

STEWARDSHIP: HELPING LANDOWNERS TO MANAGE THEIR BUSHLAND

Laura Colman, Natural Heritage, National Trust (WA)

Landowner Buddy Kent covenanted his 444 hectares of bushland with the National Trust in July 2003. His property, 'Tippaburra', falls within the Shire of Yilgarn, most of which has been cleared for broad acre agriculture and has less than 25% of native vegetation remaining. The size and high quality of Buddy's bushland means that it is very significant in both the local and regional contexts.

Buddy strongly believes that he has a responsibility to look after his bushland "for the future". He said, "I have always been conscious of the bush and it's good to know that when I'm gone it will be looked after."

Clearing is no longer the greatest threat to Western Australia's remaining native bushland; the gradual degradation caused by invasive species and inappropriate management is now of much greater concern. Conservation covenants are effective in preventing human damage to native vegetation, but active management is also required to minimise the impact of introduced species and western farming practices on surrounding land.

The stewardship program provides owners of covenanted bushland with management advice and support to maintain the conservation values of their land. Each property has a management plan, written in consultation with the owner, which is tailored to suit the specific needs of the land and management resources available. A stewardship officer also makes annual contact with the owner and is available to answer any questions that may arise throughout the year. This support helps landowners to manage their bushland more effectively.

Through the Trust, Buddy has also been able access information on grants and resources that are available to private landowners. "I had no chance on my own; I was ignorant. I didn't know what was available. It's also good to get encouragement. It can be very lonely out here and it gives you a lift to talk to somebody who supports what you're trying to do."

The Trust's stewardship coordinator, Steve Newbey, is responsible for developing management plans, conducting site visits and providing support for landowners. Steve says, "The best part of my job is meeting new people and learning new things. I don't consider myself an expert; I learn as much from the landowners as I can teach them.

Malee Fowl on Buddy Kent's property.
B Kent.



Sharing experiences and pooling information helps to increase my knowledge of bushland management and enables me to provide better advice to future covenantors".

Steve visits each property and talks to the owners, before developing a management plan to address the key issues through targeted actions. Each management plan must also consider the resources that are available to the owners to undertake management. Steve believes, "There is no point in writing idealistic management plans that are going to sit on a shelf and gather dust. It is important to be realistic about what can be done in order to achieve the greatest benefits."

The National Trust works closely with other organisations to deliver better services to landholders. Buddy first became aware of the National Trust's conservation covenanting program through other environmental initiatives, including Greening Australia and WWF's Woodland Watch program.

Steve says, "We work very closely with a number of other initiatives, because they compliment the service that we provide. It's important to have a range of tools available and then you can identify which are most appropriate for each property. Many of our covenants are referred to us by other organisations and, in turn, if we feel that a covenant is not the best solution, we will provide the landowner with details of other programs that are available to them."

Cooperative working relationships between practitioners in the nature conservation field also provide economic benefits to the landowners. Landowners only have to talk to one person to find out what assistance is available. The organisation also benefits from combining resources with the end result that land is protected.

With the continued support of the National Trust and other conservation organisations, landowners like Buddy Kent can continue to make a difference to the conservation of native vegetation in Western Australia.

If you are interested in finding out more about conservation covenants or other mechanisms for protecting bushland on private property, please contact the National Trust on (08) 9321 6088 or visit our website at www.ntwa.com.au.



Buddy Kent.
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PROFILE: STEVE NEWBEY, COVENANTING OFFICER

Steve Newbey commenced working as a Covenanting Officer for the National Trust in August 2002. Previously he had worked as a Land for Wildlife Officer with CALM based in Katanning and a Landcare Coordinator/Project Manager for the Gnowangerup Land Conservation District.

Steve's early years were spent in the small southern town of Ongerup where his family owned a farm. He completed his secondary education in Perth before studying Accountancy & Business Management in Albany.

His father was well known botanist, Ken Newbey and his stepmother of 25 years is ornithologist, Brenda Newbey. Throughout his adult life he has run the family farm at Ongerup and more recently two smaller rural/bushland properties near Donnybrook.

Steve's interest in conservation and nature has grown stronger throughout his life to the extent where his hobby is now his job. He enjoys meeting, learning from and working with many people who have a strong commitment to preserving the environment in which they live.