

*Bushland at Lake Meilup.
National Trust (WA).*



MAKING A DIFFERENCE NATURE CONSERVATION ON PRIVATE LAND

Laura Colman and Rod Safstrom, Natural Heritage, National Trust (WA).

Government reserves provide excellent protection for some of the most valuable areas of Western Australia's native vegetation; however, these ecological havens only cover around six percent of the land area of WA and are not evenly distributed around the state.

The South-West of Western Australia has recently been declared one of the world's top 25 biodiversity hotspots and is Australia's only inclusion in the list. This means that, in terms of biodiversity, WA's native bushland ranks above the Great Barrier Reef in conservation significance.

It is unfortunate that the value of the state's bushland was not recognised sooner, before more than 20 million hectares of bushland was cleared in the south-west to accommodate European settlers. This region now retains less than 20% of its native vegetation and what remains is fast degrading.

INDIVIDUALS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The long-term future of much of our precious natural heritage rests in the hands of individual landholders. Planning legislation now makes it difficult for bushland to be cleared but in order to maintain a healthy and biologically diverse habitat, specialised management needs to be implemented to control damage caused by disease, weeds, stock and feral animals.

Fortunately, there are individuals such as Roger and Lyndon Edwards who strongly believe that owners of bushland have an obligation to preserve the natural habitat on their properties, now and in years to come. It is this sense of personal responsibility that led them to covenant their 15 hectares of remnant vegetation at Binningup, near Bunbury.

The family, particularly Roger's late wife Mona, has always loved and cared for the bush, but they recognise that it could easily become vulnerable if ownership of the land changes. A National Trust covenant remains on the titles in perpetuity, which helps to ensure that the jarrah, peppermint and banksia woodlands, the Declared Rare dwarf hammer orchid and several Priority Flora, which are found on the property, are protected in the long term.

The Trust's conservation covenanting scheme has protected 7366ha of bushland on 73 properties since its launch in April 1999. There are a further 30 covenants in various stages of negotiation, covering 6672ha of



Roger and Lyndon Edwards on their property at Binningup near Bunbury. National Trust (WA).

bushland. Each covenant is developed in consultation with the landowner and, even after the covenant is finalised, The National Trust will continue to work with the owner to develop and implement a management plan for the land.


Dr. Kate Creed, secretary of Lake Mealup Preservation Society, says that the provision of management advice and support was one of the main reasons why they decided to covenant their land with the National Trust. The Society was formed in 1986 to conserve Lake Mealup and the surrounding bushland in its natural state. Of the Society's 70 members, 48 own shares in the land. Kate feels that, while it is important to protect the long-term future of the land with a covenant, it is also necessary to implement active management of the land to arrest degradation and improve its condition. The Society also values the advice on relevant resources and funding that The National Trust is able to provide.

The National Trust's other main program, BushBank, has protected rare woodlands, granite outcrops, mallee and shrubland communities, spongolite breakaways, threatened flora such as *Eucalyptus crucis subsp. crucis* and Corackerup endemic eucalypts and threatened fauna such as the mallee fowl and tamar wallaby.

BushBank is a consortium of The National Trust, the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) and WWF Australia, which purchases bush properties, places a covenant on the title and then sells the land on to a caring new owner. Since the program was launched in August 2001, BushBank has purchased three properties, covering 2503ha. The National Trust's aim is to achieve the best long-term protection and management of bushland, which in some cases means the sale of the land to a new owner who is willing and able to care for it.

BushBank's third purchase, Granite Run has extensive areas of granite, salmon gum and wandoo woodlands and widespread shrublands. This property is currently being prepared for sale with fencing and clean-up work and is due to be put on the market in June 2004. Tenders will be invited from prospective purchasers, who will be assessed not only on price, but also on their intentions for the use of the land and their ability to implement suitable management. The property will be sold with a conservation covenant on the title, which will ensure that it is protected in the long term and that stewardship support and advice is provided to new owners.

The response to both the covenanting and BushBank programs has been positive and significant conservation achievements have been made in recent years. The National Trust also works with other conservation organisations, such as Gondwana Link, Woodland Watch, Bush Brokers and Land for Wildlife, recognising that individuals have different needs and therefore a number of different strategies must be employed if a real difference is to be made.

The rewards of conserving and effectively managing bushland in the present cannot be truly appreciated for many years. Only then will it become apparent whether schemes such as BushBank and conservation covenanting have been successful in their aim to conserve Western Australia's valuable natural heritage. 

MECHANISMS FOR CONSERVING BUSHLAND ON PRIVATE LAND

Covenants

A covenant is a voluntary agreement between a landholder and an organisation such as The National Trust or the Department of Conservation and Land Management, which restricts activities that could potentially damage bushland.

**Contact: Scott Morath, National Trust (08) 9321 6088
Program Coordinator, CALM (08) 9334 0477**

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Contact: Rod Safstrom, National Trust (08) 9321 6088

Woodland Watch

Woodland Watch is a WWF project, based in the Wheatbelt region that assists farmers with the management of woodland on their properties.

Contact: Chris Curnow, WWF (08) 9387 6444

Land for Wildlife

Land for Wildlife, a Department of Conservation & Land Management initiative, informs landowners about the flora and fauna that occurs on their property and works with them to develop a management plan.

Contact: Penny Hussey, CALM (08) 9334 0530

Gondwana Link

Gondwana Link is a consortium of Greening Australia, Wilderness Society, Australian Bush Heritage Fund, Fitzgerald Biosphere Group, Friends of Fitzgerald River National Park and the Malleefowl Preservation Group. The project aims to create wildlife corridors between the coastal forests and the interior of south-western Australia and is focussing initially on connecting the Stirling Ranges and Fitzgerald River National Parks.

**Contact: Keith Bradby, Gondwana Link (08) 9842 2754
www.gondwanalink.org**

Bush Brokers

Bush Brokers is a consortium of The National Trust, WWF Australia and Real Estate Institute of WA (REIWA). Bush Brokers aims to link potential buyers, sellers and realtors of bushland through their website. Bush Brokers has also produced a manual which provides practical information on the buying, selling and management of bush.

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