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Gondwana Link – simple ideas, complex outcomes and a new reserve

Stuart Cowell is managing the Bush Heritage contribution to Gondwana Link in south-west Western Australia

Regular readers of *Bush Heritage News* will know about Gondwana Link, an exciting, challenging and inspiring project in south-west Western Australia. Gondwana Link is about conservation in a rural landscape and bringing many partners together to benefit the environment and local and regional communities.

Native habitat across the South-West has been heavily fragmented and Gondwana Link aims to reconnect the larger fragments all the way from the wet forests of the south to the semi-arid woodlands near Kalgoorlie. Gondwana Link will restore a great arc of bushland and protected areas that will once again enable the free movement of species.

So far, Bush Heritage, our supporters and our partners have purchased four properties and established some of the most significant biodiversity regeneration work yet seen in Australia. The latest purchase, the 923 hectare Yarrabee Wesfarmers Reserve, abuts the Stirling Range National Park, protects a significant area of *Banksia* woodland and is the site of the most extensive ecological restoration work yet attempted in Australia. The property is jointly owned by Bush Heritage and Greening Australia WA.

Gondwana Link is a complex project but it arises from a relatively straightforward proposition: to exponentially improve the health of existing native vegetation by building on and reconnecting what remains.

Clockwise from top: *Banksia baxteri*. PHOTO: AMANDA KEESING
The honey possum is a resident of the Banksia woodland.
PHOTO: JIRI LOCHMAN/LOCHMAN TRANSPARENCIES
Looking from Yarrabee Wesfarmers Reserve to the Stirling Range. PHOTO: STUART COWELL

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Why? Well, the problems of fragmentation are clear. By breaking up the bush into small areas, and creating large spaces between those remnants, plants and animals that were once able to 'move' to escape deteriorating conditions are now effectively 'stuck'.

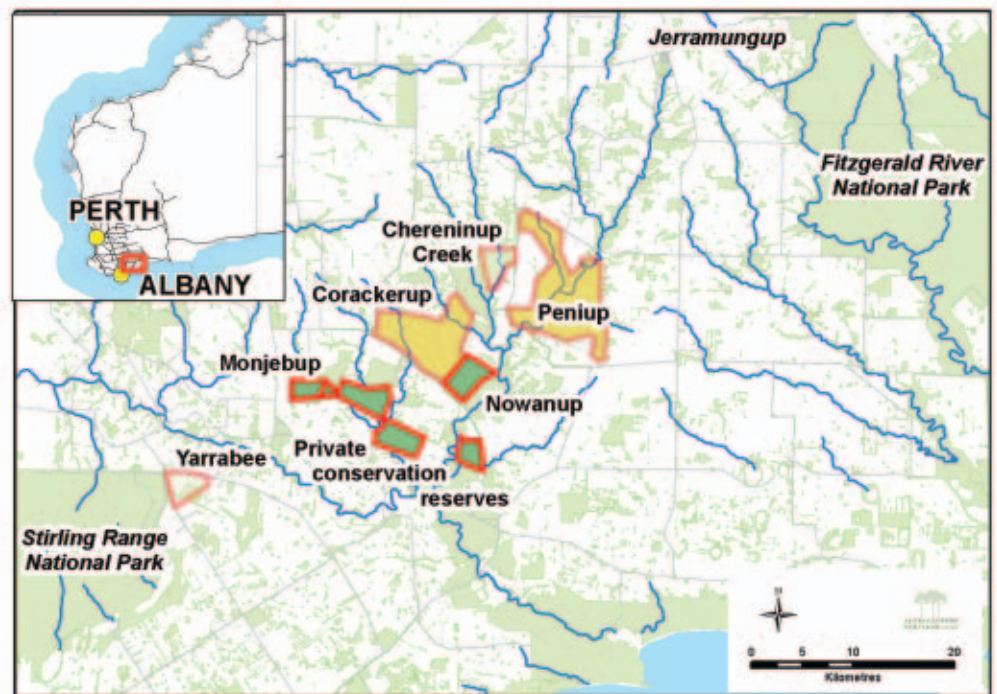
While it is true that plant communities do not move across a landscape very quickly – and individual plants not at all – they do 'move' over millennia. The impacts of habitat fragmentation on plant communities can therefore take time to see. The impacts on animals and the environment are generally more immediate. Animals lose their shelter and food. Soils and salt that have been held in place by plants move with somewhat more alacrity once the plants are gone. Overall, the result is an environment that is no longer able to work as it should, requiring constant intervention and action.

So, that is why the task is relatively straightforward – 'unfragment' the landscape, stick it back together, and get out of the way before you get run over by some migrating eucalypts.

How? A bit at a time. Start small. Protect a bit of land here and a bit of land there until you have two or three properties close together in a cluster. Create more clusters and then join up the clusters. In other words, gradually buy the bush that remains and replant the missing bits, re-establishing as much bush as you can. Species are then free to move again.

At a local level this process creates visible changes immediately. It will take many years for the changes to be seen over the entire project area. However, the process is under way.

The first three properties purchased, Chereninup and the two that were



combined to make Monjebup Reserve, have built a cluster with Greening Australia WA's Nowanup Reserve and the public Corackerup Nature Reserve. Yarrabee, the latest purchase, creates a cluster with the Stirling Range National Park. These two clusters are developing and will soon be linked. And this is where our various project partners are essential!

Bush Heritage is buying and managing the large areas of relatively intact bush, the building blocks of Gondwana Link. Greening Australia WA is bringing its experience to revegetating the cleared areas and linking the building blocks. Together we are building clusters.

The Wilderness Society is assisting by increasing our understanding of environmental processes on different scales, from the local to the regional and national scales. It has funded a scientist who has helped to create the overall plan for Gondwana Link.

Community groups such as the Fitzgerald Biosphere Group and Friends of the Fitzgerald provide the essential connection between our activities and those of the regional communities and towns of which we are becoming a part.

And the Noongar people, the Traditional Owners of the region, are working to ensure that their cultural connection is woven into the project.

So far, so good! Together, Bush Heritage and its supporters, and Greening Australia WA, have purchased 5353 hectares, and by the end of this planting season will have regenerated 1158 hectares of this overall area. Wildlife species protected include the rare and endangered western whipbird, malleefowl, Carnaby's cockatoo and red-tailed phascogale. A number of plant species with very limited ranges have already been protected, such as the Corackerup





moort, dwarf spider orchid, Monjebup wattle and Barren's wedding bush.

Now we just need to continue that work across about 14 million hectares (equivalent to twice the size of Tasmania) along a pathway about 850 kilometres in length. This looks more like an impossible goal than an ambitious one, but one of the terrific things about Gondwana Link is that it is about doing the possible while imagining the impossible.

We have broken the 850 kilometre pathway into smaller operational areas. We will work on these one at a time and thus focus on the unique challenges in each. If we can continue to 'link' clusters within each of the operational areas, presumably over many years and possibly decades, we can eventually link areas.

Our first operational area lies between the Stirling Range and Fitzgerald

River national parks where the Corackerup and Peniup nature reserves are the core building blocks.

This first stage of the plan sounds achievable when described as reconnecting habitats on 460 000 hectares over a distance of about 70 kilometres. Or we can look at it another way, as working in an area less than two-thirds the size of the land currently owned by Bush Heritage and over a shorter distance than from Ethabuka's homestead to its back fence.

Bush Heritage, its supporters and the other Gondwana Link partners have only just started this regional repair work. Finishing the revegetation of Yarrabee will be the most emphatic statement to date of our vision and capacity. This 600 hectare replanting job has been generously funded by the South Coast Regional Initiative Planning Team (SCRIPT) with the support of the West Australian and

Australian governments through the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. Bush Heritage and Greening Australia WA have further cemented their partnership by jointly purchasing and owning this property.

The Nature Conservancy, based in the United States, is promoting the project internationally and providing additional support by helping us all to develop a strategic approach to landscape planning and management.

There is still a long way to go just to rejoin the habitats in this operational area, and then we must tackle the next one, and the next. But already the pattern of linked landscapes and inhabitants is starting to emerge. It is a complex process based on a beautifully simple concept and it is of great value. We really are doing what may seem impossible.

Yarrabee Wesfarmers Reserve was acquired with generous support from Wesfarmers. Wesfarmers' contribution substantially met the reserve's purchase cost.

Facing page: Volunteer team about to embark on the replanting program at Chereninup in 2003. PHOTO: CRAIG KEESING

Clockwise from top: Western pygmy possum. PHOTO: JIRI LOCHMAN/LOCHMAN TRANSPARENCIES Red kangaroo paw *Anigozanthos rufus*. PHOTO:STUART COWELL *Banksia attenuata*. *Isopogon triloba*. Revegetation at Chereninup has been very successful. PHOTOS: AMANDA KEESING



Chilling out in central Queensland

Reserve Manager Darren Larcombe and his wife Sandy thank the volunteers who worked so hard at the working bee at Carnarvon Station Reserve in June

In central Queensland, nestled hard against the Great Dividing Range, lies Carnarvon Station Reserve. Its spectacular landscape of rocky escarpments, native grasslands and wonderful forests and woodlands, chilly in June, was the setting for a very successful working bee. Thirteen volunteers arrived, armed with great enthusiasm and spirit, and lent us a hand over a ten-day period. Some had travelled distances of up to 1000 kilometres to get here.

The purpose of the working bee was to tackle several large infrastructure and conservation projects that were difficult for reserve managers Darren Larcombe and Bryan Gorry to find time for because of the demands of their normal land management duties.

The volunteers' wonderful work has seen an improvement in facilities for both staff and visitors to the reserve and the removal of kilometres of old fencing that was limiting the natural movements of the wildlife.

Now the reserve has a concrete slab in the garden shed, a sealed surface adjacent to the visitors' showers, and sound floor timbers on the verandah of the visitors' accommodation. Concreting the workshop floor and service pit has given the reserve staff a safer and more comfortable workspace.

The water supply also received some much-needed work which included the installation of a grey-water system. This will enhance water conservation and remove the burden of constant repairs to burst and leaking pipes.

While the infrastructure work was under way, a small team of volunteers concentrated on removing old fences along Carnarvon's Channin Creek to once again allow the free movement of wildlife between the creek and adjacent grasslands. In one week the crew removed more than eight kilometres of fencing! Within days a large group of emus was foraging in grassland that had previously been unavailable to the birds. Just begun, this fence-removal project will require long-term volunteer support before we see the whole reserve opened up again.

Our volunteers stayed in the old homestead and barracks and shared stories around the large open fire after



dinner each night. It was a delight to give them a day off mid-way through the working bee to show them some of the highlights of the reserve and explain its outstanding conservation values. The remarkable 'Paint Pots' is an important spot, the source of different-coloured ochres used by the traditional Aboriginal owners, the Bidjara people. At our lunchtime stop at Cattle Creek Lookout we gazed down over a variety of the threatened vegetation types including the Queensland bluegrass *Dichanthium sericeum* downs and expanses of brigalow *Acacia harpophylla*, which are now protected on Carnarvon.

The afternoon finished with a walk from the 'White Stallion' to the top of the Great Dividing Range. Once at the top we were rewarded with spectacular panoramic views of Carnarvon Station Reserve, taking in the Buckland Tableland to the east and





Chesterton Range to the south. From this vantage point, everyone could also observe the stark contrast between the effect of land-clearing practices on neighbouring pastoral properties and the richness of protected areas such as Carnarvon Station Reserve and the adjacent Carnarvon Gorge National Park.

Our working bee was hugely successful and the staff and families of Carnarvon Station Reserve sincerely thank all the participants for their efforts. We hope there will be another working bee in 2007. Any takers?

Facing page from top: Concreting the garden shed floor.

PHOTO: DARREN LARCOMBE Looking down over the valley at Carnarvon Station Reserve. **PHOTO: WAYNE LAWLER/ECOPIX**

Clockwise from top: Volunteers dismantling the old fences.

PHOTO: ROY CLEVELAND Bush Heritage Ecologist Hugh Pringle takes photographs of the malleefowl at Charles Darwin Reserve.

PHOTO: KURT AND ANDREA TSCHIRNER Salmon gum woodlands at Charles Darwin Reserve. **PHOTO: JIRI LOCHMAN/LOCHMAN TRANSPARENCIES**

Another fence is removed. **PHOTO: ROY CLEVELAND** Our great team of volunteers. **PHOTO: DARREN LARCOMBE**

Malleefowl action

Reserve managers Kurt and Andrea Tschirner report on sightings of malleefowl

With the purchase of Charles Darwin Reserve in Western Australia in 2003, one of the key species that Bush Heritage hoped to benefit was the nationally threatened malleefowl. This beautifully marked bird is now at risk throughout Australia because its mallee habitat has been cleared or fragmented, sheep and goats graze its food plants and foxes prey on its young.

Since February 2006 we have had eight sightings of malleefowl on the reserve. We have also found many fresh tracks, particularly around the homestead area. This is great news for Bush Heritage, and a great step for the conservation of this species in the northern wheat belt of Western Australia.





Making a real difference

Caroline Chisholm and Danny Jumpertz reflect on safeguarding our precious natural heritage for future generations

Danny and I both adore the Australian natural environment. I grew up on Sydney's northern bush fringe, and Danny in Altona in Melbourne's west, an important area for migratory birds. We get away as often as we can to remote places such as Wilson's Promontory National Park where we holiday every year.

When we married we requested that, rather than giving us gifts, our wedding guests should make donations to the Australian Bush Heritage Fund. Donations from our wedding went towards the purchase of Chereninup Creek Reserve in Western Australia.

Shortly after our marriage, Danny and I wrote our wills. This included making bequests to some of the organisations we support. The amounts were not huge but, as our lives and circumstances change, these may change too. The important thing for us was, and is, to state what we strongly believe in, the preservation of our unique Australian environment.

Sadly, Australia has a fairly dismal record on the environment, but organisations such as Bush Heritage are working to redress this. Our support of their work, both now and through a gift in our wills, is something we can do to help them make a real difference for future generations.

You, too, can make a real difference to the future of our precious natural environment 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

Karen and Al say farewell to Ethabuka

Ethabuka Reserve managers Karen Harland and Alistair Dermer are moving on after making an outstanding contribution to the establishment of Ethabuka Reserve in far-western Queensland. They have been there from the start and have survived the 'hostile' conditions at the reserve while it was in its infancy. Al and Karen now leave the place in great condition, having set up the reserve's infrastructure virtually from scratch, and having made a solid start on the conservation management of the land. We thank them and wish them well. We welcome Scott Morrison and Sajidah Abdullah (and Thor) as the new managers of this wonderful desert reserve.



Sajidah, Scott and little Thor are the new reserve managers at Ethabuka Reserve.

In memory

The families and friends of **Geoffrey Findlay** and **Carolyn Stuart** gave in their memory. Leigh Fielder remembered **Mrs Joan Parsons**, **Mrs Peg Spink** and **Mrs Ruth Altman**. Terry and Caroline Bellair honoured **Mary Liz Holbeach**. Dr Helen Jenkins donated to honour the memory of **Mrs Joan Jenkins**. Beth and Brigid McLean gave for **Dorothy Harris**, 'a true lover of the Australian bush and its wild creatures'.

Lynette Illingsworth donated in memory of her mother **Thelma Martel**, who was 'green to the core', and Paul Gibson remembered his mother **Joan Gibson**, 'who loved the Australian bush'. Kaye Millar also honoured her mother **Lillian Roberts**.

Julie Felton gave for her father, mother and brother, **Lloyd, Una** and **Steve**. Janette Asche gave for her parents **Norma** and **Bill Tomsett**, and Robyn Boorer donated in memory of **Norma Tomsett**. Colin Jones remembered his wife **Janet Coveney**.

Ron and Robin Corringham honoured their cousin **Dr Patricia O'Flynn**. The Aylott family remembered their son and brother **Nigel Aylott**, 'a great adventurer and lover of the Australian bush'.

In celebration

Greg Holding celebrated **Men's Health Week** with a gift to Bush Heritage, and the staff and students at Overnewton Anglican Community College donated for **World Environment Day 2006**.

Doug Smith gave for his newest grandchild **Callum**, and Garth and Junko Noone for the birth of their son **Lucas**.

Kaye Millar donated for her aunts **Kathleen** and **Vera Roberts**, both talented artists, to honour their great appreciation of the Australian bush.

Instead of exchanging gifts last Christmas, the Winter, Myles and Duffy families and friends contributed to Ethabuka Reserve.

From the CEO

Bush Heritage and its supporters have concluded an extraordinary twelve months of activity. I look forward to reporting the audited accounts for the financial year ending 30 June 2006, but the preliminary results indicate that this past year has been our best ever.

During this time, with the acquisition of additional reserves in Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia, almost 300 000 hectares of land and water have been added to our conservation estate, nearly doubling in one year the area of land we own and manage.

I extend my thanks and congratulations to you, our supporters, for your part in this wonderful achievement.

Importantly, through both the acquisition of these new reserves and through continuing improvements in reserve management, we have increased

protection for threatened species and communities. Now, with 24 reserves in all and at least one in each state, we protect over 670 000 hectares of critical habitats.

On the strength of increased support across the organisation in both human and financial terms, there has been greater activity on the reserves and there have been more opportunities for volunteers and for developing partnerships.

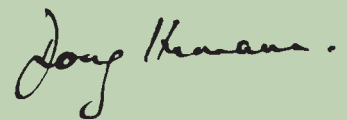
Our reserve-based staff receive great support and encouragement from volunteers and visitors, and it is for reasons of safety and management efficiency that we cannot yet provide additional opportunities for participation in this area. See Page 8 for upcoming events in which you are welcome to be involved.

It has also been pleasing to see Bush Heritage feature increasingly in the media. This helps to bring to public attention both the problems of biodiversity

loss and the practical solution that Bush Heritage offers. I know many supporters will be pleased to see this new level of exposure of our work. Our website carries a link to most of the media and journal articles and TV and radio reports that have been broadcast.

As an important window into our organisation, the Bush Heritage website is being improved this year. Major changes will not appear until late in the year but I encourage you to view it regularly for updates and news.

With clear goals and strategies for conservation in place, we are well placed to make further important gains for conservation in the future. Thank you again for your wonderful support. Please continue to help us in whatever way you can so that our work for the environment can continue to gain momentum.



We remember Rick Farley

Rick Farley died on 13 May in a tragic accident just months after he was severely debilitated by a brain aneurism. He had been a member of the Bush Heritage Board since 2002 and contributed greatly to Bush Heritage, particularly by promoting constructive alliances with Aboriginal people.

Rick had an active and illustrious working life during which he was Executive Director of the National Farmers' Federation and the

Cattlemen's Union of Australia. He was a member of the National Native Title Tribunal, the Australian Landcare Council, the national Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, the Australia-China Council and the Commission for the Future.

The following remarks have been adapted from the eulogy given at Rick's funeral by his good friend **Phillip Toyne**, President of Bush Heritage:

Rick was a great Australian who was contributing to the reshaping of Australia – to the way we relate to the land and to each other. He was highly principled ... a consummate advocate for farmers and later for Aboriginal rights.

Rick was also a creative alliance builder, believing that several interest groups could achieve way more together than any one could alone, and perhaps that is an enduring lesson to those working towards big solutions for Australia's future.

We must tell and retell the story of his achievements, for Rick's story can inspire a new generation of Australians and show

them that creating the sort of Australia we can and should have requires going beyond the relaxed and comfortable to confront the difficult and important.

We must redouble our efforts to create the sort of Australia Rick believed we should have – one that is fair and just and sustainable, particularly for Indigenous Australians. With so much achieved in his 53 years, we looked forward to more from him in the future. Australia has been sorely denied. We must never forget him.

Bush Heritage has established the Rick Farley Memorial Scholarship for young Indigenous people working in conservation management. Many friends and associates of Rick's, including organisations with which he worked, have made gifts to build the value of this scholarship. You are invited to contribute. For details please see www.bushheritage.org or phone 03 8610 9100.

