



Our latest purchase – another bit of the Outback

Bush Heritage's latest reserve, Cravens Peak, is 'just down the road' from Ethabuka Reserve in far-western Queensland but, as Conservation Programs Manager Paul Foreman points out, this new pastoral lease is very different

On my first visit to Cravens Peak Station in May this year I stood on an outcrop of the Toko Range and gazed over the source of the Mulligan River. This is one of the headwaters of the immense Cooper Creek system that braids its way through hundreds of kilometres of the Outback to finally spill into

Lake Eyre. The colours and the vastness of the landscape took my breath away. Rich ochres of every hue and cobalt-blue sky seemed to stretch into infinity.

I was standing on the edge of the Channel Country, that highly productive region of Queensland famous for fattening cattle, and for this reason so far poorly reserved. I contemplated the significance of Bush Heritage's buying and protecting some of this valuable ecosystem at Cravens Peak Station, where the Mulligan River plains are still relatively intact.

On 31 October 2005 Cravens Peak became the 21st Bush Heritage reserve. It is our largest reserve ever at over 233 000 hectares (2330 square kilometres or about the size of

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Cravens Peak

Anchors in the landscape

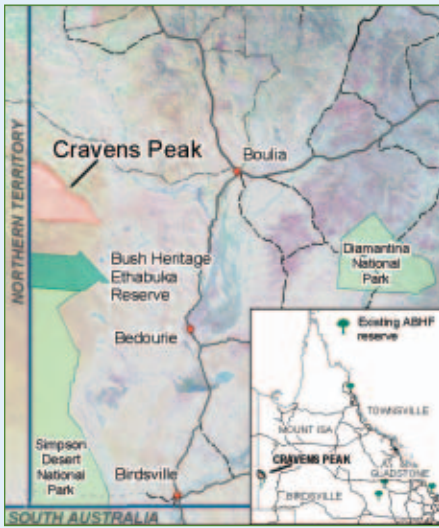
Charles Darwin Reserve weeding bee

metropolitan Melbourne or Sydney) and also the most expensive because of the 'value' of the Channel Country. We still have a great deal of money to raise!

Cravens Peak is now our most diverse reserve, in both its geomorphology and biology. It is an exciting acquisition and presents us with an unprecedented management challenge.

Grasslands and creek lines spread out from the rocky Toko Range where foxtails *Ptilotis* sp. emerge from between the rocks. PHOTO: PAUL FOREMAN Inset from top: Purple-necked rock wallaby. PHOTO: AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM Plains-wanderer. PHOTO: TOM WHELLER





LANDSCAPE

Striking parallel dunes, plateaus, low ranges of ancient sandstone, and grassland and woodland plains make up this magnificent landscape. The Mulligan River carves its way along the eastern boundary of the reserve through soft rocks that were formed under the ocean about 500 million years ago and are subject to erosion. The adjacent Toko Range – at 280 metres above sea level, one of the highest points of the region – is formed of harder, more resistant sandstone. Not far south of the homestead the Toko Range disappears beneath the Simpson Desert sands, and the river meanders on to Pulchra

Waterhole on the eastern boundary of Ethabuka Reserve.

The Toomba Range, with its gorges, lies to the west, the result of upheavals along a massive ancient fault line. In these oldest rocks is located the conspicuous mesa ‘Cravens Peak’, for which the property is named. The dunes and swales that cover much of the east of the reserve are just a thin veneer of wind-blown sand deposited in very recent geological times on these older sandstones.

VEGETATION

Most of the 21 known vegetation communities on Cravens Peak are either unreserved or poorly reserved in Queensland. The property supports some unique vegetation types including hummock grassland with red mallee *Eucalyptus pachyphylla*.

Short open grasslands with saltbush; Mitchell *Astrebla* grasslands; shrublands of acacia, hakea and emu bush *Eremophila*; and vegetation communities associated with the rocky ranges, waterholes,

drainage lines, swamps and claypans provide an abundance of habitats for the desert wildlife. Spinifex *Triodia* grasslands on the dunes are some of the most important habitats for small mammals.

Once all the cattle have been removed, the grasslands so prized by the pastoral industry will be able to grow and set seed without the pressure of stock, for the first time in decades.

WILDLIFE

Cravens Peak has three main landscape types – dunes, ranges and plains – and each has its own characteristic wildlife. Over 220 species have been recorded. As at Ethabuka, the dunes are home to a great diversity of small mammals, including the carnivorous mulgara, and one of the richest reptilian faunas of any desert area in the world.

Recent rain filled the ephemeral wetlands and brought a flush of wildflowers to the dunes. PHOTO: WAYNE LAWLER/ECOPIX
 Inset from top: Fat-tailed pseudantechinus. PHOTO JIRI LOCHMAN/LOCHMAN TRANSPARENCIES Flowering foxtails *Ptilotis* sp. on the grasslands. PHOTO: WAYNE LAWLER/ECOPIX



The plains, with sparse short grass and herb vegetation, provide habitat for a nationally vulnerable bird, the plains-wanderer. Small animals such as the fat-tailed pseudantechinus occur in the ranges, well east of the centre of their distribution in the MacDonnell Ranges near Alice Springs.

Suitable habitat exists for the bilby, purple-necked rock wallaby and spectacled hare wallaby and unconfirmed records suggest that we may find them at Cravens Peak. We may even discover the elusive night parrot.

THREATS AND MANAGEMENT

Overgrazing and trampling by cattle are the main threats to the vegetation communities, and thus the wildlife, at Cravens Peak. Wetlands and watercourses are especially vulnerable. The bores, which provide readily available surface water, also sustain artificially high numbers of native herbivores.



Grazing reduces or even removes the vegetation needed for food and shelter by small mammals, ground-nesting birds and reptiles. Even some birds of prey are affected, as the cattle prevent the regeneration of trees suitable for nesting.

As part of the conditions of sale, stock will be removed from Cravens Peak within twelve months of settlement. This was a necessary concession to secure the property and was considered acceptable given our long-term vision.

Fire is also a major threat. Too many or too few fires change the extent and structure of woodland communities. Wildfires eliminate the ground cover, exposing ground-dwelling animals to predators such as cats and foxes. Under Bush Heritage management, strategic 'patch-burning' will create a mosaic of small burnt areas that will give variety and stability to the landscape and reduce the likelihood of broad-acre wildfires.

Cat and fox control will begin in conjunction with control programs run by our neighbours. Weed infestations, especially of buffel grass, will be managed once the stock has been removed.



THE FUTURE

Cravens Peak is entirely surrounded by pastoral leases. It will soon be an island of protected habitat without cattle, unprecedented in western Queensland. It will provide a permanent refuge for an extraordinarily diverse assemblage of arid-zone animals and plants including many species and vegetation communities of national importance.

Once the homestead is properly equipped, supporters will be able to visit and explore this magnificent new reserve. A great deal of work lies ahead, both in raising the necessary funds and establishing the reserve. We would love your help. You can help us to buy and protect Cravens Peak by sending your donation or, if you enjoy the desert landscape, you can get involved as a volunteer ranger or in future working bees.

Clockwise from top: Paul Foreman with foptails *Ptilotis* sp. Rain brings a green flush to the desert landscape. Swainson's pea *Swainsonia* sp. PHOTOS: WAYNE LAWLER/ECCOPIX



BUSH HERITAGE PRIORITY REGIONS



Anchors in the landscape

Beyond the Boundaries Coordinator Stuart Cowell gives a long-term perspective on the role of Bush Heritage reserves in providing a genuine conservation solution

There is no doubt that Bush Heritage reserves are spectacular places. Each in its own way safeguards some of Australia's most important plants and animals and the bush on which they rely. But the reserves are also important because they provide a conservation 'focal point' in their region, a focal point that can nurture conservation efforts on surrounding properties.

Let me illustrate this by telling you about a pleasant Saturday in May when my father and I spent some time clearing the walking track on the Liffey River Reserve in Tasmania. Taking a break, we sat sharing a 'cuppa' under an old myrtle tree and watched as a platypus searched methodically through the sand and pebbles on the riverbed for a tasty meal.

Once, my father and I might have seen the platypus as simply a delightful river-dwelling animal that needed protection for its own sake. We now know that it is also an integral part of

a healthy temperate river ecosystem. In the same way, we can see that Bush Heritage reserves are not just sanctuaries for plants and animals; they are also important in helping to sustain the natural systems of the regions in which they occur. Moreover, the reserves are sources of expertise and hope for other conservation workers, and places from which to build regional conservation initiatives. In other words, Bush Heritage reserves are 'anchors'* in the landscape.

In *Bush Heritage News* Autumn 2003 Sophie Underwood and I reported on work done by Bush Heritage to determine the strategy that would produce the most effective conservation results. That work launched a 'free and frank' exchange of views that crystallised into a plan for the future: to focus our efforts in specific regions rather than spreading our resources thinly across the country, and yet to remain open to broader opportunities.

The regions we chose had to be under immediate threat from a factor or factors that we could influence, protect as many significant species as possible, be able to support healthy ecosystems throughout the process of climate change, be located where the establishment of an 'anchor' would provide significant benefits for



conservation in the wider community, and build on what we had already achieved.

It would take a lifetime of 'cups of tea by a river' to reach universal agreement about where our efforts should be focused. There are always other regions, other priorities, other possibilities. However we needed to start somewhere. In the end, five regions stood out: south-west Western Australia, the grasslands and grassy woodlands of southern Australia, the midlands of Tasmania, the Channel and Gulf country of Queensland and the Northern Territory, and the brigalow belt and uplands of Queensland.

Opportunities will arise outside these regions, and in fact already have. Some are too important to pass up: working to protect Hunter Island, trialling a new conservation model at Reedy Creek in Queensland, developing partnerships in South Australia.



It would be negligent of us not to follow these to their conclusion.

But there are also many lifetime's work in the 'anchor' regions. There are reserves to acquire, conservation management to refine, and support to give for conservation management on neighbouring country.

Using the same determined and methodical approach as our platypus searching for her dinner, we, the supporters and staff of Bush Heritage, have identified and protected key properties by using the best of our knowledge and combining our resources. We will keep on doing it for the foreseeable future. But there are also other important opportunities to seize, including working beyond our own boundaries. By concentrating our efforts around our 'anchors' in the landscape and helping neighbours and other regional land managers to bring conservation management and expertise

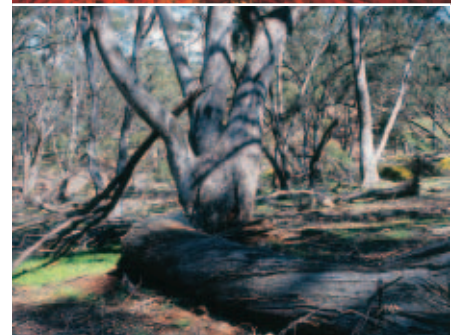
to their land, the country and its wildlife will see much greater benefits.

My father and I finished our cups of tea – it's always hard to have one in such a relaxing spot – and got on with the day's work. The platypus was long gone. However, knowing she was still there somewhere in the river gave me confidence that the river was healthy, and hope that by protecting habitats like those at the Liffey River Reserve we can be instrumental in restoring the health of our environment both within and beyond our reserve boundaries.

*An anchor not only represents security; in heraldry it is the emblem associated with hope.

From the top: Liffey River Reserve, Tas. Ethabuka Reserve on the edge of the Channel Country. PHOTOS: WAYNE LAWLER/ECOPIX
Judith Eardley Reserve in the grassy woodlands of south-eastern Australia. PHOTO: DAVID TATNALL Monjebup Reserve in the South West Botanical Province. Rare Corackerup moort *Eucalyptus vesiculosa* is protected on Monjebup Reserve.

PHOTOS: JIRI LOCHMAN/LOCHMAN TRANSPARENCIES



Weeds, work and sticky date pudding

Wendy Radford was a volunteer at the recent weeding blitz at Charles Darwin Reserve, Western Australia

In August 2005 Charles Darwin Reserve was a rippling sea of white and pink paper daisies, and we were struck by the beauty of the woodlands and the spectacular variety of flowers. Our intrepid crew of weeders was primed to do battle against double gee, cape weed and London rocket, weeds that posed a threat to this wonderland of biodiversity.

Months earlier, in a flash of audacity, Reserve Manager Leigh and his wife Jackie had conceived of achieving a weed-free reserve. Leigh was not sure how his plan would work with the wide range of volunteers who arrived to help, but the evenings spent sharing expertise with novices and experts alike helped to fine tune the details.

At Charles Darwin Reserve, weeds occur where there have been farming activities and disturbance of the ground, whether by vehicles, stock or water. The wells, stock traps and roads are the chief repositories of weeds, and the wild goats and vehicles the main vectors. Thirty-seven sites have been identified as problem areas, occupying less than two per cent of the reserve.

Our work at Quandong Well was an example of how we tackled the problem. It took the team five days to clear this area. Our aim was to allow the plentiful native vegetation to out-compete the weeds. This meant weeding the infested areas by hand rather than spraying, including along drainage lines out into the bush. Where weeds had completely taken over it was possible to spray, but only if the seed was still immature.

At night we enjoyed the company around the pot-belly stove after hearty meals prepared by Jackie, Leigh and the gang. Yes, 'Donga's Restaurant' provided some memorable culinary delights, including sumptuous chocolate cheesecake and sticky date pudding. A view of the stars from the roofless shower after a hard day's weeding was just one of the many impressions I took with me from Charles Darwin Reserve.

Thanks, Jackie and Leigh and all of our fellow workers, for a thoroughly memorable time.

Clockwise from top. Getting the weeds by mechanical means. Satisfaction by the bucketful. Hand weeding the comfortable way. Some of our intrepid weeders.

PHOTOS: LEIGH WHISSON



A heartfelt thanks to all those who participated with such commitment in the inaugural weeding bee at Charles Darwin Reserve. With a total of 42 participants and nearly 300 person-days of work, it was a huge success. Of the 37 sites surveyed, 25 were completely weeded and seven partly weeded. Only five sites were not visited. A fantastic effort! Please join us again next year.

Leigh Whisson
Reserve Manager, Charles Darwin Reserve

From the CEO

Bush Heritage has secured its 21st reserve and it is stunning (see Pages 1–3). Cravens Peak lies in the heart of the Outback and will protect examples of some of the most important and as yet unreserved vegetation communities in the Channel Country. Its populations of small mammals and reptiles are unusually diverse.

With the purchase of Cravens Peak, Bush Heritage now protects over ‘one million acres’ of land and water, more than 171 vegetation communities and populations of at least 55 threatened animal species. What a remarkable achievement for our 14 000 supporters in only fourteen years!

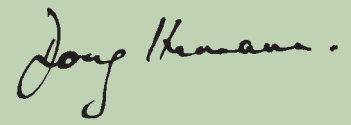
However, these reserves are more than satisfying lists or figures in accounting tables. They are functioning, living systems, supported and actively managed by professional staff, volunteers, visitors

and research teams. They are also places of learning, where our knowledge of the environment and how best to manage it is growing all the time. As we continue to work with, and learn from, our neighbours and local communities, we will be better able to help care for the broader landscapes around us.

Recently our colleagues at The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in the United States announced the startling reappearance of the ivory-billed woodpecker in the Big Woods of Arkansas (www.nature.org/ivorybill). The bird had been considered extinct but was rediscovered in areas conserved by TNC and others in the Mississippi Delta. Whether or not we contribute to such a discovery in Australia, Bush Heritage reserves provide a haven for native species, contribute significantly to maintaining healthy, functioning landscapes and provide wonderful opportunities for

research, visitation and education. The reserves we protect contribute measurably to the abundance of life on earth. As I write this in my flourishing spring garden in the suburbs, it makes me optimistic and enthusiastic about the opportunities ahead.

Thank you for your continuing support and encouragement of Bush Heritage. If you can help us further by giving for the acquisition of Cravens Peak, it would be an important contribution. The forthcoming months promise further exciting developments. In the meantime, please enjoy a safe and happy festive season and New Year, and don't hesitate to visit www.bushheritage.org or call the Conservation Support Centre at 1300 NATURE (1300 628 873) if you have any questions.



In memory

Judith Ambler, ‘a passionate and concerned protector of the natural environment’ and loyal supporter of Bush Heritage since 1993, passed away recently. At Judith’s request her friends and family donated to Bush Heritage in her memory. The gifts were too numerous to mention individually. She will be sadly missed.

Heather Willsher and family remembered their pa **Ted Fitzgerald**, ‘who loved our Australian bush’. Anne Marks honoured her father **Charley Morris**.

Deborah Lehman and Michael Alpers sent a gift for their close friend **Sandy Skinner**, and Dr Ieva Dzintars remembered **Mr Meihubers**. Julia Masny gave in memory of **Genevieve Palmer**, and Heather Stewart honoured **Cec Southern (Croft)** ‘for more than 50 years of friendship’.

Julie Hamilton donated in memory of **Dr Margaret Scott**, ‘Tasmanian poet and a warm and inspiring person who embraced Tasmania as her home’.

In celebration

Paul Pryor made a donation for **Jacquie Pryor** to become a patron of the Charles Darwin Reserve on the occasion of her 60th birthday.

The **Winter, Myles** and **Duff** families and friends made a commitment at Christmas time to donate to Bush Heritage instead of buying Christmas presents. They have made a wonderful contribution towards Ethabuka Reserve in western Queensland.

Birthday gifts were sent by Janet Forster for her son-in-law **Mitchell Cork**, by Jill Robinson for her brother-in-law **Barrie Robinson**, by Stuart and Leah Brooks for their daughter **Dr Roslyn Brooks**, by Nolene Rowell for **Margaret Flint**, and by Mrs R Filipczyk for her son **Martin Filipczyk**. Geoff Cumming donated to celebrate the 60th birthday of **Garth Powell**.

To celebrate their 50th birthdays, twins **Heather Coleman** and **Phillip Sinclair** asked guests to donate to Bush Heritage in lieu of gifts.

Thanks

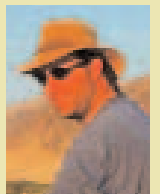
Our special thanks to the late **Valette Williams** who left a significant bequest to Bush Heritage to help protect the Australian animals and birds that she loved.

New staff

Richard MacNeill has taken on the responsibilities of geographic information systems (GIS) and data coordinator. Before coming to Bush Heritage he worked with the Victorian Government administering cultural heritage databases and coordinating the development of spatial information systems.



Julian Fennessy has joined Bush Heritage as Conservation Partners Coordinator. Julian has worked in wildlife research and community-based natural resource management for many years in the arid zones of southern Africa. For the past five years, he has worked in conservation in the non-profit sector.



Getting involved

VOLUNTEER RANGERS

If you enjoy being in the bush, why not become a volunteer ranger? It might be your first stint or your fifth but, if you are good with your hands, or prefer just to lend a hand, please consider working with us somewhere in Australia's great outdoors on your next holiday. You will play a vital role in caring for one of the Bush Heritage reserves.

Planning for the 2006 Volunteer Ranger Program is under way. Any of you interested in a spot of intense weeding at beautiful Carnarvon Station Reserve over the summer, please contact us! Goonderoo Reserve in south-central Queensland will begin taking volunteer rangers in 2006. This reserve, nestled in the heart of the Brigalow country, is a gem with a remarkably complex vegetation structure. Work will include general reserve management tasks and infrastructure projects.

Ethabuka, Charles Darwin and Carnarvon Station reserves benefited greatly from the work of volunteer rangers in 2005.



WORKING BEES

Bush Heritage working bees involve camping, some hard work and a lot of fun and satisfaction. The tasks depend on the management priorities of the reserve but include maintaining tracks, removing fences, improving infrastructure and, of course, weeding.

April 2006: Goonderoo Reserve, Qld, Saturday 22 to Sunday 30. Our first working bee on this beautiful reserve will focus on small-scale infrastructure improvements and weeding.

A number of working bees are planned for the Judith Eardley Reserve, Victoria, in early 2006. Dates will be confirmed in the next *Bush Heritage News*.

For all volunteering enquiries please look on the website or contact Joelle Metcalf on email volunteers@bushheritage.asn.au or 03 8610 9102 or 1300 NATURE (1300 628 873).

Sally Jarvis injecting wheel cactus at Judith Eardley Reserve, Vic. PHOTO: DAVID BAKER-GABB
Sunset at Cravens Peak Reserve, Qld. PHOTO: WAYNE LAWLER/ECOPIX



FIELD TRIPS

We have an exciting program of field trips scheduled for 2006, which will be advertised in future editions of *Bush Heritage News* and on the website. Bookings are essential, as places are limited. Below are some trips available early next year. Dates will be confirmed, and bookings, open in 2006.

April:
Burrin Burrin Reserve, NSW, evening spotlight tour, Friday 7.
Brogio River Reserve, NSW, field day, Sunday 9.
Charles Darwin Reserve, WA, field trip, late April (date to be confirmed).

May:
Tarcutta Hills Reserve, NSW, field weekend, Friday 12 to Sunday 14.

For information on attending field trips, or to RSVP, please contact Katrina Blake on 03 8610 9124, fax 03 8610 9199 or email kblake@bushheritage.asn.au

CAMPING

Carnarvon Station, Charles Darwin and Ethabuka reserves will be closed for camping over the summer fire season, from November 2005 to March 2006.

Camping, caravan sites and home stays are available at Eurardy Reserve, WA. Please ring the reserve direct on 08 9936 1038 or fax 08 9936 1054.

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