

NATURAL HERITAGE

REHABILITATION OF THE AVON REGION

Laura Colman, *Natural Heritage*

The Avon Natural Resource Management (NRM) Region retains just 13.2% of its original vegetation; however, this area continues to exhibit astounding biodiversity, with many species found exclusively in the region. More than 40% of the remaining native vegetation occurs on private land and the National Trust is working with landowners, the Avon Catchment Council, WWF Australia and other environmental groups to conserve this valuable natural asset.

The Avon is one of six NRM regions in Western Australia, covering an area of 11.8 million hectares. More than 60% of the region is agricultural and its high proportion of cleared land has led to widespread salinity. Native plants are adapted to be efficient at collecting and using rainwater; consequently, very little drains away into groundwater. The removal of native plants means that the majority of rainwater enters the groundwater system, resulting in rising water tables, which bring the natural salt deposits to the surface.

Despite widespread clearing and land degradation, the Avon region is home to an incredible range of flora and fauna species, earning it recognition as part of an international biodiversity hotspot. There are 34 hotspots in total, only one of which occurs in Australia, making the conservation of the Avon's natural heritage especially significant.

The National Trust is adopting a holistic approach to conservation in the Avon region, targeting areas that will contribute to the rehabilitation of the region as a whole. Properties that provide habitat for threatened species, link existing bushland or contribute to salinity containment across the catchment are of particular interest. The Trust works closely with the Avon NRM Council and environmental groups, such as WWF Australia, to identify areas of interest and explore possible solutions.

AVON ICONS:

BLACK-FLANKED ROCK WALLABY (*Petrogale lateralis*)

Black-flanked Rock Wallabies were once common in central and southern Western Australia; however, the species is now threatened and only exists in small, isolated populations. The National Trust is working to create links between existing Rock Wallaby populations by extending habitat. A number of conservation tools will be employed in order to achieve this, including revolving funds, conservation covenants and land donations.

CARNABY'S BLACK COCKATOO (*Calyptorhynchus latirostris*)

Carnaby's Black Cockatoos are endemic (exclusive) to Western Australia and have become endangered due to loss of habitat. Carnaby's Cockatoos breed in the Wheatbelt and nest in the hollows of Eucalypt trees, many of which have been cleared to make way for development and agriculture. The National Trust is working to protect the habitat of Carnaby's Cockatoos through conservation covenants and partnerships with other organisations.



Male and Female Carnaby's Black Cockatoo, L Lauri, Birds Australia.

MORTLOCK RIVER

The Mortlock River has been identified as a regional priority under the Avon NRM strategy, due to its landscape and ecological significance. A recent assessment of the river by the Department of Environment and Conservation uncovered its poor state of health, which has been largely attributed to unsustainable land use and poor management. The National Trust is exploring opportunities to contribute to the rehabilitation of the Mortlock, in partnership with the Avon Catchment Council.

References:

http://www.avonnrm.org.au/about_us/regional_profile/biodiversity.html
<http://www.biodiversityhotspots.org/xp/Hotspots>
<http://www.carnabyscockatoo.org/>
http://www.naturebase.net/plants_animals/pdf_files/sp_black-flanked_rock-wallaby.pdf#search=%22Black-flanked%20Rock-wallaby%20petrogale%22
<http://www.nrm.gov.au/state/wa/avon/publications/report-card/index.html>

CONDITIONAL CONSERVATION COVENANTS

Louise Leigh, *Natural Heritage*



Monson Property, Yallingup. Unknown.

Conservation Covenants provide an invaluable source of protection for our native bushland in Western Australia. The National Trust of Australia (WA), through its Conservation Covenant Program has to date registered 95 covenants over approximately 43000 hectares of privately owned Western Australian land comprising in whole or part native bushland. The Covenant Team is gearing up for many more registrations over the coming months working towards 100 registered covenants in WA.

Whilst the Conservation Covenant Program normally operates on a voluntary basis with the specific purpose of assisting landowners with the protection and sustainable management of the bushland on their property, use of conservation covenants as a tool to assist government agencies in land use planning and environmental evaluations has grown over the years. This includes situations where the covenant is set as a condition of subdivision by a regulatory agency such as the Western Australian Planning Commission.

In these cases subdivision approval is often granted upon registration of a conservation covenant on the landowner's title.