

BUSH HERITAGE NEWS

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Introducing your John Colahan Griffin Reserve

In central Victoria, a group of friends and family met to commemorate a nature and animal lover – and to witness the beautiful legacy he has left behind. Fiona Rutkay reports.

A crossroad in the tiny town of Stuart Mill, Victoria, (population 241) might seem an unlikely place for eight people from as far and wide as New Zealand, Ballarat and Melbourne to meet. But on October 16, a convoy of vehicles lined up near the central Victorian town on their way to a unique and special place – Bush Heritage’s newest property, the John Colahan Griffin Reserve.

The group had gathered to honour the life of John Colahan Griffin – their father, uncle and friend – and to experience the gift he had given to the reserve’s wildlife and to future generations of Australians.

As the group entered the property, kilometres of wind farms, agricultural land and canola crop gave way to beautiful woodland.

After two years of discussions and meticulous planning, the family had finally found just the right way to honour the wishes of the man that brought them together: 96 hectares of precious habitat for Australian wildlife was now protected forever in his memory.

“It was just terrific for us to see the reserve,” says John’s daughter Sally.

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“The birdsong was melodious and noisy in that marvellous raucous way... we had birds – cockatoos and galahs – flying overhead.”

*Above: Bush Heritage Reserve Manager Jeroen van Veen at the John Colahan Griffin Nature Reserve, Vic.
Photograph by Matthew Newton*



20 yrs
Our heart & soul

“It was a joyous occasion, with good people, memories and conversation. The birdsong was melodious and noisy in that marvellous raucous way... we had birds – cockatoos and galahs – flying overhead.”

As they walked through the big stands of box and stringybark eucalypts, and heathy forest, reserve manager Jeroen van Veen pointed out yam daisies and rare spider orchids.

“The property is in excellent condition,” says Jeroen, “and the vegetation under the trees is very healthy”. This vegetation provides plenty of shelter for diamond firetails, hooded robins and other woodland birds that are declining dramatically throughout the region. The reserve can also serve as a resting spot for the nationally endangered swift parrot as it migrates up north from Tasmania every year.

“This property connects other sections of bush to make this important landscape more robust – it provides corridors of habitat for wildlife to move through.” says Jeroen. The reserve is just the start of a plan to protect the remaining bush in the grassy box woodlands area by buying more properties, revegetating land and working with the local community.

John’s children are delighted that their father’s gift will have such far-reaching effects, not just for the wildlife on the reserve, but for wildlife all over the region. Throughout his life John loved animals and they were always part of his life. He was especially fond of birds – when he found one wounded, he’d put it into a cage to recover. When a bird needed extra warmth and protection, he’d place it in a box and bring it into the house.

“We chose Bush Heritage because they are very ambitious and they have a specific plan. They’re active and not prepared to watch from the sidelines.”

“In our family house, animals like birds and possums were as commonplace as the visitors,” remembers Sally. “When Dad was growing up, he had a relationship with nature without being conscious of it as we might be. He swam all year round in the St Kilda Sea Baths and had a large overgrown garden full of birds and pets. Sometimes he witnessed people being cruel to animals and would always challenge the perpetrator.”

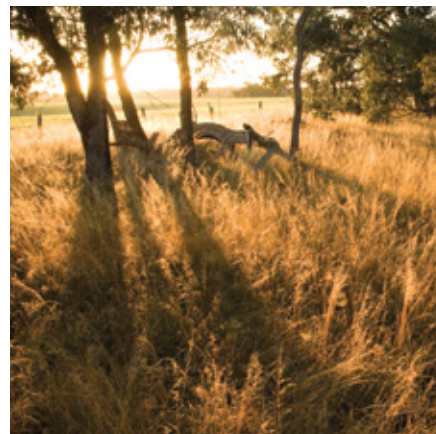
John wove these events into morality tales for his children, so it came as no surprise to Sally, Michael and Ric, that their father wanted to leave part of his estate to animals and nature. The gift that John left in his Will was so generous that it allowed not only for the purchase of the land, but will also contribute to its ongoing management.

“We were very happy about the decision because we share his love of all those things,” says Sally. “Certainly it’s an example for the rest of us to think along those lines – to leave money to causes that wouldn’t get the funding any other way.”

It was up to the children to decide where the money should go. “We chose Bush Heritage,” says Sally, “because they are very ambitious and they have a specific plan. They’re active and not prepared to watch from the sidelines. I know my father would have approved of that.”

While visiting the reserve, the Griffin family found a position for the plaque that will commemorate John. The plaque will stand between some trees overlooking a natural amphitheatre of red stringybarks and a waterhole, where family and friends gathered to remember John. Sally imagines it’s a spot her father would have liked very much. “He’d put his chair there, and love to just sit and think and enjoy.”

Bush Heritage Australia gratefully acknowledges the Estate of John Colahan Griffin for this very generous gift.



Top: Protected forever thanks to the lasting legacy of John Colahan Griffin
Photograph by Matthew Newton

Above: The nationally endangered swift parrot uses the reserve as a resting point on its annual migration to Tasmania
Photograph by Chris Tzсарos

A lasting legacy

Every gift, no matter how small or large, will make a real difference to the Australian bush. If you would like information on making a lasting legacy, contact Annie Mayo on **(03) 8610 9139** or amayo@bushheritage.org.au

This Christmas give a gift that lasts forever
Give a WILDgift
www.wildgifts.org.au

WILDgifts
BUSH HERITAGE AUSTRALIA
Our heart & soul



Left: The red-capped robin, a sign of a healthy ecosystem, repaired by Bush Heritage supporters
Photograph by Rob Drummond

Below: Ecologist Sandy Gilmore at Boolcoomatta Reserve, SA · Photograph by Bron Willis



Bobbin' robins

He may turn his back on you if you're trying to watch him, but as Lucy Ashley discovered, the red-capped robin has plenty to tell about how well you're looking after his home.

If you're lucky enough to spot one perched on a stump or a branch near the ground, you'll see why the red-capped robin is known as one of the busiest birds in the Australian bush. Stand a moment and watch this tiny creature flicking its wings and tail feathers while it combs the ground for food, but don't look away for long or it will be off. Catching unwary insects for dinner is important stuff – and these diminutive robins are masters of the chase.

While it sometimes catches prey airborne, the red-capped robin mostly forages for food on the ground. It cocks its head to one side, quickly lifting one wing and then the other, and shuffling its feet about in the leaf litter. This is the red-capped robin's inventive way of flushing out prey – or perhaps it's just doing its zumba.

The red-capped robin gets its name from the spectacular plumage adorning the male – a distinctive scarlet cap and chest. However, the female was short-changed in the plumage department. Unlike its showy partner, it is a nondescript grey-brown, with just a slight reddish tint to the crown.

Being a highly visible male red-capped robin in the Australian bush can have its drawbacks. Male robins have been known to turn their backs on observers in a somewhat comic attempt to disappear.

While the red-capped robin is not identified as a threatened species in Australia, it is declining in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. It is one of many insect-feeding bird species that have suffered greatly due to land clearing and habitat destruction. In the 250 years since Europeans arrived in Australia, 26 of our 850 native bird species or sub-species have been driven to extinction. By 2000, one in five native birds was listed as threatened.

But thanks to Bush Heritage supporters, it's a different story for many of the other bird species at Boolcoomatta Reserve in South Australia. Between 2006 and 2010 we recorded population increases of 235% for the white-winged fairy wren, 395% for the rufous fieldwren, 655% for the redthroat, 165% for the chestnut-crowned babbler and 109% for the chirruping wedgebill.

The results are a welcome reward for Bush Heritage ecologist Sandy Gilmore and his team of volunteers, who have together carried out five bird surveys since Bush Heritage supporters began protecting Boolcoomatta.

"With shrubland and ground-foraging birds in decline right across Australia, these results on Boolcoomatta clearly buck the trend,"

says Sandy. "As well as population increases, we have also found that many bird species have colonised Boolcoomatta or been recorded for the first time such as the brown songlark, grey fantail and red-capped robin."

The results are also good news for Bush Heritage supporters – since birds are present in just about every ecosystem and almost every level of the food chain, they can tell us a lot about how an ecosystem and its various elements are performing. The increasing number and size of bird populations at Boolcoomatta is a good indicator that our management practices are working – and it's all made possible by the ongoing support of the Bush Heritage community.

Back at Boolcoomatta, the red-capped robin has one more fascinating trick up its sleeve.

The male bird's red plumage is the result of the presence of two pigments, which the bird can't manufacture himself and can only get from his food. Several recent studies suggest that the redness of the male's plumage is therefore a good indicator of the health of its habitat.

Yet another way that the very red, red-capped robin is able to show you how well you're looking after his home.

Bush Heritage Australia gratefully acknowledges The Native Vegetation Council for their support of conservation activities on Boolcoomatta.



Read more about how your support has made such a difference to the Australian bush in our recently published *Their future in our hands*, a report on 20 years of private conservation with Bush Heritage Australia.

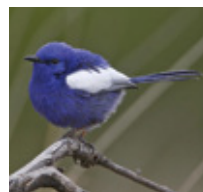
Download your copy now at www.bushheritage.org.au/their_future.html

Increase in abundance from 2006 to 2010

Left to right:
White-winged fairy-wren
Photograph by Lochman
Transparencies

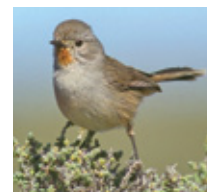
Redthroat · Photograph
by Graeme Chapman

Rufous fieldwren
Photograph by
Graeme Chapman



235%

White-winged
fairy-wren



655%

Redthroat



395%

Rufous fieldwren

Around your reserves in 90 days

Your support makes a difference in so many ways. We take a look into the successes at your reserves around Australia – achievements all made possible thanks to you.

Wunambal Gaambera

Bush Heritage has appointed a Healthy Country Manager, Dr Tom Vigilante, to work with the Wunambal Gaambera people on the implementation of a Healthy Country Plan. Tom's appointment is a key action in the ground-breaking, ten-year, agreement signed recently between Wunambal Gaambera people and Bush Heritage to work together to manage a new Indigenous Protected Area. The Indigenous Protected Area protects 340 000 hectares of Kimberley bush, at least 65 animal species and 102 plant species found nowhere else on earth. The goal of the Healthy Country Plan is zero loss of species.

Wildflowers blooming at Eurardy

Visitors to Eurardy Reserve were treated to an extraordinary wildflower show this season, after the property had its wettest year in more than 20 years. "Nature has done us a favour," says Reserve Manager Elizabeth Lescheid, who showed visiting wildflower enthusiasts displays of orchids, sandplain heath, everlastings and in particular, a rare flower called Eurardy wax. "We've only ever seen Eurardy wax in a few spots before now, but this year, it's showing up all over the place," says Elizabeth. High rainfall is an obvious reason for the extraordinary boom, as well as regeneration after a 2010 bushfire. But thanks to your support, Elizabeth and fellow Reserve Manager Matt Warnock have helped the land make the most of the favourable conditions, managing feral rabbits, goats and foxes, and controlling weeds.



Photograph by Geoff Spanner / GS Wildshots

80 per cent fewer rabbits at Scottsdale

Like many of our reserves, Scottsdale received plentiful rains in the last year, with grasses growing high and feed for native animals in endless supply. It's not just native animals that enjoy the good times though – during boom periods, rabbits can have four or five litters a year, with just 1000 rabbits producing up to 25 000 offspring. In June, thousands of you responded to that very real threat, by supporting our feral-fighting campaign across all our reserves. Thanks to your support and a team of dedicated and skilled volunteers, we've been able to prevent thousands of rabbits from breeding at Scottsdale. Reserve Manager Peter Saunders reports an 80 per cent reduction in the number of rabbits since volunteers began quarterly working bees three years ago. (Nationally and elsewhere in New South Wales, rabbits have increased in numbers.) That's 80 per cent fewer rabbits to feed on native grassland flowers like bulbines, creamy candles and milkmaids, all of which grow at Scottsdale.



Bush Heritage anchor regions



Bush Heritage partnerships



Bush Heritage reserves



Yourka back on track

Reserve managers Paul and Leanne Hales are well prepared for the summer fire season thanks to repairs made to access roads after Cyclone Yasi devastated infrastructure in early 2011. "In the last three months we've had a contracted dozer removing heavy cyclone timber and clearing fire breaks," says Leanne. The work has been made possible thanks to our generous supporters after dramatic news of the cyclone's destructive impact at Yourka, bolstered by disaster relief funding from the Queensland government. "For the first time since Bush Heritage purchased Yourka we have commenced our planned burn program with the security of bare earth breaks and clear tracks around fire blocks. Proactive fire management is the most critical management activity at Yourka as it protects our greatest natural asset, the diverse woodlands, from broadscale, devastating wildfire."



Photograph by Wayne Lawler

Hopping right into our hands

When Journalists from SBS, ABC and Channel 9 News visited Boolcoomatta Reserve in October, this tiny mouse stole the show. The journalists had gathered to witness firsthand the incredible difference Bush Heritage and its supporters have made since the property was purchased in 2006. Scientists carrying out Bush Heritage's first trapping survey of the reserve were thrilled to find a dusky hopping mouse in their monitoring trap – the first live capture of the mouse on record at Boolcoomatta. The teeth marks on Ecologist Jim Radford's hands suggest the mouse wasn't a willing participant, but that didn't stop it becoming a media star. The mouse, which is known for its feistiness, is listed as vulnerable in South Australia and, until recently, had not been seen in the area for at least 40 years.

Photograph by Peter Morris



New hope at Edgbaston Reserve



The path to conservation success can be long, winding – and sometimes a little muddy. But Dr Adam Kerezsy has good news from Edgbaston Reserve, where he continues his mission to save the red-finned blue-eye.

Dr Adam Kerezsy is unpacking his bags from his most recent trip to central Queensland's Edgbaston Reserve – roughly his twentieth such visit. It's lucky the freshwater ecologist is a patient man: he's been working with Australia's smallest freshwater fish (and one of the most endangered) on behalf of Bush Heritage supporters for three years, in a mammoth effort to save it from extinction. And finally, he has some good news to share with the thousands of people like you, who last year supported his quest.

"There is definitely good news to report," says Adam, in the familiar country twang that's been heard on a myriad of radio programs since the public got wind of his work. "I can now confirm that we have three new populations of blue-eye, which seem to be doing okay. It's early days yet – we're only six months in – but they're healthy and there are no feral gambusia in their new habitat."

That's big news for a fish whose only habitat in the world for some time was three, five-centimetre-deep springs on Edgbaston Reserve – and its thanks largely to people like you. Since June 2010, when thousands of supporters got behind Adam's quest to save the blue-eye, Adam has established plastic barriers to keep out feral gambusia ("mosquito fish"), a species that out-competes the blue-eye with its phenomenal breeding rate. He also relocated existing blue-eye populations into new springs that were free from gambusia. So far, the strategy seems to be working.

Conservation is rarely a straight road, however. "Sometimes," says Adam, "you take two steps forward, and one step back. Although the three new populations are doing well, we found that gambusia have invaded one of the established springs."

"It's a reminder that this challenge needs ongoing, regular attention. We can't just do our thing and walk away – there is no magical quick-fix. We need to be there for the long haul."

Dr Adam Kerezsy's interest in freshwater fish is far from a fad. He's been splashing about in waterholes and rivers since he was a teenager. His interest has taken him to Bush Heritage's Simpson Desert reserves, on an adventurous eight-week trip down the Kimberley's remote Berkeley River and dozens of other places, as he describes in his recently published book, *Desert Fishing Lessons*.

All of his fishy forays have involved chasing fish in unusual places, and Adam says the blue-eye is no exception. The blue-eye's tenacity is also part of its intrigue. "In some ways, the blue-eye seems as tough as nails. It survives in the harshest environment you could imagine for a fish. But in other ways it's very particular – the springs we move it to must be very similar to its original habitat or it just won't last."

Adam is a very long way from resting his hat. "Summer will be the make-or-break," he says. "That's when the rains come and we could get local flooding. All it would take is one big flood and we could be in trouble. We've got plenty of work to do yet."

Bush Heritage Australia gratefully acknowledges The Nature Conservancy's David Thomas Challenge for their generous support of this work.



*Top: Thanks to your support, Dr Adam Kerezsy has good news from the red-finned blue-eye at Edgbaston Reserve, Qld
Photograph by Alison Wheeler*

*Above: One of Australia's most endangered fish, the red-finned blue-eye, safer thanks to you
Photograph by Adam Kerezsy*

Desert Fishing Lessons

\$34.95 from UWA Publishing

The red-finned blue-eye might be the biggest challenge of Adam Kerezsy's fishy career, but it's certainly not the first. In his recently published book *Desert Fishing Lessons*, Adam takes readers along for the often humorous ride to places like Ethabuka and Cravens Peak reserves in his quest to understand our humble and very hardy freshwater fish.

For a fish-eye view of what life for a Bush Heritage ecologist is like, go to www.bushheritage.org.au/desert-fishing-lessons.html

Fire at Ethabuka Reserve

In late September, Steve Heggie clicked on satellite images of the Simpson Desert for what seemed like the hundredth time. The images told him what he'd been hoping to avoid – fire was on its way to Ethabuka Reserve.

It was a Monday morning when Steve Heggie hopped in his ute and turned it in the direction of Ethabuka Reserve, Queensland. As Regional Reserve Manager for Bush Heritage, Steve was used to making plans with one eye on Mother Nature, but that week, he was hoping she would bring waves, not fires – his car was packed, his surfboards strapped to the roof-rack and he and his wife were set for ten days holiday in Byron Bay.

Two days and 1700km later, Steve felt the hot, dusty air of the Simpson Desert on his skin as he greeted Reserve Managers Al and Karen Dermer at Ethabuka. Steve and twelve other Bush Heritage team members would spend the next two months fighting wildfire in an around-the-clock vigil, involving 32 firefighters including neighbours, volunteers from the local community and staff from government departments.

The fire would burn 760 square kilometres of land at Ethabuka and Cravens Peak reserves as well as thousands more in the Simpson Desert National Park and neighbouring pastoral stations. The Queensland government would declare the area a disaster area.

When Steve looked out over the Ethabuka landscape, he saw fingers of smoke and fire reaching high into the air. "In this part of the country, you can watch a fire come towards you for miles," he said. "At night, the orange glow of the fires can make them seem closer than they really are."

Within hours of arriving, Steve was putting years of training and fire management expertise into practice. He worked alongside his team as they fought to protect the homestead and other infrastructure, and to prevent the spread of fire to nearby properties, where neighbours rely on the land for their livelihood.

"This is exactly what we prepare for," said Steve. "Staff from two reserves in the east and Bon Bon Station in South Australia were ready to provide immediate backup. Soon after, reserve managers from further afield arrived to relieve them."

"It gets pretty intense – wearing your yellows (protective clothing) and feeling the heat radiating before you even get close to the fire. It's exhausting work."

Steve was relieved to have Bush Heritage supporters behind him. "It's important to have good systems and equipment – satellite phones, experienced staff, – none of that is cheap. We have a lot to thank our supporters for."

While images of the fires can be confronting, Steve is quick to offer reassurance. "Although we manage fire carefully and we plan for it, wildfire is not in itself a bad thing," said Steve. "It's part of the landscape. Over time, the land needs a patchwork of burns, which reduces the chance of huge, destructive wildfire."

After six weeks, Steve finally went home and stayed home. In an email to colleagues, he described himself as "fried – not so much physically, but mentally." He slept for twelve hours straight. At Ethabuka, Al and Karen would sleep with one eye open for weeks, as summer storms hung over the reserve. It's just the beginning of the fire season and the job is far from finished.



Photograph by Steve Heggie

How did your support help Steve fight the fire?

In November 2010, Bush Heritage supporters responded to our call to help fight wildfire on your precious reserves. Here's how you helped the firefighters on the frontline:

- Incident management training for reserve managers in July 2011
- \$80,000 of grader machinery dedicated to Cravens Peak and Ethabuka reserves
- Emergency safety "grab" bags for reserve staff to carry when working remotely
- Satellite phones, 'SPOT' tracking devices and satellite fire imagery
- Protective clothing for firefighting
- Bush Heritage staff equipped to respond quickly and safely by working around the clock and ensuring rest time between shifts

In memoriam

Hilary Thorn donated in memory of **Max Thorn**. Peter and June Poland made a gift in loving memory of their son **James**. Lindy Jones, together with friends and family donated in honour of **Roy Leigh**, a gentle man who wanted to leave the world a better place and who loved the untouched places of the world where birds, animals and plants have a chance to thrive.

In celebration

Mr V Dawson donated in celebration of **Andrew's** 60th birthday. Friends donated in celebration of **Louise Sylvan** and **Barry Catchlove's** wedding. Mr and Mrs Glenn and Judy Burns donated in celebration of **Dave** and **Steph's** wedding.



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FROM THE CEO



Signing off

In August 1997 I arrived at Hobart airport, to begin my role as Bush Heritage's first full-time CEO. I was equipped with my bike, a change of clothes, and a load of enthusiasm. It was the first of fourteen years of the tremendous adventure, challenge and opportunity that is Bush Heritage Australia.

Some things were very different then. I spent my first month in Hobart without my family and so on my 40th birthday I was delighted to receive birthday wishes from my children. They came via a fax machine, one which could have housed a small family!

Interstate travel in the late 90s was also not as sophisticated as it is today – one morning I sat on the plane at Hobart airport until the sun rose because the pilot wasn't credited to fly in the dark!

Bush Heritage has come a long way since I watched the sunrise touching the clouds on Mt Wellington that morning. Back then we were a handful of passionate conservationists with scant resources and big ideas. We owned six reserves covering several thousand hectares and our work was funded by a few visionary supporters.

Now, we are a team of more than 70 staff, with more than 947 000 hectares and 34 reserves under our management. We have thousands of committed supporters and an operating budget of more than \$10 million.

Some things have changed, yet others have stayed the same. I will still arrive at work on my last day as CEO, with my bike, a change of clothes and a load of enthusiasm for an organisation I respect immensely. In 1997, I believed that protecting the Australian bush through the tools of Bush Heritage was an achievable and essential goal. And in 2011, thanks to your support, that has been proven.

And although I haven't waited 'til sunrise for my plane to take off in a long time, I still look out over the landscapes that form the Australian bush and treasure the view. Our properties, partnerships and supporters now span the length and breadth of Australia.

I am confident that Bush Heritage is well positioned to meet the considerable challenges it faces, even as the global financial situation remains unpredictable. I am also confident that the board has made an excellent choice in appointing Gerard O'Neill as your new CEO. I have known Gerard for over 20 years and as a mutual acquaintance recently said to me, "he will keep the faith".

I have written regularly of my affection for Bush Heritage: my admiration for you, our supporters and how proud I am of Bush Heritage's achievements.

Thank you also to my family, friends and the many of you who have supported me on my personal and professional journey. Good wishes and good bye until I see you next.

Doug Humann, CEO

Yes, I want to make a difference!

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