited enormously from the work of two Green Corps teams. Green Corps is a Federal Government program in which young people receive on-ground training and practical experience while working for the environment. Each work program runs for six months and is coordinated by Greening Australia and Job Futures.

Our first team, working between June and December 2003, was led by Travis Sydes and renewed over twelve kilometres of fencing at Carnarvon to exclude feral horses from the property. They worked to upgrade the volunteer quarters, construct a vehicle wash-down facility and build a terrific outdoor oven and barbecue. At Goonderoo they replaced the dilapidated fencing around the homestead.

The team were an impressive and enthusiastic group, surviving the -12°C temperatures of the Carnarvon winter and the heat of the central Queensland summer. They received local acclaim and were dux of the state in that round of Green Corps projects.

The second Green Corps team began work in early April 2004. With Travis again as team leader, the team hit the ground running. At Goonderoo the main theme



of their work was to integrate cultural heritage and ecological conservation. We were extremely fortunate to have the wonderful support of local Kairi elder Lindsay Black, who provided invaluable insights and perspective. The team mapped areas of past Aboriginal habitation on the property, located and photographed significant artefacts, and rehabilitated areas of cultural heritage that were suffering from erosion.

The second team also worked on the nature refuge on an adjoining property where bridled nail-tailed wallabies, once thought to be extinct, were released a few years ago. Several shelters were constructed to assist refuge owner Hugo Spooner to encourage local school groups to the site. As these shelters were built close to the boundary fence of the two properties, Bush Heritage can also use them.

This cooperative venture has helped to strengthened ties between Bush Heritage, Goonderoo and local landholders.

Also part of the Green Corps program were weed mapping in important areas of bluegrass downs and brigalow woodland, repairing and constructing fences, and revegetating redundant tracks.

The success of both teams has highlighted the benefits of volunteer and sponsored work programs at Goonderoo. We are hoping to extend the equally successful Volunteer Ranger Program to this reserve in the future.

Clockwise from top: Sunset at Goonderoo. PHOTO: WAYNE LAWLER/ECOPIX. The Green Corps team on Carnarvon. At work on the wash-down facility. The completed outdoor oven and barbecue. PHOTOS: CARL RUDD



From the CEO

Visiting Bush Heritage's Carnarvon Station Reserve, which I do regularly, always lifts my spirits. Carnarvon is such a beautiful place and is being expertly managed for conservation. My visits remind me of the unique assemblage of talents and support that we have at Bush Heritage, and how this ensures the protection of such outstanding landscapes.

My visit in September coincided with a month of great activity and energy. Volunteer rangers, staff and Green Corps volunteers were involved in fencing another spring (which is already rejuvenating), conducting mammal surveys and completing our new composting toilets (with a shower block to follow). We conducted cross-boundary pig baiting with National Parks' staff and collaborated with a pastoral neighbour on removing noxious weeds from native grasslands. A local contractor was mustering the remaining wild cattle and a painting workshop was under way, guided by renowned Australian artist Mandy Martin.

All this activity was a wonderful example of how the convergence of supporters' donations and interests, volunteer support, professional skills, neighbourly interest and plain common sense contribute to good conservation management.

The completion of the annual audit confirms a phenomenal year for Bush Heritage. Donations are up by 131 per cent and more than 160 volunteers contributed over 2300 days of work, providing value and cost-savings of over \$327 000. This strong financial growth allows us not only to expand our

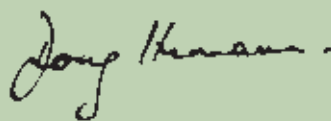
'beyond the boundaries' programs but also to consider more properties for purchase than ever before. Thank you all for your wonderful support.

By January 2005 the Bush Heritage national office will be in Melbourne, closer to many of our supporters and providing easier access to most of our on-ground conservation work. I will be joining a number of staff in moving there, so this column is my last from Hobart.

My special thanks to Bronwyn Brown and Nathan Males, whose contracts are up for renewal and who have decided to stay in Hobart. Bronwyn has overseen administrative processes during our extraordinary period of growth and Nathan has, amongst other things, established our Conservation Partners Program. He will retain an active role in our Tasmanian reserves. My sincere thanks also to Mick and Claire Blackman for their outstanding stewardship of Carnarvon Station Reserve over the past two years. We wish them all well in their new pursuits.

Finally, I welcome our new General Manager Annette Stewart and on behalf of the Board I also welcome our new Director, Carol Schwartz. Carol is widely known and respected in the business and philanthropic communities.

Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.



New staff

Annette Stewart has recently joined Bush Heritage as General Manager.

She has over 20 years' experience in information technology and financial services, as well as a passion for all things environmental. She has a Masters degree in both business administration

and environmental management, and brings a wide range of skills and experience to help us continue our mission.

Karen Harland and Alastair Dermer have taken up the challenge of being the first reserve managers at Ethabuka Reserve, Qld. We also welcome back Steve Heggie and Mel Sheppard, former reserve managers at Carnarvon Station Reserve, to the reserve managers' role at Reedy Creek Reserve, Qld.

In memory

Rosemary Blemings donated to celebrate the life of **Ros Dixon**, 'a tireless environmentalist'. Jennifer Wilson made a gift for **Lois Humphreys** 'to celebrate the happy times spent bushwalking'. Joan Eltham sent a donation for **Douglas Clague** 'in memory of his life and work in conservation'.

Peter Poland gave in memory of his cousin **Richard Domville Poland**, and Shirley Pryor for her grandson **Noah Domen Skaberne-Pryor**, who would have been three in September. Helen McFadden donated in memory of **Patrick Sean McFadden**, 1984-1988. **Florence Faulkner** was remembered by her niece Dawn Kneen, and **Sybil and Robert Story** by their daughter Judy Kelly.

Stephen Humphry and his workmates remembered **Fritz Fratini**, and Gary Swavley, **Mrs Dorothy Mackinlay**. Martha Allan-Hirsiger gave for **Mrs Phyllis Bryden**, and Merrill Brandenburg for **Evie Anderson**. **Jean Wallace** was remembered by Chris and Elaine Towers. Darlene Spinelli donated in memory of **Bruce Heggie**.

Professor Jiro Kikkawa and Wan Hooker donated in memory of **Geoff Tracey**, who was considered a true visionary with a special commitment to the environment.

It is with sadness that we learnt that long-time supporter Reginald Juchau passed away recently. Our thoughts are with his family and friends.

In celebration

Joan and Lee Harris sent a gift to celebrate the wedding of **Carly and Ben McMillan**.

Annual report

The Australian Bush Heritage Fund annual report for 2003-2004 is now available. It will be up soon on the website at www.bushheritage.org/about/annual_report_2003_4/index.html To receive a printed copy please contact Janine Derks at the national office on 1800 677 101.



Bush Heritage moves to Melbourne

Bush Heritage will soon be relocating its national office to Melbourne. The decision to move the office was a difficult one and was taken in the long-term interests of the organisation's growth. We are convinced that from Melbourne we will greatly enhance our opportunities to achieve national biodiversity conservation.

With sadness we will close the doors of our Hobart office just prior to Christmas, and reopen in the New Year at our new Melbourne home in the Central Business District. We are looking forward to meeting more of our supporters once our final destination is decided. We invite you to call in and visit us.

Understandably, some of our staff have decided to stay in Hobart and maintain the wonderful lifestyle Tasmania offers. We will therefore be recruiting new staff to join us in Melbourne. We are seeking people with skills and experience in the areas of fundraising, ecology, mapping, reception and bookkeeping. Details will be posted on our website as positions become available: www.bushheritage.org/how-you-can-help/

If you would like more information, please contact Annette Stewart on 1800 677 101 or email astewart@bushheritage.asn.au

Printed on combination 50% recycled and 50% plantation fibre.

Thanks

Our sincere thanks to Jim Russell and Anya Laszynski for their very generous donations to Bush Heritage of the proceeds from the sale of their beautiful property in Cygnet, south of Hobart. Prior to the sale, the land was covenanted to protect its outstanding tall wet forest, creeks, waterfalls and abundant wildlife. Jim's gift to Bush Heritage is in memory of his father Jim Russell Snr.

Under new tax provisions, Jim and Anya have the option of spreading the tax

deductions for their gifts over up to five years and in whatever proportions they wish. This way they will not lose some of the tax value of their generous donation by being obliged to take the whole deduction in one year. This option is generally available to individual taxpayers for donations of any amount.

Our thanks also to Jim Oakley of Simmons Wolfhagen in Hobart for his pro bono work on the conveyancing.

Getting involved

FIELD DAYS 2005

Come on guided visits to some of our reserves and learn more about these special areas. Places are limited so please register your interest soon.

March: Brogo Reserve, NSW, field day, Sunday 6. No cost.

April: Burrin Burrin Reserve, NSW, field day, Sunday 10. No cost.
Tarcutta Hills Reserve, NSW, field weekend, Saturday 24 to Sunday 25. Cost: \$40
Charles Darwin Reserve, WA, field weekend, Saturday 24 to Sunday 25. Cost: \$60

For information on attending field trips, or to RSVP, please contact Kalina Koloff on 02 9264 3377, fax 02 9264 0811 or email kkoloff@bushheritage.asn.au

VOLUNTEER RANGER WORKING BEE

Victorian and New South Wales supporters may like to join us for a weekend working bee at Tarcutta Hills Reserve, NSW, on Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 April 2005.

We will be doing track maintenance, bush regeneration and seed collection. You can camp on the reserve. Food will be provided.

Please contact Joelle Metcalf for details on volunteers@bushheritage.asn.au or on 03 6223 2670, or fax 03 6223 2680.



Return to: **Australian Bush Heritage Fund, Reply Paid 101, Hobart TAS 7001**
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I wish to join the Friends of the Bush and give a tax-deductible monthly donation.

Please deduct monthly donations of \$_____ from the credit card below until further notice

Please deduct monthly donations of \$_____ from my bank account by Direct Debit. (ABHF will forward an authority form)

I would rather give a single, tax-deductible donation of: \$50 \$100 \$360 \$500 Other \$_____

I am paying by: Cheque/Money Order Bankcard Mastercard Visa Diners Club American Express

Card number: _____ / _____ / _____ / _____ / _____ / _____ / _____ / _____ / _____ / _____ Expiry date: _____ / _____ / _____ / _____

Card holder's name: _____ Card holder's signature: _____

I have pledged \$30 or more per month or enclosed a gift of \$360 or more. Please put my name on the commemorative plaque at the new Ethabuka Reserve.

Name (Please print) Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss _____

Address _____ Postcode _____

Phone (h) _____ Phone (w) _____ Email _____

8 _____ Office use only _____

