

Rain at Ethabuka? I'd like to see that!

Bush Heritage staff members Julian Fennessy, Paul Foreman and Murray Haseler explain the remarkable event that brought life back to Ethabuka

'While rain in the desert is always reason for celebration, the next rain that falls on Ethabuka should, by any reckoning, cause a riot.' These were the prophetic words written by Bush Heritage ecologist Murray Haseler in *Bush Heritage News*, Summer 2003.

On June 11 this year, after several years of drought, and on the weekend of the inaugural Bush Heritage field trip for supporters, the clouds rolled in at Ethabuka and the skies opened. Murray Haseler, Julian Fennessy and fifteen others, both guests and staff, witnessed this once-in-a-lifetime event – and for longer than they expected (see Page 3).

The homestead 'lake'. PHOTO: JULIAN FENNESSY **Insets from left: Desert spadefoot toad.** PHOTO: PETER ROBERTSON/WILDLIFE PROFILES **Red kangaroos arrived to drink from the 'lake'.**

PHOTO: WAYNE LAWLER/ECOPIX

Over the following week approximately 125mm (five inches) of rain fell in what proved to be the epicentre of the mid-dry-season downpour. Sandy depressions turned into lakes, roads into watercourses and dry creek beds into rivers. The view from the homestead changed. A vast shallow lake appeared, two square kilometres in area, its surface decorated with hundreds of tiny emergent islands of parched vegetation and soil.

The signs of renewal for the desert began almost instantaneously. Footprints and droppings of red kangaroos, not seen recently, appeared at the edges of the ephemeral pools.

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Burrowing desert spadefoot toads dug their way out of subterranean dormancy, ate off their protective saliva coatings and got on with it. Frog spawn appeared, floating in glutinous masses on the pools. Tiny green shoots of germinating seeds emerged along the fine contours of the pools and across the plains, heralding a spectacular blooming of wildflowers.



The small desert rodents such as the desert mouse and spinifex hopping mouse will soon start to breed and their marsupial predators will respond later in spring. The recovery of these animal populations will take time as their current numbers are low after years of drought and the effects of cattle grazing. Those that have survived will begin to breed up again under the cover of a carpet of spring wildflowers.

Although our desert-like landscapes appear 'dead' to most people, in fact they are full of life. Most of the time they lie in wait for an opportunity such as this. Their activity is episodic, concentrated into the short periods of plenty. When the rain comes, it triggers a frenzy of growth and reproduction and the explosion of animal populations.

Ethabuka lies in the sand dune country of the Simpson Desert in far-western Queensland. Bush Heritage purchased the 214 000 hectare lease in 2004 to protect its outstanding small mammal and reptile populations, at risk from the expansion of the pastoral industry. Cattle were removed from the property at the time of its purchase.

For a long time at Ethabuka, cattle have been the beneficiaries of the abundance resulting from weather events such as this. Now it is the turn of the locals. The pulse of vegetation now sprouting will, for the first time in many decades, contribute its goodness to the native animals and birds. In the months to come, the recovery of the landscape and its wildlife will be nothing short of spectacular.

Sadly, reserve managers Al Dermer and Karen Harland, who toiled through the heat and dust of summer, were not there to witness this momentous rain event. However, what has arisen from their short sojourn away from the reserve matches the miracle of that observed in the desert – new life!

(Our congratulations to Karen and Al on the arrival of their baby girl Asha. All are doing well.)

The renaissance of Ethabuka has begun. PHOTO: KATRINA BLAKE
Insets from top: Desert mouse. PHOTO: JIRI LOCHMAN/LOCHMAN
 TRANSPARENCIES **Yellow tops** *Othonno gregorii*. PHOTO: KATRINA BLAKE
Western netted dragon. PHOTO: JULIAN FENNESSY **Murray Haseler**
 (left) and Julian Fennessy test the water depth.
 PHOTO: KATRINA BLAKE



Flight from Ethabuka

Bush Heritage supporter **Jane Lennon** recounts her journey from Ethabuka after the rain

Friday 10 June had been hot and windy when we drove into Ethabuka via the beautiful Montara dune. We were anticipating our next four days exploring this new Bush Heritage reserve.

A little rain overnight delighted everyone by settling the dust. The rain was a harbinger of things to come but did not interrupt our explorations to the south the next day to explore the rocky mesas and to look at Pulchera Waterhole, birdwatch and identify plants.



Our Sunday excursion was engulfed in a heavy storm adorned by fabulous rainbows. By next morning the campers among us had become 'boat people' in a sea of red mud. Over the next few days the rainfall total climbed over 120 mm, neighbouring properties recorded good rains, roads were declared impassable and we were marooned.

People busied themselves with management jobs around the homestead and, with seventeen to feed, we did a food stocktake. The sun shone on Wednesday, our 'lake' at the front gate receded a little and a green tinge on the mud announced the sprouting of dormant seeds.

Thursday's satellite photo brought bad news. An enormous rain front was moving towards us from the West Australian coast. We were either here for a long haul or it was time to make a break for it.

A small convoy of nine of us left in a northerly direction on Saturday 18.

Within ten minutes we were bogged for the first of many times on this epic journey. After four hours our three vehicles had travelled 103 kilometres and crossed 73 sand dunes. On the flatter country we abandoned the road and followed two stockmen on motorbikes who guided us through the 'spew country' where stopping meant bogging. The black clouds were ever on our heels and finally caught us as we hit the bitumen near Boulia, nine and a half hours after our journey had begun 178 kilometres to the south.

As I write this, four couples are still marooned at Ethabuka, sustained by a food drop from the Queensland Special Emergency Service. Who says the pioneering spirit is dead? It lives on in the caretakers at Ethabuka.

Clockwise from top: Acacia shrubland on the road to Mirrika Bore. Searching for the pot of gold. PHOTOS: JULIAN FENNESSY
Youthful enthusiasm with a snatch strap. Bogged again.

PHOTOS: KATRINA BLAKE



The four remaining couples are now safely home. Our special thanks to all who were at Ethabuka during this eventful downpour. Your enthusiasm and flexible attitudes to the extreme set of circumstances we faced has been praised by all the Bush Heritage staff. Thank you for making the experience such a rewarding one.



Eurardy – wild with flowers

Bush Heritage Conservation Programs Manager Paul Foreman provides an update on Eurardy

The new Bush Heritage Eurardy Reserve is 30 066 hectares of wild and spectacular heathland and woodland. The property has a reputation as one of the top wildflower destinations along Western Australia's Batavia coast.

After years of drought, recent rain will make 2005 a bumper year at Eurardy and there is mounting excitement over the approaching wildflower season.

For decades people have been coming to the property to experience the beauty of spring – an opportunity that will continue under the stewardship of Bush Heritage. Spring at Eurardy is a feast for the senses, with wildflower displays in all colours of the rainbow. The property also boasts extraordinary plant diversity (over 900 species recorded so far) and many endemic

and rare or threatened plants. Beard's Mallee *Eucalyptus beardiana* and the shrub *Verticordia x euradyensis* are unique to the area and found on the reserve. Insects and birds flourish in this floral abundance.

Four of the vegetation communities found on Eurardy have been heavily cleared in the region and are poorly represented in conservation reserves. The beautiful york gum *Eucalyptus loxophleba* shrubby woodland is one example. With the purchase of Eurardy, the reservation status of york gum increased from less than one per cent to nearly 22 per cent. This rare community is easy to see; the remaining area of york gum occurs where the North West Coastal Highway bisects the property.

Since the early 1970s about 2000 hectares, or six per cent, of Eurardy has been progressively cleared and cropped. Not surprisingly, most of this cropland is located on the more productive soils, soils that once

supported the york gum community. More recently, some heathland vegetation on sandy soils has been cleared for cereals.

Bush Heritage's long-term vision is to restore these areas to their original state and to return the stands of york gum, a process that will be detailed in the management plan and may take decades to accomplish. In the short term, sharecropping will continue on the long-cultivated areas. This will help to prevent an outbreak of weeds and provide a significant income stream to help offset the management costs of the new reserve.

Cropping will be phased out, starting in 2006, in the most recently cleared and more fragile sandy paddocks. Some of these areas are already showing signs of recovery and may eventually be completely restored with minimal cost.

Restoring the balance of the older croplands is not as straightforward. These paddocks may need to be actively revegetated, a process that





requires careful planning and significant resources. Owning cropping country is new for Bush Heritage but we have shown that revegetation, though costly, can be effectively undertaken on a large scale. The restoration of 60 hectares at Chereninup Creek Reserve near the Stirling Range, undertaken in 2003 in collaboration with Greening Australia, is progressing well (*Bush Heritage News*, Spring 2003). We will provide an update on the Chereninup revegetation work in an upcoming issue of *Bush Heritage News*.

Eurardy's former owners Bruce and Margaret Quicke established Eurardy as a wildflower tour destination with fully equipped homestead-style accommodation, powered sites for caravans, and a camping area. Bush Heritage aims to continue this tradition and offer guided wildflower tours by knowledgeable naturalists during spring.

You can book now to experience this season's spectacle (see Page 8).

Fees will apply for both accommodation and tours, with some accommodation subject to availability. All money raised will go towards the management of Eurardy or towards protecting yet another significant area of Australian bush.

AND YOU CAN VOLUNTEER!

You can now be a volunteer ranger at the new Eurardy Reserve, 150 kilometres north-east of Geraldton. As with all new reserves, there is a lot to do and we need help from people with time and energy to spare.

It is going to be a bumper wildflower season, so there will be special opportunities for knowledgeable volunteers – amateur or professional botanists and, we hope, members of the Wildflower Society of Western Australia – to assist Bush Heritage staff in the day-to-day guiding of visitors. We will provide private accommodation in new, two-bedroom dongas and, for long-term volunteers, a travel allowance.

For more information please contact Joelle Metcalf at volunteers@bushheritage.asn.au or phone 03 8610 9102.

Facing page, clockwise from top: White *Baeckea* sp., pink *Verticordia spicata*, orange *Pileanthus peduncularis* colour the heathland. Land that has been cropped for many years may need to be actively revegetated. *Melaleuca* sp. *Dryandra fraseri*. PHOTOS: PAUL FOREMAN

This page, clockwise from top left: The reserve managers Paul Hales and Leanne Edmonston. *Grevillea* sp. Rhinoceros beetle. PHOTOS: PAUL FOREMAN Spotted sun orchid *Thelymitra sargentii*. Malleefowl mound. Banded lapwing and nest. PHOTOS: MARGARET QUICKE Bungabandy Creek. PHOTO: PAUL FOREMAN





A gift to the future

John Tait, from Blackmans Bay, Tas, reflects on the world that future generations will inherit

As our lives have progressed, my wife Judith and I have both become increasingly aware of the damage that humankind has done – and, it seems, will continue to do – to our 'lonely planet'. Somehow, environmental degradation must be stopped. In Australia we can 'do our bit' through the Australian Bush Heritage Fund.

We grew up in the era of 'leaving it all to the kids' but, as our retirement approached, we realised that 'the kids' have probably got greater financial security than we have now. So we have decided that securing land for long-term environmental conservation may be a better and more personally satisfying way of 'safeguarding' their – and the world's – future, long after we have departed.

We didn't know about Australian Bush Heritage Fund until we read a newspaper article and then discovered the website. That started us thinking. We decided to help by leaving a bequest in our wills to assist Bush Heritage's work of protecting Australia's wild places. In this way, we're confident that our children – and their children's children – will truly benefit from our gift to their future.

You too can help safeguard our natural heritage for future generations by leaving a gift in your will to the Australian Bush Heritage Fund. For a copy of our bequest brochure, which includes a recommended wording, please call **Anne Peedom** on 02 9922 6953 or **Merrilyn Julian** on 03 8610 9120 or email bequests@bushheritage.asn.au



Weeding blitz at Carnarvon

Carnarvon Station Reserve in central Queensland is a remarkable place. There are few areas where you can breakfast with a mob of red-necked wallabies, lunch beneath a prehistoric forest of cycads and enjoy a 'sundowner' at the 'edge of the world', gazing over the range, as you can at Carnarvon.



But, as is the case with any property with a pastoral history, there are environmental issues to deal with. During this summer there will be a blitz on two invasive weeds: buffel grass and Johnson grass.

Supporters of Bush Heritage, friends of Carnarvon and lovers of the Australian environment, we are looking for volunteer rangers to help with the weeding program from November to January. Flexibility will be the key, as work is dependent on the timing of spring rains and the subsequent growth of the targeted weeds.

If you have two weeks or more to spare, then come and discover Carnarvon while working on weed eradication. You will have time to explore and, if you are lucky, you can even dine with the stars – literally!

Urgent call for volunteer rangers at Charles Darwin Reserve

Volunteer rangers are also needed at Charles Darwin Reserve, particularly between 23 September and 10 November 2005. During this period, previous experience would be valuable but is not essential. The wildflowers will be spectacular and accommodation is provided.

Volunteer rangers are traditionally involved in a range of reserve management tasks from weed and feral animal control to infrastructure maintenance and monitoring programs. Professional trade support is also needed. Calling electricians, plumbers, mechanics, carpenters and jacks-of-all-trades! If you want to use your skills for the environment in one of Australia's beautiful landscapes, please contact us.

For more information on any of these volunteering possibilities, please contact Joelle Metcalf at volunteers@bushheritage.asn.au or phone 03 8610 9102.

Thank you, weeders

Our sincere thanks to the wonderful weed team that worked so diligently at Charles Darwin Reserve in August. We had over 300 person-days of dedicated work and the results speak for themselves.

From top: Carnarvon Station Reserve, Qld. Red-necked wallaby. **PHOTOS:** WAYNE LAWLER/RECOPIX Charles Darwin Reserve, WA. **PHOTO:** PHIL CULLEN



From the CEO

Many parts of Australia have been blessed by good rain in recent months and Bush Heritage properties in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia are no exception. We anticipate a splendid wildflower season on all the West Australian reserves. This may be the time to visit, as limited camping will be available at both Eurardy and Charles Darwin reserves. (Please see Page 8 for other opportunities to visit our reserves, and for booking details.)

We can only imagine what Ethabuka Reserve in the Simpson Desert will be like in a few months' time after five inches of rain in June (see Pages 1 to 3). The rain coincided with our first field weekend and our supporters got rather more than they bargained for. I thank them for their patience and for their invaluable support.

Our guests turned their hands to a range of volunteer tasks over the days (several weeks, for some) that they were held captive as vast bodies of water rose and fell.

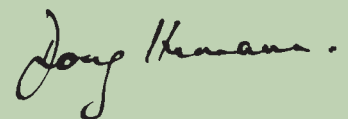
The rain will rejuvenate the property, which has suffered below-average rainfall over recent years. The once-dry lakebeds are now full and the vegetation, and all the wildlife that it supports, will flourish.

Many of our reserves have experienced flood, fire or tempest in the past twelve months and our emergency planning has been well tested. Fires, both planned and wild, at Carnarvon Station Reserve (Qld) have stimulated some excellent regeneration of the vegetation. A fire over summer in the more closely settled region of Tarcutta Hills Reserve (NSW) was rapidly brought under control as our fire plan swung into action.

Meanwhile, storms caused damage to buildings and power at Charles Darwin Reserve (WA) and started a fire at Goonderoo Reserve (Qld).

Your support, whether through financial help or your work as a volunteer, enables us to prepare for and respond to these events. Such emergencies test our planning and give us the opportunity to refine and improve our procedures.

It is one thing to acquire our marvellous reserves and another to ensure that they will be properly protected and maintained. As you know, we need and value your support for this long-term objective. Thank you for your help.



In memory

Alan Pert donated in memory of **Ruby Adele Pert** and Jenny Deyzel in memory of **Jo Hudson**. Iris Nicolades remembered **Fifi Hansen**.

Eleanor Rowley gave for **Elizabeth Arden**, 'a tireless worker for Australian bushland'. Margaret Allen donated in memory of **Roslyn Dixon** and of **those who lost their lives in the South Australian bushfires**. **Dr Jill Landsberg** was remembered by Dr Jann Williams, Professor Tony Norton and Dr Sandy Berry.

Marion James gave for her husband **Brian James** who 'loved all the Australian flora and fauna'. Doug Smith remembered his wife **Joy Smith**, 'a garden lover', and Barbara Skarratt her husband **Eric Skarratt**. John Ransley gave to celebrate the life and memory of his partner **Muktanand Meannjin**.

Lynne McMahon donated for her mother **Anne Inger**. Margaret Hall and Michael and David Cook sent a gift for their parents **Walter Arthur Aufrere Cook** and **Jean Nora Cook**. Philip and Jenny Nye gave to remember their uncle **John Butler**. Isabel Gray donated for her son **Stuart Gray**.

Hilary Taylor gave for **Evol Knight** in recognition of her work with Australian plants. Peter Richards and Juliet Thomas remembered **Monica Flint**, 'whose love of the Australian bush continues through her children'. Heather Willster and family donated in memory of **Ted Fitzgerald**, who loved the Australian bush.

In celebration

Genevieve Gall celebrated the work of her brother **James Harrison** through a gift to Bush Heritage. Bec Gibb and Ian Humphries sent gifts for **Dan Rosauer and Alli Foster** and **Sara Hinchey and Tom Pikusa**.

Jodie Thomson honoured the wedding of **Rachel Keyter and Josh Thomson**, and Cynthia Mitchell and Liz Harry the wedding of **Tanzi Smith and Shawn Jarvey**, 'two beautiful people and active participants in the fight to save our fabulous planet'. Melissa Lane celebrated the wedding of **Gabriella Schuster and Bruce Taylor**.

Peter and Ivanka Canet donated for their 25th wedding anniversary and Fairlie Ferguson for the 50th wedding anniversary of **Jamie and Jane Butler**.

Petrina Dare gave in honour of her anniversary with **Pierre DeBisscop** 'who introduced me to the bush'.

Australian Ethical Investment staff celebrated the 60th birthday of their colleague **Peter Beckman**, and Liz Diggles the 60th birthday of **Ross Neumann**. John Stein commemorated the birthday of **Janet Stein**. David Holland honoured the 90th birthday of his grandfather **Alexander David Clifford** and Kerry Shorney the 90th birthday of her mother **Laurie Coles**. Annette O'Callaghan donated for her father **John O'Callaghan**.

John and Jeanette Carlsen celebrated the birth of their **first grandchild**, born to their daughter Emmaline Smith-Laubscher.

Other birthdays have also been celebrated with gifts to Bush Heritage: Margaret Carlton gave for her mother-in-law **Mrs M Carlton**, Heather O'Connor for her great friend **Jenni Mitchell**, James Damman and Ruth Beilin for **Muriel Mathers** and Eric and Emma Heyde for **Philippa Mazoudier**.

