

BUSH HERITAGE NEWS

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Making it count at Naree

It takes a whole lot of planning, preparation and people-power to uncover the true potential of any place, as the upcoming 'bio-blitz' at Naree Station – our newest property, thanks to our supporters – proves.

By Kelly Irving

"It's a funny name for an ecological survey," says Bush Heritage's Science and Monitoring Manager, Dr Jim Radford, about the 'bio-blitz' that's taking place at Naree Station Reserve in mid-April. "But essentially, it means that we try to get as much information about our new reserve as we can, in a really short amount of time."

Over nine days on the 14,400-hectare property, a team of up to 25 dedicated conservationists, comprising Bush Heritage staff, volunteers, consultants and traditional landowners, will rise at the crack of dawn every day to carefully check traps for mammals and reptiles, survey birds and map vegetation. This crucial inventory – Naree's first – will help determine how the reserve will be managed and monitored over time.

"For example, if we find areas where threatened marsupials like the kultarr live then that will influence our fire management," says Jim, one of the leaders of the blitz. "We might not burn that area or we'll exclude it from grazing."

"Hopefully, in five or ten years, we'll be able to say, 'wow, look at the difference all of us have made'."

Above: Dr Jim Radford checks a pitfall trap during a similar survey at Boolcoomatta Reserve, SA, in 2010.

Photograph by Peter Morris



BUSH HERITAGE
AUSTRALIA

Our heart & soul



Left: Wetlands at Naree Station Reserve

Above: Jim with a dusky hopping mouse found at Boolcoomatta Reserve.

Photographs by Peter Morris

Power to the people

It takes a particular type of person to be involved in the planning and production of a bio-blitz.

“I jumped at the chance to work with Bush Heritage,” says Martin Denny, a consultant who’ll be documenting land-dwelling fauna like reptiles, frogs and small mammals during the blitz. “It’s a magnificent feeling to have that open, clear land to look at. I feel freedom out in that sort of country.”

“Attention to detail and a willingness to do the tedious work are paramount to our success,” says Jim. “Monitoring the first site has to be done to the same exacting standards as the last. We can’t rush it. Consistency is important so that any future comparisons we make are valid.”

A day in the life

Early each day, the team will drive off from the homestead in designated groups of two and three, ready to work on projects related to their skills and experience. Some will sit patiently and wait in the long grass for wetland birds that are difficult to spot, like crakes and rails. Others, like Bush Heritage’s Aquatic Ecologist Adam Kerezsy, will carefully clear nets of fish while others, like Martin, will check pit-fall traps for creatures like stripe-faced dunnarts, a task that, according to ethics standards, must be done within two hours of sunrise to minimise stress to captured animals.

Later, they’ll return to the homestead for a home-cooked meal prepared by volunteer camp cooks, before some evening spotlighting (see the box right) and then settling in to their tents for the night.

What keeps them going every day is the promise of what they might find. “Perhaps a flock of pied honey eaters or freckled ducks or a shovel-nosed snake; a painted snipe would be tremendous!” says Jim.

“We just like being out in the bush, getting on our hands and knees looking for stuff. It’s exciting when you get to a new site and you start to wonder what you’ll find.”

In it for the long term

“We all see this as a long-term investment,” says Martin. “We’re motivated because we know we’re building a baseline for Naree’s future.”

“Hopefully, in five or ten years, we’ll be able to prove there’s been an increase in species. We’ll say, ‘wow, look at the difference all of us – Bush Heritage volunteers, staff, partners and our supporters – have made’,” Jim adds.

The bio-blitz also plays a valuable role in bringing together all the people who have the interests of Naree at heart.

“Traditional owners, for example, will be able to give us advice on what sorts of things we should be looking for and where we might be best placed to look for them,” says Jim. “It’s a process of building trust.”

“This might be the first survey, but it certainly won’t be the last,” he adds. This is thanks to all our supporters who have made the purchase of Naree possible.

Thank you to Chris and Gina Grubb and family for their generous support for the purchase of Naree Station Reserve.

Thanks to so many of you who have supported both the purchase of Naree Station, and the Naree ‘bio-blitz’. If you’d still like to donate to support Jim and his team as they uncover Naree’s ecological secrets, you still have time. www.bushheritage.org.au/donate



Tips, tricks and traps

Dr Jim Radford explains how to catch and record elusive animals like the small and rare kultarr.

1. Pitfall traps (above)

“An unbaited hole in the ground that’s good for catching ground-dwelling animals like geckos, skinks, dragons and dunnarts. A 20cm high wire fence directs the critters into the pit-fall.”

2. Elliot traps

“A small box-trap with a spring door. It’s baited with peanut butter and oats – an odd bait for small carnivorous marsupials but it seems to work.”

3. Camera traps

“Motion-triggered infrared cameras to try and catch the kultarr on camera.”

4. Spotlighting

“Active searching on foot using a spotlight. Good to supplement with other methods to increase our chances of spotting animals.”

Above: Animals like this stripe-faced dunnart fall into pitfall traps overnight and rest there until scientists measure and release them in the morning.

Photograph by Peter Morris



“My hope is to preserve the immensity of the landscape, and that’s what Bush Heritage is trying to do.”

Grietje Croll decided to honour her late husband by leaving a bequest to Bush Heritage in her Will. “He wanted to preserve parts of the bush while he was still alive”.

Photograph by Bec Walton

A place to breathe

As a Dutch-born immigrant, Grietje Croll first saw the Australian bush with fresh eyes – from the comfort of her new husband’s tent. This was the start of a lifelong love affair, and a shared commitment to help protect the Australian bush.

When Grietje Croll first arrived in Australia from her native Holland, her impression of the Australian landscape was “Wow, this is space”. She had just arrived in the country to join Bob, an Australian agricultural scientist she had met at a rural sciences seminar in her native Holland. They drove from Sydney to Melbourne through Bob’s beloved “back country”, camping along the way. “In Holland we could never be anywhere where we couldn’t hear traffic. Here you could breathe in and breathe out and say, ‘Isn’t it wonderful!’.” Australia soon became Grietje’s permanent home.

The camping trip is just one of Grietje’s memories of exploring the bush with her husband. When Bob passed away in 2003, Grietje decided to honour him by leaving a bequest to Bush Heritage in her Will. “I know,” says Grietje, “that he wanted to preserve parts of the bush while he was still alive”.

The couple started donating to Bush Heritage in 1997 because they were impressed by the way we systematically purchase land based on scientific research, and focus on caring for that land. Grietje saw our philosophy in action when she visited Nardoo Hills Reserve.

“I was happy to see the area was being maintained and the weeds had been taken out.”

After Bob retired in 1980, the couple took to their campervan and experienced much of the Australian landscape they were so keen to see protected, including iconic destinations like Kakadu and Carnarvon Gorge. Bob, a botany enthusiast, would identify plants and trees by their Latin names, while Grietje took out her sketchbook and attempted to capture the vastness and the atmosphere of the landscape – an “impossible, but fun” task.

One place that holds special memories for Grietje was in South Australia’s mulga country, where the couple had camped in a “magical spot”, far from the road, fascinated by the diversity of plants. They had finally decided to pack up and move on, and had driven for about 200 metres, when a plant captured Bob’s attention. They stopped and got out. “I looked down,” says Grietje, “and saw the most beautiful little piece of jasper, full of different colours. We said, ‘Let’s camp here and have another look around’. And so we did. This land is full of surprises. We had only driven 200 metres but the magic had become overwhelming all over again.”

Grietje’s wish is to protect forever the natural wonders, big and small, that she and Bob adored. “My hope is to preserve the immensity of the landscape, and that’s what Bush Heritage is trying to do.”

Since Grietje first supported Bush Heritage...

Grietje and Bob have helped to make so much possible since they first supported Bush Heritage in 1997. Here’s just a glimpse:

1999 Bush Heritage played a founding role in Gondwana Link, a project reconnecting habitat from the south-west forests of Western Australia to the edge of the Nullarbor Plain.

2001 We purchased our first large-scale property, Carnarvon Station Reserve.

2011 We signed a ground breaking ten-year agreement with the Wunambal Gaambera people to work together to keep their homeland healthy.

2012 With the help of supporters like you, we purchased our 35th reserve, Naree Station, a remarkable property in the heart of the last free-flowing river system of the Murray-Darling Basin.

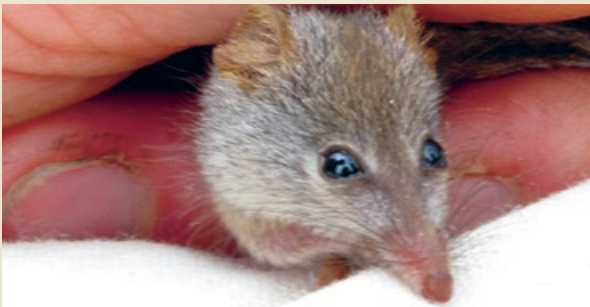
Bush Heritage thanks Grietje, Bob and all our supporters for helping protect our vast open spaces. A bequest, no matter how large or small, helps our wild places to thrive far into the future. For more information, contact Annie Mayo on (03) 8610 9139 or amayo@bushheritage.org.au

Around your reserves in 90 days

Your support makes a difference in so many ways. We take a look at what's been happening at your reserves around Australia – all made possible thanks to you.

How much does a honey possum weigh?

So how much does a honey possum weigh? “About the same as an eyeball!” according to one primary school student who visited your Monjebup North Reserve in south-west Western Australia. The student was one of two groups that visited Monjebup North and Chereninup reserves to learn about the ecological restoration project that is in full swing there. (And she was pretty close – honey possums weigh four grams, not far from the weight of an eyeball!) The students saw firsthand some of the animals returning to the areas that were once cleared paddocks. The honey possum was one of 91 animals recorded during the week-long fauna survey, which was part of a project to gather data that will tell scientists whether the restoration is having a positive impact on native species numbers. Animals recorded included pygmy possums, skinks and a juvenile western banjo frog.



Photograph by Angela Sanders



Small hands make a big difference

Charles Darwin Reserve has been busy with the sound of chattering schoolchildren recently, with students from Geraldton Leaning Tree Primary School and the local Perenjori Primary School visiting the reserve on the edge of the wheat belt in Western Australia. The students helped Healthy Landscape Manager Luke Bayley with erosion control and weed removal, and collected sandalwood seeds, which Luke will spread around the reserve to grow new seedlings. Their work has made a huge difference to Luke, whose annual weeding work gives native plants, and the animals that rely on them, a better chance to flourish. The students also cleaned out some gnamma holes – small, natural holes in granite rock surfaces made larger by Aboriginal people through the use of fire and grinding techniques. Local Badimia man Ashley Bell accompanied the students and talked about the importance of gnamma holes as a water source for the Badimia people, as well as about other cultural sites that the Badimia people are working in partnership with Bush Heritage to protect at the reserve.

Students from the Geraldton Leaning Tree Primary School tend gnamma holes at Charles Darwin Reserve. Photograph by Luke Bayley





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Bonni joins the fight against Siam weed

Last year reserve manager Paul Hales asked you to join in the fight against Siam weed at Yourka Reserve, one of the greatest challenges we've faced at Bush Heritage. Now Paul and fellow reserve manager Leanne have a new weapon to help them traverse the 200km of creekline of the Upper Herbert River. No, it's not a high-tech helicopter (although we're using one of those too!) – it's Bonni the horse! "The country we need to cover during the Siam flowering cycle is simply too much for a reserve manager and our volunteers to manage," says Paul. "But now we have Bonni! With Bonni, we can cover up to five times the country during those short timeframes and, from 17 hands high, it's much easier to spot Siam plants that get missed on foot bashing through the undergrowth." Thanks to all of you who have supported our fight against Siam weed. Bonni is just one of the ways in which we are tackling this ongoing problem.



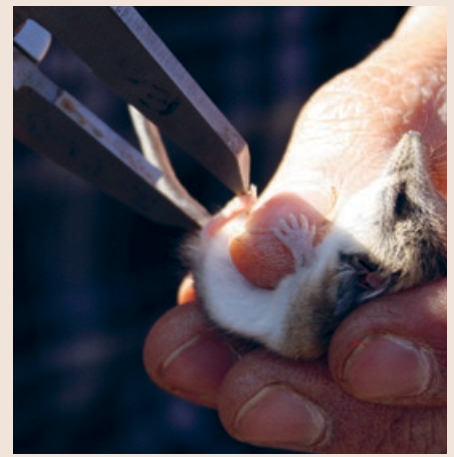
Photograph by Leanne Hales

A dawn walk at Naree Station

Ron and Di Davies, the reserve managers looking after Naree Station until the full-time managers arrive, have taken full advantage of the birdwatching opportunities on offer there. Di has spotted variegated fairy-wrens, black-fronted dotterels, little woodswallows and glossy ibis on her morning walks, to name a few. In addition, Ron and Di came across a small flowering plant growing in the dry creekbed of Back Creek. They were unable to identify it without a microscope on hand due to its tiny size (the flowers are 3mm wide!) so they sent photos and a pressed, dried specimen to the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney. The plant was identified as starfruit, *Dentella minutissima*, from the Rubiaceae family listed as endangered in New South Wales. The plant has only been found in one other location in New South Wales. Could this plant be a taste of what Jim and his team of scientists might find in their April bio-blitz? Watch this space!

Photograph by Di Davies





Left: Teachers from Earthwatch's TeachLive with research assistants at Charles Darwin Reserve.
Above: A fat-tailed dunnart being measured.
Photographs by Caroline Bayer, Earthwatch
Below: Mitchell's hopping mouse.
Photograph by Tim Doherty

Bush lovers joining the fight against feral cats

It's not just supporters like you who are helping scientists to protect native Australian animals on your reserves – schoolteachers are on board too.

By Vanessa Murray

The sky overhead is blushing a deep and gentle blue, the air still and tranquil as the day slowly dawns. It's only six in the morning, but already a team of committed scientists and volunteers are up and about, preparing to traverse a landscape rich in reds and greens and browns.

This was the scene that volunteer and schoolteacher Olivia Baran woke up to every morning for ten days last October, when she joined a group of scientists and volunteers at your Charles Darwin Reserve, on the northern edge of the Western Australian wheat belt.

The team was helping with a trial of a new bait, Eradicat, a tool designed to help reduce the damage caused to native animals by feral cats, as part of a partnership between Bush Heritage, Edith Cowan University and Earthwatch Australia. Olivia was one of hundreds of teachers who volunteered as part of an Earthwatch initiative, which places schoolteachers on conservation research projects and allows them to take their experiences back to the classroom.

A unique opportunity

Like you, many of whom recently supported our efforts to manage feral rabbits on other reserves such as Boolcoomatta

and Bon Bon Station, Olivia is passionate about Australian native wildlife.

"We dug in pitfall traps and checked them in the early morning before the heat of the day. We were trying to get an idea of what native species the cats are preying on, and their abundance on the reserve," says Olivia.

"It was just incredible to see and handle the animals up close in their environment," recalls Olivia, who is particularly interested in reptiles.

"We found a lot of dunnarts and hopping mice, but the highlight for me was finding a few thorny devils."

"It was wonderful to get out into the beauty of remote Australia, and a great opportunity to meet people with a similar passion for maintaining our unique biodiversity," she continues.

Why target feral cats?

Nocturnal and carnivorous, feral cats prey on small- to medium-sized native mammals, birds, reptiles and insects. They have been implicated in the extinction of 22 Australian mammals, and threaten many more including some that live among the salt bushes and wildflower plains of Charles Darwin Reserve.

"The history of extensive clearing throughout south-west Western Australia makes the reserve an important refuge for animals that were once widespread in the region," says Bush Heritage ecologist Dr Matt Appleby.



Mitchell's hopping mouse

The Mitchell's hopping mouse is a small sandy-brown rodent that grows up to about 60g, with white chest hairs and a pale underbelly. Its large back legs and long, bushy tail give it the strength and balance it needs to travel – by hopping – at speed. A nocturnal species found in southern SA, north-western Vic. and southern WA, the mouse feeds on roots, green leaves and seeds, and is one of several native small mammals that was found at Charles Darwin Reserve in October.

An innovative approach

"Field experiments have shown that broad-scale aerial application of Eradicat is capable of controlling feral cats, foxes and wild dogs," says Tim Doherty, the PhD student at Edith Cowan University responsible for the trial.

“There’s a lot at stake on this reserve. If we’re able to radically reduce the prevalence of feral cats and foxes, we could see the re-introduction of locally-extinct species.”

Aerial baiting is an expensive exercise however. “We believe hand-baiting may provide an effective on-ground solution to both the feral cat and fox problem at properties like Charles Darwin Reserve.” During Stage Two of the trial, Tim’s team will return to the reserve to capture, collar and release feral cats. The GPS-enabled collars will enable the cats’ movements to be monitored, so that the team can work out the most effective places to lay the Eradicat bait. The baits will then be laid by hand in one section of the reserve, with an unbaited “control” area in another to test the impact of the baits.

If Eradicat is found to be effective, Healthy Landscape Manager Luke Bayley will continue to lay Eradicat by hand along a 200km network of tracks, on an ongoing basis. Bush Heritage and Edith Cowan University will share their findings with neighbouring landholders and the wider community, in the hope of integrating feral predator controls in the region.

Thank you for joining the fight

Your support of feral cat management at Charles Darwin Reserve, and at reserves across the country, is another important step towards protecting native animals like the Mitchell’s hopping mouse across Australia. **Thank you!**

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Visit a Bush Heritage reserve

Cravens Peak Reserve
Photograph by Peter Morris

Point the wheels of your 4WD towards the Simpson Desert and join Bush Heritage Reserve Manager Peter Weeldon for a five-day tag-along camping trip on the magnificent desert reserves of Cravens Peak and Ethabuka.

These vast properties offer a diversity of landscapes including spectacular red dune fields, ephemeral waterbodies, rocky gorges and expansive escarpments. The reserves have seen a remarkable regeneration of the landscape since we purchased them in 2004 and 2008, thanks to a combination of our careful management and above-average rainfalls.

Dates 10–14 June, 2013
Price \$500 per person

While 4WDs are essential to get around these reserves, there will be time to explore on foot. You will travel at a relaxed pace and camp each night under the stars.

To book your spot, call Katrina Blake on (03) 8610 9124 or email kblake@bushheritage.org.au. Limited spaces are available.

www.bushheritage.org.au/tagalong

To find out about other reserves you can visit, go to **www.bushheritage.org.au/getting_involved_visit**

Thank you

Bush Heritage thanks the many supporters that have donated in honour of friends or family members. A small selection is below.

In memoriam

Judy Burns made a donation in memory of her parents, Vic and Nancy Murry. Scott and Pamela McNaughton, and Merrowyn Deacon donated in memory of our late Cravens Peak Field Officer, “Mo” Mauritz Pieterse. Margrit Lack donated in memory of Diane Binstead, “who loved and cared for the bush”.

In celebration


Andrew Blanckensee donated in celebration of Helen Blanckensee and William Schlapak’s wedding. Barbara Madden celebrated the birth of three grandchildren with a gift towards the purchase of Naree Station. Barbara Beeson donated to celebrate John and Gillian Moore’s 80th birthdays.

Bequests

Bush Heritage gratefully acknowledges the generosity of the Estates of Teresa Bocking, Laurie Violet Abell, Lois Maud Addison, John Frederick Turner, Anthony Glynn Smith, John and Jennifer Barnett, Margaret Mary Cowper, Judith Catherine Iltis, Marion Belfrage Field and Roy Thalheimer.

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FROM THE CEO

One of the great privileges of my role is being able to visit the beautiful places that together we help protect.

Last month, I had my first trip to one of these special places – Tarcutta Hills Reserve, in the rolling Humula Hills in south-western New South Wales.

Tarcutta Hills Reserve is one of the largest remaining areas of grassy white box woodland left in Australia, a vital habitat for birds such as the endangered swift parrot, and has only been protected thanks to the generosity of Bush Heritage supporters like you.

On this particular trip I was further privileged to be joined by Bush Heritage Ambassador Tim Fischer, a passionate enthusiast for regional Australia. Tim is a strong supporter of Bush Heritage's role in maintaining Australia's unique places. Together with Reserve Manager Peter Saunders we took a tour around Tarcutta's 430 hectares to see how the bush was faring, but not before firstly logging into the Bush Heritage 'call-in' safety system and registering our trip.

With a workforce of regional and remote staff, the safety of our people is our

highest priority. The log-in and log-out system is just one process, albeit an important one, in the range of safety procedures we adhere to, and Tim was reassured to learn about the steps we take to keep our Bush Heritage 'family' safe.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to introduce the newest members of the family, David and Sue Akers, who will be joining us as the first full-time reserve managers of your newest reserve, Naree Station. David and Sue bring to their latest role a wealth of experience in landscapes like Naree, so I am thrilled that they are on board. It's thanks to you that we're able to position David and Sue at Naree – your overwhelming support for the protection of this important place gives all of us at Bush Heritage even greater determination to look after it.

As you'll read in our cover story, our work at Naree Station is really now only just beginning, with an ecological survey of the reserve's plants and animals soon to take place, so I look forward now to getting David and Sue settled into Naree's beautiful little homestead, and letting them get down to work!



Bush Heritage ambassador Tim Fischer touring your Tarcutta Hills Reserve with CEO Gerard O'Neill in March. Photograph by Peter Saunders

“Your overwhelming support for the protection of Naree Station gives all of us at Bush Heritage even greater determination to look after it.”

Gerard O'Neill, CEO

Bush Heritage is a not-for-profit organisation, funded entirely by donations from generous supporters like you. If you'd like to make a contribution to our work, please fill in the form and send it to us at the address below. Thank you.

Yes, I'll help Jim and his team of scientists conduct Naree Station's first ever bio-blitz!

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