

# BUSH HERITAGE NEWS

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## Hideaway home

**The tiny tammar wallaby has one secret that Bush Heritage ecologists would just love to know.**

*By Fiona Rutkay*

As day turns into night on your Chereninup Reserve, diminutive tammar wallabies emerge from their daytime hideout, creep under the fence and hop into the paddock to feed – on what else but wallaby grass.

They're a social sort – foraging, feeding and grooming in pairs or groups of up to eight.

They might love to natter among themselves, but they're keeping their cards close to their chests when it comes to us humans.

After much trial and error, Bush Heritage ecologists first managed to capture the elusive wallabies on infrared cameras in 2009, but they still have not been able to find their bolthole. "We have spent hours and hours searching," says Bush Heritage ecologist Angela Sanders. "We know they're there, but we haven't flushed any out. We have no idea where they hang out in the daytime."

*"We know they're there, but we haven't flushed any out. We have no idea where they hang out in the daytime."*

*Above: Thanks to your support, we are restoring habitat for the tammar wallaby in south-west Western Australia  
Photograph by istockphoto*



**BUSH HERITAGE**  
AUSTRALIA

*Our heart & soul*



### A powerhouse of energy

Tammar wallabies are surprisingly small and weigh about five kilograms. When monitoring wallabies with spotlights, ecologists distinguish tammars from black-gloved wallabies by their distinctive shape. “They look like a ball with a little pin head bouncing along,” says Angela. And bounce they do. They can take three-and-a-half hops per second at up to two-and-a-half metres a hop – not a lot of time for any observer to get a good look. To add to their talent for evasion, as their speed increases, so does the energy in their tendons – this allows them to speed up further when carrying the extra load of a joey.

For all the tammars’ talents, they have not been able to avoid the effects of devastating land clearance across much of Western Australia’s south-west. Once prevalent in the area, their numbers have greatly declined. In fact, the name ‘tammar’ comes from a scrub that was traditionally the preferred habitat of Western Australia’s tammar wallabies. The scrub, very common when settlers arrived, has been extensively cleared in the south-west.

### A woodland home

But thanks to you, Bush Heritage is restoring tammar habitat as part of the Gondwana Link project, together with our many conservation partners. The project is now well on the way to linking up bushland across a 1000 km swathe of land from Western Australia’s south-west to the edge of the Nullarbor Plain.

With your support, tammars are now returning to restored land on your Monjebup, Beringa, and Chereninup reserves.

The reserves in this ecological hotspot are stunningly beautiful, featuring dramatic yellow and orange cliffs, with an undulating landscape criss-crossed by creek lines. Most importantly, the once cleared land is blooming. While some of the larger trees that have been planted could take up to 300 years to reach full height, much of the mallee scrub is already four metres high. Now that the native trees have taken off, the wallaby grass is coming back all by itself. To give the tammars even more to smile about Bush Heritage, together with our Gondwana Link partners and a team of volunteers are also busy creating more dense-canopied moort woodland, one of their favourite hangouts.

To make sure our planting activities are having a positive effect, we have been monitoring tammar numbers. A 2011 survey showed we have twelve populations on our Gondwana Link reserves. With your support we will be putting infrared cameras onto revegetated areas on Monjebup North, and doing spotlighting each spring to check on the tammars’ progress. Perhaps one day we will even find out where they hide during the daylight, but for now their secrets are safe.

The Gondwana Link project aims to reconnect fragmented landscapes across the south-west of Western Australia, providing new habitat for species like the tammar wallaby (above).



### Thank you from the tammar wallaby

Thanks to those of you who have already donated to help us protect our native species. Your donations will help tammars thrive through:

- Revegetating cleared land with 130 species, including eucalypts, wattles, paperbarks and proteaceous species
- Carrying out weed control before planting
- Creating ideal tammar habitat by growing more moort woodland
- Setting up remote cameras and doing spotlighting on Monjebup North each spring to record tammar and black-gloved wallaby numbers.

If you haven’t yet donated, there’s still time. Your generous support can help provide tammar wallabies with healthy habitat now and far into the future.

[www.bushheritage.org.au/donate](http://www.bushheritage.org.au/donate)

Photograph by istockphoto

*Above: Bush Heritage Healthy Landscape Manager Simon Smale in moort woodland, the favoured habitat of the tammar wallaby, in south-west Western Australia. Photograph by Peter Morris*



Julian von Bibra now has the support he needs to ensure the critically endangered grasslands growing on his family farm can be protected.

Left: Photograph by Matthew Newton

Below: Photograph by Matt Appleby



# Country that gets under your skin

**A connection with the land was a legacy that Tasmanian Midlands farmer Julian von Bibra inherited from generations of his family. Now, farmers like Julian have more than personal conviction alone to help them protect these precious places.**

By Bron Willis

If you stand on Julian von Bibra’s Tasmanian Midlands farm and look to the distance, you’ll see the heavily wooded slopes of the Eastern Tiers and the rolling hills of agricultural land where his family have run merino sheep for four generations.

Amongst the agricultural land you’ll see native grasslands carpeted with silver tussock, kangaroo grass and surrounded by open woodland. It’s these critically endangered native grasslands that have brought Julian and neighbouring farmers together to work with Bush Heritage Australia and the Tasmanian Land Conservancy under an innovative project called Midlandscapes.

As part of the project, Bush Heritage and the Tasmanian Land Conservancy are offering farmers like Julian stewardship payments for protecting threatened natural landscapes, inviting them to commit to conservation activities that continue to protect the key targets of grasslands, wetlands and woodlands and the fauna species they support. The fund that makes this all possible is called the Midlands Conservation Fund.

## A home for generations

The land on the von Bibra family farm is what Julian describes as “very special country, once it gets under your skin”. Memories of his boyhood are ingrained into it. “We used to picnic near a sandstone escarpment that has been a meeting place for generations,” he says. “In winter my father would show us how to make firesticks with bark, and how to light a soft burn, mimicking the way Aborigines used to care for the land. I remember the smoke and the heat in the air.”

But the land holds more than memories alone. The native grassland on Julian’s farm is just one of the conservation targets identified by the Midlandscapes project as urgently in need of protection, along with others such as valley floor wetlands and wedge-tailed eagle habitat.

“The native grasslands represent what most of the Midlands would have been like pre-European settlement,” says Julian. “Since a large percentage of the little that is left, is on properties like ours, we feel a sense of responsibility.”

## Habitat for native species

Julian’s property is also habitat for several threatened species such as the endangered Tasmanian devil and Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle, as well as bandicoots and spotted-tail quoll.

Matt Appleby is the Bush Heritage ecologist working with landowners like Julian.

“It’s the human side of things that makes it all work.”

“Many of the landscapes most under threat in the Midlands are owned by families that have been on that land for generations,” says Matt. “Funding these landowners to carry out conservation activities on their land is one of the best ways to make a real difference in this region.”

## Conservation on a working farm

The fund helps to support farmers like Julian, to run a profitable working farm while still protecting the land’s ecological values.

“Those needs are definitely contrasting,” says Julian. And while Julian and his neighbours have a head start thanks to a passion for conservation that pre-dated the project, the fund will allow him to set the grasslands aside and commit to protecting them long-term, along with the declining grassy woodlands also found on his farm.

Julian is proud of the difference he’s already made to the landscape that is so special to his family – of the regenerating wattle and eucalypt saplings, and the healthy kangaroo grass and tussocks on his farm – but it’s working with fellow farmers and conservationists that he’s most proud of. “It’s the human side of things that makes it all work. Working together with philanthropists has been a really important part for us. This is not something you can do on your own.”

*We gratefully acknowledge the very generous support of the Sidney Myer Fund, the John T Reid Charitable Trusts, the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation and private donors.*

# 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.

## Easter surprise at Bon Bon

Native animal enthusiasts from the South Australian-based Field Naturalists Society spent their Easter break at your Bon Bon Station Reserve, surrounded by the shimmering salt lakes and expanses of pearl bluebush found on the central South Australian reserve. Bush Heritage Australia relies on skilled groups like these to help us with the essential task of monitoring species on reserves and this was the second such visit from the Society in two years. Striped-faced and fat-tailed dunnarts were found in greater numbers than last Easter's survey, and three previously unrecorded bats were discovered but are yet to be confirmed. The group also recorded some creatures that had not previously been seen on the reserve, like the sandy inland mouse and the beaded gecko.



Fat-tailed dunnart. Photograph by Tim Doherty



## Dja Dja Wurrung at Nardoo Hills Reserve

If you look hard enough on your next bushwalk, you might just find you are following the footsteps of Aboriginal people who walked before you, thousands of years ago. That was the case when Bush Heritage staff joined Dja Dja Wurrung traditional owners at Nardoo Hills Reserve in Central Victoria. A Dja Dja Wurrung cultural heritage study completed in 2013, revealed important cultural values at Nardoo, including artefacts like cutting instruments and clay cooking balls. Scar trees, the bark of which was used for ceremonial purposes and for carrying food, were also found. "When I walk around this place, I feel connected to my country and people," says traditional owner Boadan Kerr, a Ranger with Dja Dja Wurrung Enterprises. Bush Heritage builds partnerships with Indigenous groups like Dja Dja Wurrung, who are connected with the land we work on, across the country.

Photograph by Sarah Eccles





### Not so quiet at Naree

Thousands of supporters put their hands up recently to support a team of scientists heading out to survey your newest reserve, Naree Station. Thanks to your generous support, those scientists were able to gather essential ecological information about Naree. This information will put us in good stead to go forward with our decision-making on how to best care for this important place. The bioblitz achieved its objectives: species inventories of mammals, reptiles, birds and plants; a vastly improved vegetation map of the reserve; installation of 96 pitfall traps that will be reused in future surveys and monitoring; and mapping of infrastructure like tracks and fences that will become crucial to our land management. 170 bird species are now known to be found at Naree, as well as the stripe-faced dunnart (vulnerable in NSW), the narrow-nosed planigale and seven bat species including the little pied bat (vulnerable in NSW).



Photograph by Katrina Blake

### All hands on deck

One hundred and fifty volunteers gathered in early April at your Scottsdale Reserve in the New South Wales' Southern Tablelands, to start to restore nationally endangered box gum grassy woodlands as part of a two-year, 300-hectare project with our partner Greening Australia. Volunteers travelled the 75km from Canberra to plant 2000 seedlings that had been especially cultivated for the day. Reserve Manager Peter Saunders and his dedicated volunteer team had spent weeks preparing for the project. "We spent two weeks digging 4000 holes and slashing excess African Love Grass, an invasive weed found on the reserve and across south-eastern Australia – and we'll be planting for many months to come!" More than 95 per cent of box gum grassy woodlands have been cleared in south-eastern Australia, allowing African lovegrass and other invasive weeds to flourish and diminish available habitat for endangered and vulnerable native bird species like the speckled warbler, scarlet robin and diamond firetail.



Photograph by Peter Saunders



## Science and art: a restoration

**Ecologist Justin Jonson has spent the last two years piecing back together a “living mosaic” of plants, animals and landscape at your Monjebup North Reserve. The experience has changed him.**

*By Jane Lyons*

It was a small patch of soil that first made Justin Jonson realise he was not master of all he surveyed. The ecologist had returned to look over his first big restoration project at your Beringa Reserve, when he suddenly noticed that some soil was a bit richer than the surrounding area.

“What came into my mind was: nature has got control of this. I had thought that I was creating nature, but I saw suddenly that I was the servant of a process that is way more complex than I will ever understand. It was one of the most humbling experiences of my life,” he says.

Justin has brought this reverence for nature to his current project with Bush Heritage at your Monjebup North Reserve, in south-western Australia. The project will result in the revegetation and repopulation of a cleared area on the reserve, roughly the size of 750 football fields. The first 100 hectares of the 435-hectare block were planted last year, and the remaining hectares will be planted over the next two years.

### Thinking big – Gondwana Link

The work is part of Gondwana Link, a bigger vision that Bush Heritage shares with a range of conservation groups – a collaborative initiative that aims to reconnect isolated fragments of landscape in the south-western corner of Australia. The area, once rich with a high concentration of plant and animal life, has lost two-thirds of its vegetation – and with it the homes of many native species.

Monjebup North Reserve had suffered a similar loss. Before the project began, the barren agricultural land was the landing strip for only a few birds, the night-time beat for some bats and the occasional playground of a lone mouse.

Justin and his company, Threshold Environmental, has spent the last two years piecing the land, plants and animals back together again, in what he calls a “living mosaic”.

This has involved identifying the soils and vegetation at Monjebup North, and recreating a patchwork of plant communities to reflect them. To create such diversity, Justin has hand-planted pockets of different native seedlings after a tractor has done the broad brushstrokes of seeding. He has so far planted 133 different species, including 60 kilos of locally collected native seeds and 10,000 seedlings.

### Spotted-thigh frog

On a recent seed-collecting trip Justin and his fellow workers were enjoying the warmth of their swags under the stars, when they were woken by a chainsaw-like call belonging to a spotted-thigh frog.

The campspot, located under one of only a few isolated mallee trees in the area, seemed an unusual spot for a frog to spend the night, far from the nearest water.

It reminded Justin that even a single tree, can provide shelter for native animals.

The spotted-thigh frog depends on water for breeding, however, and we hope that a shallow wetland area recreated by Bush Heritage staff in 2011 will find them recolonising the landscape in larger numbers.

*Top right: The spotted-thigh frog*

“What I do is a mixture between science and art: it’s designing by reading the cues that nature gives me and then creating a design that best supports those natural cues and processes,” Justin says.



Far left: Justin Jonson, the ecologist overseeing a visionary habitat restoration project with Bush Heritage and our conservation partners in the south-west of Western Australia  
Photograph by Lien Imbrechts

Middle left: "Life has a power of its own."  
– Justin Jonson  
Photograph by Peter Morris

Left: The spotted-thigh frog  
Photograph by Barrie Collins

“The doors are going to be open to the local fauna and the hamper is going to be stocked.”

### A home-grown Noah’s ark

His technique provides not only food for thought but also for animals, with the creation of a wide variety of forage and homes to support their different needs. Pygmy possums, dunnarts, black-gloved wallabies and legless lizards are among the creatures the project hopes to encourage back.

Monitoring has revealed encouraging first results. “It’s going to be a real cracker, that 100 hectares,” he says. “You can look at it and see that the system in every single seeded area is on a trajectory to becoming really productive and diverse plant communities.”

But ultimately, Justin believes that the complexity of ecology makes it more than just the sum of its parts and restoration more than the mere re-assembling of them. There’s magic in its synergy. “Life has a power of its own,” Justin says.

*Monjebup North Reserve was acquired in 2010 with the assistance of the The Nature Conservancy’s David Thomas Challenge.*

## Thank you

Bush Heritage thanks the many supporters that have donated in honour of friends or family members. The following is a small selection of recent donations.

### In memoriam

Deborah Andrew donated in memory of Dr Patrick Michael Fleming and his contribution to the conservation of Australian wetlands. We received a number of donations in memory of the late Professor James Bartram Douglas. Helen Saville donated in memory of her father Herbert Charles May.

### In celebration

We received a number of donations celebrating the wedding of Sara Buchanan and Ben Lawson. Peter and Ivanka Canet donated to celebrate the birth of their grandson, Alastair Hay.

### Bequests

John Atkinson, Alison Wynne Hearn, Arthur George Harrold, Virginia Tyler Leland Bonawit, Sally Wykes

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