

NATURAL HERITAGE

NATIONAL TRUST: MAKING YOUR VOCATION YOUR VACATION

Peter Murphy, Conservation Officer National Trust (WA)

It was winter 1981 - when my friends Alex and Eleanor and my partner Sallie climbed aboard our battered 67 Beetle and headed down South West Highway – towards Wellington Mills, in search of our Holy Grail. A couple of hours later - there we were; clambering over giant granite boulders, traversing bubbling creeks, and picnicking under huge jarrah and marri trees on a 40 hectare paradise in the small hamlet of Lowden.

In those days buying or owning bushland was frowned upon - as if it was a liability or a waste of space. Sure I can still clearly remember some of the locals' hollow words, "You can always log it, or run goats over it. She needs a good burn!" And, "Cockies down the valley reckon it would make a ripper of a dam." *'A fool sees not the same tree as the wise man sees'* (William Blake).

We called the bushland 'kiah' (nyoongar for greetings), and over the next decade began to explore and immerse ourselves in every nook, creek and cranny, whilst familiarising ourselves with a plethora of flowers, bush tucker, birds, mammals, fungi, trees, frogs, insects - their comings and goings along with the seasons, and especially our own personal spiritual bonding with the boodja (land).



Nearly two decades on – Sallie and myself were still there; Alex and Eleanor had gone their separate ways, a couple of 'tree changers' came and went, and eventually (to our relief) Scott and Peta arrived. As both couples were childless (an environmental decision), it was important that we discussed kiah's future, including our long term custodial responsibility to a suite of threatened native fauna: Chuditch, Quenda, Brush Wallaby, Ringtail Possum, Red and Whitetail Black Cockatoo, Yellow Breasted Robin, and the rare Barking Owl to name a few. So, we implemented a

management strategy. To be honest, sometimes our management plan received much flack from locals (fire management), government utilities (power and phone) and mining companies (exploration).

Fortunately through the campaign to save native forest in the 90's, we met Mary Frith. Mary at that time was also a Conservation Officer for the National Trust. After much discussion with her on the merits of entering into a conservation covenant agreement with the National Trust – we began the covenant process.

This entailed implementing a more detailed comprehensive management plan that would include: feral animal control, fire management, corridor connectivity, flora and fauna surveys, invasive weed control and inviting interested groups for educational tours. Also entering the agreement - meant we could seek extra support and assistance through the National Trust when applying for funding grants for rehabilitation projects. We signed our covenant agreement in 2002.

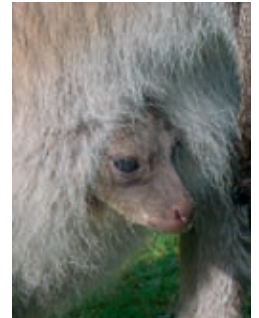


Red Tail Cockatoo
Dennis Fairclough at his
Noggerup property.

A couple of years ago our beautiful National Trust covenant sign arrived, and is now proudly pinned to our gate, and it wasn't that long ago, that I brought the sign's attention to a Telstra's crew, who were about to bury cable in Ringtail Possum habitat. And to their credit, they reassessed their operational plans to a more environmentally acceptable route.

Since signing our covenant agreement, it has not only given us a new sense of relief as land custodians, but also guarantees the long-term protection of the many beautiful creatures that have adopted us over the years. The covenant also made us realise, that we were only one of many National Trust covenants which covered and protected over 11 000 hectares of Western Australian's unique ancient landscape.

All this had me thinking; as to my role in the conservation movement; campaigning to protect the remaining forest ecosystem from an unsustainable logging regime, and frustrated by a government that wasn't doing enough to protect remnant bushland. When out of the blue, came a job opportunity to join the National Trust as a Conservation Officer. Six months on - my passion has now been rekindled, whilst providing me with the opportunity to visit some amazing bushland properties, and meet like-minded people. But above all, I am doing what I love most, helping to protect this wonderful ancient landscape for future custodians.



Images by Peter Murphy

DOWERIN FIELD DAYS 2007

Louise Leigh, Natural Heritage

The National Trust was delighted to receive an invitation to join the WWF Avon based 'Healthy Ecosystems' team at what is reported to be the biggest agricultural event in the state.

Since its inauguration in 1965 the Dowerin GWN Field Days draws farmers, agricultural businesses and city persons alike from near and far.

Historically, communication and large distances between towns had always been an issue for the farming community in the wheat belt, so the idea of holding a single agricultural event where farmers meet once a year to both exhibit and trade on a level playing field placed Dowerin on the map.

Some 165 kilometres north east of Perth the small town of Dowerin overflows with visitors to the field days each year. Clinging to the coat tails of winter the field days provide a welcomed break in an otherwise hectic farming calendar and more than enough social interaction to fuel enthusiasm for the onset of spring and the rigours of harvesting.

In addition to its state conservation covenant program, the National Trust works in partnership with other conservation organisations to help preserve and protect remnant native bushland in Western Australia. Through the Avon Catchment Council Natural Diversity Project 'Healthy Ecosystems', the National Trust is working strategically with WWF towards targeting potential covenantors in areas such as the Avon wheat belt.



Dowerin Field Day logo.
Louise Leigh/National Trust.