

BUSH HERITAGE NEWS

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Naree Station
Wetlands in the outback

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Special edition Summer 2012

The magic of Naree Wetlands of the outback

*Above: A pied stilt wades in the dying sunlight at Naree Station
Photograph by Peter Morris*

In the north-eastern corner of New South Wales lies a remarkable place where woodlands and wetlands meet. Thanks to the quick action of Bush Heritage supporters Naree Station has been protected from immediate danger. Now you can help to secure its long-term management forever.

By Kelly Irving

Mist rises with the morning sun, as duck calls break the silence. Clouds shadow the black box woodlands and flocks of ibis ruffle their feathers and take flight. Wetlands stretch into the distance.

Welcome to Naree Station – Bush Heritage’s newest reserve, a 14,400-hectare property that you have the chance to protect forever.

Naree, located 150km north-west of Bourke in the remote north west of New South Wales, is aptly described as “wetlands of the outback”.

Why? “Naree is located on the Cuttaburra Creek, in the heart of the last free-flowing rivers of the Murray–Darling Basin – the Paroo and the Warrego – and it’s part of one of the 20 most important wetlands for waterbirds in Australia,” says Jim Radford, Bush Heritage’s Science and Monitoring Manager.

In May this year, the future of this beautiful place, and the creatures that thrive in its nationally renowned wetlands became suddenly uncertain.



BUSH HERITAGE
AUSTRALIA

Our heart & soul



The previous owners Paul and Debbie Kaluder, who had cared for Naree Station for six years, made the difficult decision to put the property on the market.

The future of this incredible place was of deep concern to the Environmental Water Trust (EWT), a national body protecting the health of Australia's rivers and waterways, and to renowned ornithologist Professor Richard Kingsford, who has been studying waterbird populations on Naree for over 26 years. Together, Richard and the EWT recognised Bush Heritage as the ideal new owners of Naree Station. Now, Bush Heritage supporters like you have the opportunity to help protect this outback wonderland forever.

A fight for life

"It's a good thing to see something you've nurtured go to someone who will carry it on," says previous owner Paul Kaluder about Bush Heritage's new role as owners and guardians of Naree Station. "We're delighted with the way Bush Heritage looks after their land."

When the Kaluders bought Naree in 2006, it had suffered years of drought and heavy grazing that had severely degraded the condition of the land. Determined not to let this magical land go to ruin, they worked tirelessly to restore the ecological health of the property through an innovative and progressive grazing regime.

Debbie Kaluder was also instrumental in the successful campaign to prevent the extraction of water from the Warrego River. If those plans had been allowed to continue, the wetlands' natural flooding and drying cycles would have been seriously affected, and along with it Naree's iconic waterbirds, like the brolga, freckled duck, pied stilt and spoonbills.

"Waterbirds like ibis, egrets and cormorants need regular floods to establish breeding colonies, which often doesn't happen elsewhere in the Murray-Darling Basin because most of the water is extracted or stored in dams," says Jim. "Naree is special because the extent and regularity of flooding means it is one of the more reliable and most important colonial waterbird breeding sites in inland Australia."

The future is in our hands

Thanks to the Kaluders, Naree is showing good signs of recovery. However, Naree's future remains far from secure.

"If we hadn't purchased Naree," explains Jim, "then it would have been sold on the open market, with the very real risk that it would have been bought by someone without the environmental credentials of the Kaluders or Bush Heritage. That could have had disastrous consequences for the wetlands and other ecosystems on the property."

"The Kaluders have been such responsible stewards of the land," says Richard Kingsford. "They represent everything that's great about people living in the bush. They're very practical, but they have a deep empathy and understanding of the country, wetlands and rivers and just how important it is to protect them."

Now, you too have a unique opportunity to help protect this unique property forever. "Think about how important the water is here," urges Richard. "Help ensure it's protected so we can be good custodians for future generations."



The kultarr

Naree is also home to mammals such as the kultarr, a nocturnal marsupial that weighs just 30g and measures 100mm, with a tail 1.5 times as long as its body. The kultarr bounds along at high speed, and inhabits other animals' burrows, like trapdoor spiders and hopping mice. The kultarr feeds on spiders and crickets and is found in sparsely vegetated arid plains like the acacia shrublands and woodlands found at Naree Station.

"Think about how important the water is here," urges Richard. "Help ensure it's protected so we can be good custodians for future generations."

Top: Grey teal at Naree Lakes

Photograph by Peter Morris

Above: The kultarr

Photograph by Jiri Lochman



Naree Station

Wetlands in the outback

With wings spread wide, the silver brolgas jump, dance, pirouette and prance...

Photograph by George Pergaminelis

A love for life on Naree: the brolga

Meet one of the stars of Naree – the brolga – a beautiful bird that loves, well, to love.

By Kelly Irving

Some birds attract a mate with a beautiful song, some flash their bright feathers and some, like the brolga or the Australian crane, like to do “a bit of a dance”.

“Brolgas have these elaborate courtship routines where they pick up sticks and leap high in the air, flapping their wings,” says Professor Richard Kingsford, an ornithologist (bird specialist) from the University of New South Wales, who has studied Naree’s bird populations for many years, and who has provided Bush Heritage with critical information to help make the decision to buy this special place.

With wings spread wide, the silver brolgas jump, dance, pirouette and prance on their long, stilt-like legs, while making loud trumpeting calls to each other. They beat their wings, bow and bob their featherless red heads – all in the name of love.

The brolga show

The brolga’s mating dance, which is often performed in flocks, is actually much more than just a show. “It’s about bonding with their lifelong partner,” says Richard. “When they mate, they do so for life, but this dance continues on even after they’ve chosen a mate. It’s an important way of reinforcing their commitments to each other.”

“They’re majestic, absolutely beautiful birds,” he adds. “They’re the largest water bird in Australia, but they’re very elegant and graceful. When they walk through the bush they’ve got such slow deliberate steps. They’re never in a hurry.”

A special place for a special bird

Though brolgas are widespread across Australia, and most commonly found in the north, one of their most important areas in southern Australia is around Naree.

“This part of the world is really important for these birds,” explains Richard. “Many of the world’s wetlands and rivers have been dammed and the water taken away, which means they lose their vitality. Naree still floods and dries naturally so we often see brolgas in large numbers here.”

Lots of fresh, natural water means lots of life. There are plenty of frogs, tadpoles, fish, small mammals and large crustaceans for brolgas to forage on and feed their young with.

On Naree, brolgas breed around January to June when the floods have delivered plenty of water. This is when they lay their eggs in the middle of the wetlands, on grass nests made into little platforms. Hence, the best time to view brolgas at Naree is just after the breeding season when they congregate in flocks.

Fight not flight

Any dramatic changes to the brolga’s environment, like water supply, could affect their food source and the ability to protect their young from feral pigs, foxes and cats.

“The brolga’s biggest threat is loss of habitat, particularly through draining of swamps and wetlands,” says Jim Radford, Bush Heritage’s Science and Monitoring Manager. “The areas where they breed are often destroyed through farming practices, which has happened across much of Australia.”

Thanks to the Kaluders, who have been careful not to overgraze and erode the land, this hasn’t occurred at Naree Station.

Thanks to Bush Heritage supporters like you, we’ve been able to act quickly to protect the brolga’s home by buying Naree Station. But there is much work still to do. While we’ve been able to secure the property, we still have to pay for it, and for critical set-up costs, a baseline ecological survey, and stopping the damage being caused by feral pigs and goats.

You can help safeguard this wonderful species for many more generations to come, by supporting the purchase of Naree Station – and that will give us all something to dance about.

Read more about Dr Richard Kingsford and the role he has played in the story of Naree Station on page 6.

Around Naree Station

From quiet waters where stilts wade, to open woodlands and foraging emus, Naree Station has a surprise around every corner. Here, we share the unique parts of Naree that you can help protect forever.

Naree Station Reserve, NSW

Naree Station homestead

This was the former family home of previous owners, Debbie and Paul Kaluder. Debbie ran a successful campaign to secure Naree's natural water flows virtually from the kitchen table. The homestead will provide a base for a reserve manager to live and for scientists and volunteers to base themselves during conservation activities, including ecological surveys and management of fire and feral animals.

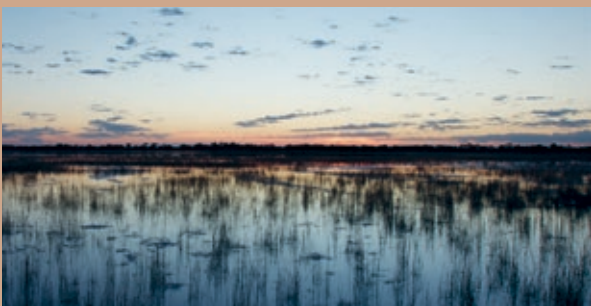


Photograph by Peter Morris

Yantabulla Swamp

Meeting of waters

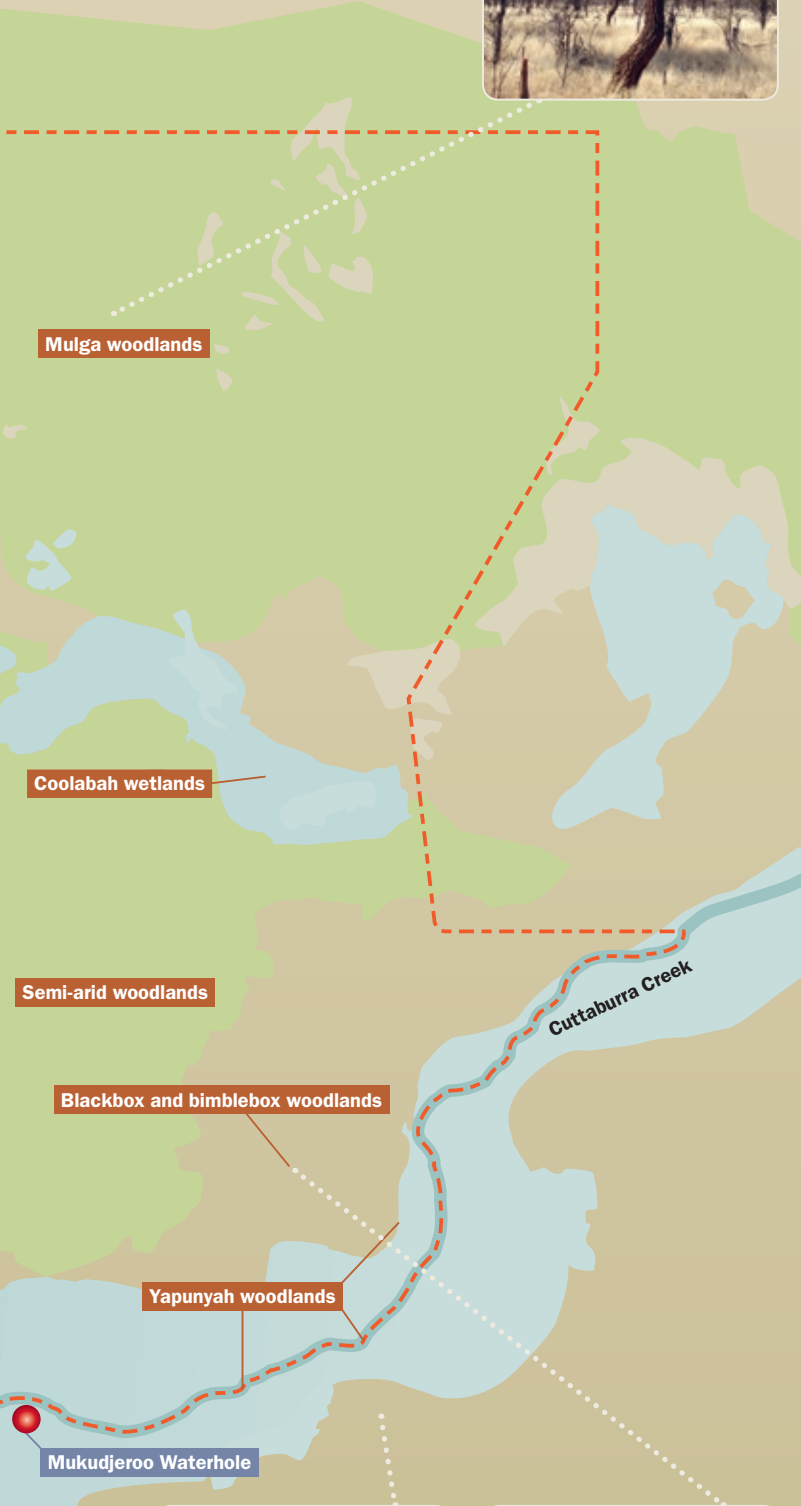
The location of Naree at the upstream end of the Yantabulla Swamp, and straddling the Paroo and Warrego River floodplains via Cuttaburra Creek, means that Naree contains an abundance of wetlands and aquatic habitats that support nationally significant populations of waterbirds. Large flows from the Warrego River flow through Naree via Cuttaburra Creek into Yantabulla Swamp.



Photograph by Peter Morris



- Feature
- - - Naree Station Boundary
- Waterways
- Waterways
- Woodlands



Animals of the woodland

With your help, ecological surveys can be carried out to find out more about the animal populations that Naree supports. Species recorded so far at Naree include the kultarr (read more about this endangered marsupial on page 2), emus and kangaroos (below).



Photograph (top) by Jiri Lochman and (bottom) Peter Morris

Wetland and woodland birds

Bush Heritage ecologist Jim Radford was stunned to see 40 different species of waterbirds during two days at Naree Station, such as pelicans, freckled ducks, pink-eared ducks and brolgas. Naree is also a feeding ground for sandpipers and greenshanks migrating from Siberia. Threatened woodland birds like the grey-crowned babbler, brown tree creeper and hooded robin are also resident on the property.



Photograph (top) by Graeme Chapman and (bottom) Peter Morris

The people who've loved Naree



Paul Kaluder, previous owner, Photograph by Peter Morris

Naree Station has found a place in the hearts of many who have helped to protect its wetlands and woodlands, including supporters like you who have generously donated already.

Here, a traditional owner, a scientist and Naree's former owners talk about what Naree means to them.

By Kelly Irving

Phil Eulo, Budjiti elder and representative

"This water is the lifeblood of our people," says Phil, who has lived off the land around Naree all of his life. "I catch fish by hand, just take what I need to eat. It's the old way of doing things, to respect the land. If you don't look after this land and water then they won't look after you."

For Phil and the Budjiti people, the area's traditional owners, you can't put a price on the wetlands of Naree. Not only are they of significant cultural and spiritual value, but they're also an ecological dream come true.

With the Yantabulla Swamp at one end and the Warrego River floodplains at the other, Naree is home to more than tens of thousands of waterbirds and many threatened and endangered species like the Major Mitchell's cockatoo and the kultarr, a small, carnivorous marsupial.

"It means a lot to us that country out there," Phil says, reminiscing about his childhood, camping along the creeks with his grandmother. "The land's just beautiful when it rains – the trees, the flowers, the sky – it really shows its colour after a good season. Every chance I get, I still go out there with a swag and camp along the river."

Professor Richard Kingsford, University of NSW

Professor Kingsford is an ornithologist (bird specialist), river ecologist and conservation biologist who has studied waterbirds and wetlands all over the world. Naree Station is one of his great passions.

"Wetlands like these are few and far between," explains Richard. "They're scattered like jewels across the continent. Yantabulla Swamp is undoubtedly one of the Murray–Darling's, and even Australia's, more important wetland systems because of its size and its colonies of waterbirds – ibis, herons and cormorants. They're just spectacular."

Naree Station incorporates the critical upstream section of Yantabulla Swamp. Richard has worked on Naree since 1986, studying waterbirds and recording the affects the floods have on their populations. His work here has given him a rare glimpse into a huge variety of birds, like pink-eared ducks, grey teal, pelicans, egrets and brolgas.



"There's always so much happening, particularly when the birds are breeding," he says. "They bring food in from the large wetland to feed their chicks. It makes it a really exciting place to work in."

Debbie and Paul Kaluder, previous owners

"Selling to Bush Heritage, with their values, and the way they look after their land is something we're delighted with. It's a good thing to see something you've nurtured go to someone who will carry it on, maybe do it better, probably do it better."

"Naree is a special property. It is unique. The wetlands that are here, you won't find in many places."

Below left: Richard Kingsford, University of NSW
Photograph courtesy of Richard Kingsford

Below right: Phil Eulo, Budjiti elder and traditional owner representative
Photograph by Bernard Eulo





Next year, supporters will be able to visit Boolcoomatta Reserve
Photograph by Boris Hlavica

Visit a Bush Heritage reserve



In our recent supporter survey, many of you told us you'd like to know what opportunities there are to visit the conservation reserves that your generous donations help to protect.

Above: Explore the rainforest of Liffey River Reserve
Photograph by Peter Morris

We offer self-guided visits to selected reserves. Choose your destination by visiting our website, where you'll find information on camping and day visits. You might choose to visit the gnamma holes at Boolcoomatta Reserve, SA, explore the rainforest at Liffey River Reserve, Tas, or catch a spring wildflower display at Charles Darwin Reserve, WA.

New next year

Our campsite at Boolcoomatta, SA, will be open from April to October (bookings essential). We will also be offering the chance for people with their own high-clearance 4WD to join a "tag-along" camping trip with our Reserve Manager at Cravens Peak Reserve, Qld. (Keep an eye out in the next newsletter and on our website for dates.)

For more information on all these options, go to www.bushheritage.org.au/visit

We're currently reviewing opportunities for supporters to visit reserves. We'll let you know when new visitation opportunities are confirmed.

Thank you

In memory

Burnie and Elidia Rymer and family donated in memory of Norman Edward Wisewould, "born in the bush; a lover of the bush". Shirley Prior donated in loving memory of her grandson Noah Sraberne Pryor on his birthday. Carl and Elaine Nolte donated in memory of Clive Saxton from WA. Alison and Steve Pascoe donated in memory of Dr Peter Human.

In celebration



Julie Duell donated in celebration of the launch of her book, *Joy and the Bush Sprites*.

Bush Heritage Australia
Level 5, 395 Collins Street
PO Box 329 Flinders Lane
Melbourne, VIC 8009
T: (03) 8610 9100
T: 1300 628 873 (1300 NATURE)
F: (03) 8610 9199
E: info@bushheritage.org.au
W: www.bushheritage.org.au

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FROM THE CEO

Firstly I want to pay tribute to Mauritz “Mo” Pieterse who perished in tragic circumstances last month on Bush Heritage’s Ethabuka Reserve where he worked as a Field Officer.

If you had met Mo you would have quickly grasped his strong commitment to conservation and his passion for the bush. He was a dearly loved member of the Bush Heritage team and is sorely missed.

The last month has been a difficult time for Mo’s family and friends and I have conveyed Bush Heritage’s deepest sympathy to his family. We are offering them, and our staff, all the support we can.

Down the track, we will work out how best to honour Mo’s contribution.

In the meantime we will pass on the many condolences we have received to Mo’s family.

While November was a tragic month for all at Bush Heritage, it also marked our launch of a campaign to protect one of Australia’s most important and unprotected wetlands.

Significantly, this campaign was launched with farmers, Debbie and Paul Kaluder, a remarkable couple who share a passion for caring for the land and waterways as part of a sustainable farming enterprise.

What is most exciting about Naree Station is that you can become a part of its story. While Bush Heritage has acted quickly and decisively to save Naree from an uncertain future, I need your support to ensure its long-term viability.

Debbie and Paul Kaluder started this story six years ago when they bought Naree Station and introduced the low-impact grazing techniques that are responsible for the remarkable health of this reserve.

Bush Heritage has now become part of Naree’s story, and now you, as one of the people that have helped us come so far, can also play a part.

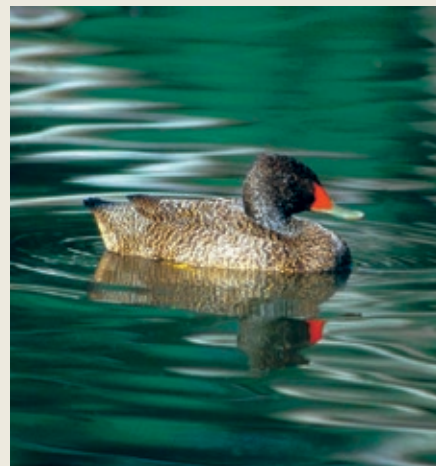
Many Australians like you have already joined us in our goal to protect Naree Station – so far we have raised over a million dollars of the \$3.1 million we need. If you are one of those people I’d like to thank you. But if you haven’t done so already, I encourage you to join us. Your support will help us repay the loan we’ve taken out to buy Naree. It will also help us to implement our science-based conservation methods, including a thorough ecological survey, which will tell us even more about Naree’s incredible birdlife and wildlife, and how to look after it.

“What is most exciting about Naree Station is that you can become a part of its story.”

I just know that if you visited Naree Station you would want it protected forever too. If you visited in the evening, you’d see the spectacular sight of the sun dipping over the horizon and the birds returning from the Yantabulla Swamp, to roost in the trees. You’d see white-faced herons and cormorants getting settled for the night. And in years to come, you’ll be able to share the journey of Naree, as we uncover more of its magic.



Gerard O’Neill, CEO



Secure Naree’s future

While Bush Heritage has acted quickly and decisively to buy Naree Station and protect it from immediate threat, your help is needed to ensure its ongoing protection and management. Please help secure Naree’s future now.

www.bushheritage.org.au/donate

Naree Station provides habitat for wetland birds like freckled ducks (top) and pelicans (bottom). Photographs by Steve Parish



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give a gift that protects Australia’s wildlife
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www.wildgifts.org.au



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