

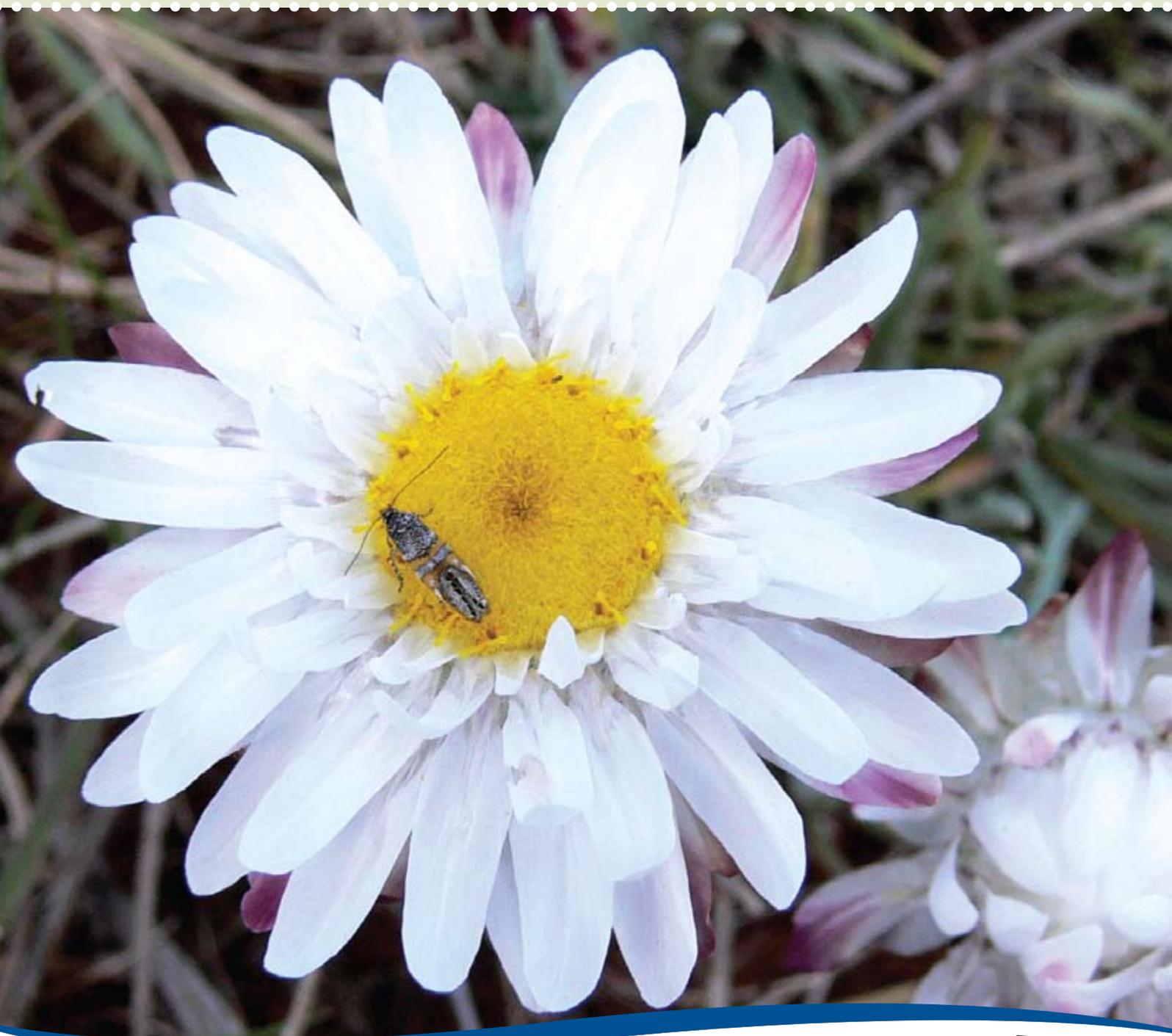


The
RunningPostman

Newsletter of the Private Land Conservation Program

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*Building partnerships with landowners for the sustainable management
and conservation of natural values across the landscape.*



Message from the Program Manager



Covenanted programs have been operating in Tasmania for roughly ten years now. The well known Private Forest Reserves Program and the Protected Areas on Private Land Program have been highly successful in targeting under-reserved vegetation communities for protection on private land over this time. In more recent times, the Non-Forest Vegetation Program, Forest Conservation Fund and Midlands Biodiversity Hotspots Program have made significant additions to the areas under conservation covenant.

Those of you who have entered into conservation covenants through these programs are probably aware that their focus has usually been quite specific. For example, certain forest communities have been eligible for funding and others have not, and certain grassland communities have attracted higher levels of funding than others - in spite of them appearing roughly the same to the casual observer.

The reason for this generally comes from the recognition that those particular vegetation communities are not well represented in the conservation "reserve estate" - whether it be National Park or private land. So it is those communities that our programs are able to offer funding on a per hectare basis for a guaranteed commitment to ongoing conservation management by the landowner.

Over the time that I have been in the position of managing the PLCP, I have had numerous conversations with landowners interested in taking a more holistic approach to property management than just targeting one patch of forest or one sward of grassland. Their emphasis has generally been on the fact that all of their property provides habitat for something, and it is the balance of all of these species, their interactions and their various niches that makes their property special to them.

It is also these very features that make some parts of Tasmania more valuable from a conservation perspective than others. This is particularly so in those agricultural areas that are more fertile and have been managed for their productive values for many years. In those areas, the remaining hilltops that have not been ploughed and fertilised, or the bands of forest and scrub along waterways may be the only link to the native vegetation that once covered the land.

The PLCP has been actively working with partners such as the Tasmanian Land Conservancy, Bush Heritage Australia and the Tasmanian NRM Regions to make our funding programs more flexible, and to recognise those natural values beyond specific vegetation communities that are under-represented in the conservation estate. We are working with potential funding providers so that areas of locally significant habitat that is under some form of conservation management may be

eligible for some level of financial incentive for entering into a conservation covenant, or assistance with weed or stock control under a long term management agreement.

Most recently we have been working together to develop a proposal for the Australian Government's Caring for Our Country initiative, and over the last year have been actively pursuing philanthropic funding through the Myer Foundation. This work may bring significant opportunities for Midlands landowners committed to sustainable land management and conservation management. In the future, we hope to broaden this type of opportunity out to other parts of Tasmania.

This edition of The Running Postman features articles that explore the diversity of habitat that is found on covenanted land and Land for Wildlife properties. This is the hidden value of the bushland, scrub and grassland that landowners I speak to are really interested in looking after. I hope you enjoy the articles.

John Harkin



Living in a **shared house**, every action has a reaction

There are many definitions for 'habitat' but the one that describes it best for me is 'home'. Within nature this 'home' can range from a large geographic area to a single cell within an organism. This complexity of habitat requirements creates a challenge when considering reserve design. When assessing a reserve proposal, the PLCP takes into consideration not only the protection and long-term viability of important vegetation communities but also the value of habitat both within and surrounding the proposed reserve.

Structural complexity and connectivity of reserves, in both a landscape and individual reserve context, are important factors we take into consideration to maximise the effectiveness of the private reserve system, to protect a wide range of habitat within Tasmania.

In a landscape context, for example, large areas of native bushland and/or connectivity to other areas of native vegetation are important for larger animals such as birds and native mammals. Connectivity of riparian areas is important for native invertebrates, such as burrowing crayfish and the giant freshwater

lobster. However, for some smaller species, the presence of a good ground layer of leaf litter and coarse woody debris may be all that is needed to maintain their population.

Within individual reserves, it is the structural complexity of the vegetation that allows a wide range of animals to share the same environment. Different species have evolved to exploit the variety of resources (e.g. hollows, water bodies) available within each vegetation layer (e.g. canopy, shrub layer, ground cover). Whilst some species can be considered generalists, that is, species that do not have highly specialised habitat and dietary requirements, other species have evolved with more specialised requirements.

An example of a specialised species might be the swift parrot, a bird that only feeds on the flowers of two eucalypt species – the blue gum and the black gum. Without these tree species the swift parrot cannot survive in the wild. On the other hand, generalist species such as the bluetongue lizard are able to exploit many habitats and food sources and so have a better chance of survival in a changing environment.

It is clear that changes in the structural complexity of the vegetation community can have big effects on the local fauna. One such example is the noisy miner; an aggressive native honeyeater, which excludes or kills smaller birds from their community. In a community that has been structurally simplified (e.g. removal of understorey or opening of the canopy by significant tree removal), the miner gains a competitive advantage over the smaller native bird species and is able to achieve species dominance. Their dominance can cause an ecological imbalance in that the small bird species they exclude are specialised insect eaters which feed on leaf eating invertebrates. In the absence of these insect eating birds, tree health can seriously decline. As the saying goes, every action has a reaction.

Maintaining a healthy, structurally and floristically diverse vegetation community benefits both the native flora and fauna, and by managing protected areas on private land we are working towards achieving healthy and robust vegetation communities across the Tasmanian landscape.

Janet Smith

Photos (L to R):
Photo by Janet Smith (DPIW)
Photo by Oberon Carter (DPIW).

“A covenant area can provide a myriad of food and shelter resources for a variety of wildlife.”



Managing habitat for wildlife in privately owned reserves

Some of the threats faced by our native wildlife include habitat destruction and fragmentation caused by land clearing, competition for resources from introduced species, urban development, as well as pollution and modification of waterways. Climate change is also likely to impact on our native species, particularly those with specialised requirements and those that are already under threat of extinction.

A covenant area can provide a myriad of food and shelter resources for a variety of wildlife. Native fauna, including the invertebrates, reptiles, birds, and mammals, is just one of the natural values conserved by this important network of protected areas.

To assist with the protection of the natural values in these conservation areas each reserve landowner is provided with a Nature Conservation Plan, also called an Operations Plan (the Plan), along with the conservation covenant. The Plan details the prescriptions, authorisations and recommendations that will contribute to the long-term protection of the reserve.

Information provided in the Plan relates either directly or indirectly to the management of habitat for native wildlife, with an emphasis on threatened and priority species.

For example, in those reserves where the collection of firewood for domestic use has been authorised, the prescriptions aim to protect important habitat features such as tree hollows, dead trees, and fallen timber, as well as maintaining the structural and floristic diversity of the vegetation. Furthermore, firewood collection is only allowed where it can be done with minimal impact on the natural values of the reserve area. Firewood collection is never permitted in threatened vegetation communities listed under the *Nature Conservation Act* (2002).

Plans may also aim to protect particular animal species by implementing particular management of habitat. An example of this is a Nest Management Area (NMA) around a wedge-tailed eagle nest. This area should be managed as intact forest, free from habitat modification, as the eagles depend on (intact) forest on sheltered

aspects for breeding.

One of the standard prescriptions in this case is “During the Breeding Season, the Owner must not conduct recreational pursuits in the NMA, but pursuits are permitted in the surrounding areas if noise levels are kept to a minimum and all human activity remains outside line-of-sight”. This is due to eagles being very shy nesters that will often abandon their nests (and eggs or chicks) if disturbed, particularly early on in the breeding season.

These types of prescriptions seek to balance the needs of the landowner with the needs of the threatened species.

The Plan is a management tool that should be consulted if landowners of covenanted land have any queries about the agreed management of their reserves. If any aspect is unclear they should contact the PLCP stewardship team for advice.

Annika Everaardt

“Birds play an important role in maintaining the health of the ecosystem by reducing the number of insect pests, pollinating plants and dispersing seeds.”



Native grasslands - more than just grass

Native grasslands represent some of the most species-rich and aesthetically pleasing parts of our landscape but are often overshadowed (both metaphorically and physically!) by the more conspicuous forest vegetation. Tasmania's lowland temperate grasslands are typically dominated by kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*), wallaby grass (*Austrodanthonia* sp.), tussock grass (*Poa* sp.) or spear grass (*Austrostipa* sp.). When these native grasslands occur in good condition, they often contain a high diversity of plant species, such as lilies, orchids and wildflowers, including some of Tasmania's rarest and most threatened flora. For example, the grassland paperdaisy (*Leucochrysum albicans* ssp. *albicans* var. *tricolor*) which is listed as endangered occurs predominantly in grassland areas.

Native grasslands also provide habitat for many animal species. Birds play an important role in maintaining the health of the ecosystem by reducing the number of insect pests, pollinating plants and dispersing seeds. Some smaller mammals, such as bandicoots, potoroos and bettongs, and reptiles, such as lizards and snakes, also feed on

insect pests and play an important role in dispersing fungi.

Lowland native grasslands also contribute significantly to the Tasmanian economy, in particular as an important pastoral resource for the wool industry. Over half the sheep in Tasmania graze native pastures, with a number of benefits to farmers stemming from this, including finer wool, reduced worm infestation in stock, reduced need for fertilizer and insecticides, and less farm maintenance as both soil and vegetation cover is healthier reducing the need for expensive inputs like erosion-rehabilitation and pasture establishment. Indigenous grass species also tend to be drought and frost tolerant in Tasmania, and more resilient to pasture pests such as corbie grubs and pasture cockchafers.

Over the last 200 years, lowland grasslands have suffered significant loss and degradation and in the past decade severe drought has put additional pressure on these areas. In recent times there has also been observational evidence of increased shrub invasion into Tasmanian grasslands, with recent experimental

work providing evidence that increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) may contribute to invasion of grasslands by woody plants.

Management of grasslands historically has involved both fire (particularly by Aborigines) and stock grazing (following European settlement). Light stock grazing remains an appropriate management tool for grasslands, helping to maintain the vegetation by reducing plant competition between grassland species, and creating spaces between grass tussocks for other native wildflowers to occupy.

Thanks to the commitment of Tasmanian landowners a number of lowland native grassland areas across the state are now protected under conservation covenants, or managed under Land for Wildlife agreements. In 2009, the work of the monitoring team in the PLCP will have a particular focus on assessing the condition of these grassland areas in private conservation reserves to get a better sense of the condition of these areas and consider broader threats and management issues that affect native grasslands.

Helen Crawford

Photos (L to R):
Pussy Tails (*Ptilotus spathulatus*).
Photo by Oberon Carter (DPIW).
Photo Lyn Pullen (DPIW)

“...The land is still mine,
but is protected forever,
maintaining habitat for plant
and animal species.”

Meredith Gebbie, landowner



Balancing **conservation** and **production**: A landowner's perspective

Meredith Gebbie and her family from “Shamrock Valley” near Ellendale in the mid-south of the state run a mixed cropping/sheep production enterprise. Like many landowners dealing with the current continuing long dry period, the family has diversified their production to include supplying cut firewood, using a variety of fattening crops for their sheep and supplying dressed lamb as well as supplying hay for the growing number of horse owners in the district.

Meredith's grassy forest covenant of approximately 70 ha, is a relatively recent addition to the PLCP and includes old growth stands of white gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*), black peppermint (*E. amygdalina*) and swamp gum (*E. ovata*). Although much of this forest does not comprise threatened vegetation, old growth forests are often depleted and are now considered rare. The natural values of this covenant lie in the fact that the forest has not been burnt or disturbed for a long time, contributing to its good condition.

When asked her reasons for joining the Program Meredith stated that “knowing that I had an area of land that had been basically untouched - as the previous owner had advised me that the land had not been disturbed for his 30 years of ownership and even before that, and he himself had considered conserving it –and believing it was so important to keep the land in that pristine state. As well as, not wanting it to lose its natural values, and to be there for future generations.”

Meredith stated that her support for conservation on private land was “because it is ME taking responsibility for preserving the intrinsic values of natural bushland. The land is still mine, but is protected forever, maintaining habitat for plant and animal species.”

She felt the strengths of the Program were “supporting the preservation of natural areas of land, to retain their environmental values. Allowing the landholder financial and physical support to do this, through providing to the landholder excellent

personal support, information and encouragement throughout the process”. Meredith's favourite features on the covenant are “not single species but the old growth eucalypts, the orchids, and the mossy areas along the creek plus the variety of birdlife, echidnas and platypus”. Her greatest concern “is that not enough landholders will appreciate the importance of conserving their land, and thus these areas will be lost”. Meredith concluded by saying “I feel that we must each be responsible for caring for our land. Farmers and landholders must recognise the importance of balancing conservation and production”.

Meredith and her family have welcomed the Program staff whilst conducting property visits and look forward to a continuing positive relationship using the services offered to help increase her knowledge of the natural area.

Lyn Pullen

Dr Sally Bryant with one of the bandicoots at the Bonorong Wildlife Centre.



Creating **bandicoot habitat** – conservation in **captivity**

Not every garden needs flowers to attract wildlife. Sometimes rocks, soil and even vegetables are just the thing. Bonorong Wildlife Centre at Brighton has built a new garden display enclosure to house bandicoots – it contains vegetable beds surrounded by native tussocks and grassland planned in a 'backyard setting'.

The display concept was developed by Dr Sally Bryant (former manager of DPIW Threatened Species Section) to house the centre's eastern-barred bandicoots in an enclosure that provides them with plenty of space and opportunity to exhibit their natural behaviours and talents for digging.

Most people see bandicoots either late at night digging on their lawns or in gardens, or dead on the road. Bandicoots love moist soft soil to probe their pointed nose for worms, grubs or insect pests, especially corbie grubs. Active during the night they emerge around dusk from a well-concealed nest of grasses and begin their foraging.

In captivity, bandicoots are difficult to display without a nocturnal house. They are naturally shy and secretive with only short bursts of activity. In the new enclosure, even if you can't see the bandicoots, you can see where they have been digging for their dinner.

In 2008 the project attracted the attention of Gagebrook Primary School and about 15 children under the supervision of teacher Steve Robinson spent regular periods at Bonorong helping to clear the area ready to house the display. Pru Cotton managed the project, Dave Wylie constructed the fence and John Ettles built the interior. Horticultural Supplies from Brighton and well-known community gardener David Stewart provided mulch and compost ready to fill the garden beds. A great team effort! The bandicoot display focuses on Bonorong's conservation theme of 'Living with Wildlife' and compliments its registered 'Land for Wildlife' and 'Gardens for Wildlife' property status.

Bonorong was first established as a wildlife sanctuary in 1981 and is situated on about 8 ha of light

bushland. Much of the area is native grasses which have never been grazed by domestic stock or fertilised. In keeping with Bonorong's conservation ethos, the property is now managed to promote natural seed setting and flowering of the grasses and provides habitat for swamp harriers and other native wildlife seeking refuge in the area.

For more information email gowildbonorong@bigpond.com.au or go to www.bonorong.com

Dr Sally Bryant

*Conservation Director,
Bonorong Wildlife Centre*



Photos (L to R):

Photo by Iona Mitchell (DPIW)

A *Chaostola skipper* larva. Photo by Phil Bell (DPIW)

Gahnia spp. Photo by Phil Bell (DPIW)



Habitat for threatened species – the butterfly *Chaostola* skipper

The loss of habitat for threatened species that have restricted habitat range, specific habitat type or even specific plant species association, can have a profound impact on the overall survival of those species in the wild.

The threatened butterfly *Chaostola* skipper (*Antipodia chaostola leucophaea*) is a good example of a species with a very specific plant association that can easily suffer from a bit of “tidying up” around the place.

This skipper has a limited distribution and specific habitat preference, as the caterpillar (larvae) feeds only on the thatch sawsedge (*Gahnia radula*) and slender sawsedge (*G. microstachya*). This skipper has been recorded in dry lowland vegetation communities on relatively infertile soil substrates where the food plant occurs.

The name ‘skipper’ comes from the rapid and erratic flight typical of the species of this family. The *Chaostola* skipper has brown and yellow markings and adults fly for only a few weeks between October and

December. The larva has a yellow body and a faint grey mid-dorsal line. The larvae feed at night and rest head downwards by day in a conical shelter of rolled up leaves of the food plant.

The *Chaostola* skipper has a very long stage as a caterpillar of approximately two years. The adults are generally found in the vicinity of the larval food plant and feed on nectar from nearby flowers.

Two large populations have recently been discovered on the east coast at Freycinet Peninsula and Little Swanport. These populations are somewhat protected as they occur in Freycinet National Park and a Private Forest Reserve conservation covenant on a property at Little Swanport. *Chaostola* skipper is also recorded in bushland areas supporting *Gahnia radula* and/or *G. microstachya* around Hobart, the Huon Valley, the Channel south of Hobart, Kingston, Little Swanport, Bicheno and the Freycinet Peninsula.

Because of their rarity, all populations of *Chaostola* skipper are considered a high priority for

conservation. No matter how large or small our properties, anyone with a property that has these *Gahnia* species can contribute to the protection or enhancement of the skippers’ survival by retaining areas where the food plant grows.

More information on Tasmania’s threatened species can be found on the DPIW web site, go to the home page at www.dpiw.tas.gov.au then select ‘Native Plants and Animals’.

Iona Mitchell



“Eagle scientists suggest that 20 ha of quiet forest around a nest is a good working minimum for a sustainable breeding site.”



Protecting habitat – saving species

We are incredibly lucky that Tasmania is an island that still has its top bird predators in place. It is an uplifting experience to watch a pair of wedge-tailed eagles soaring on thermals above the Midlands plain or one of our white-bellied sea eagles observing the water from a prominent perch on the shore.

Sadly, the Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle is listed as an endangered species under both national and state legislation and the white-bellied sea eagle is listed as vulnerable under the Tasmanian legislation.

State experts estimate that only 750 mature wedge-tailed eagles and less than 1,000 mature white-bellied sea eagles remain in Tasmania. The primary challenge facing our eagles' ongoing survival is successful nesting and breeding. As our natural landscapes are increasingly fragmented and activity in our forests increases, there are fewer isolated, peaceful nesting sites.

Eagle scientists suggest that 20 ha of quiet forest around a nest is a good working minimum for a sustainable breeding site. Any disturbance,

activity or noise in this zone during breeding season can be a serious factor in breeding failure. Other ongoing risks to the population are accidental deaths on roads, in wind turbines, and on power lines.

While collisions of eagles with wind turbines cause some eagle deaths, Roaring 40s (owner and operator of Tasmania's Woolnorth Wind Farms) is making a major contribution to the state-wide survival of Tasmania's eagles.

In 2008, the Tasmanian Land Conservancy (TLC) and Roaring 40s formed a partnership to protect viable nesting sites on private land, and launched the Eagle Nest Protection Program. The partnership was initiated by Roaring 40s to meet their operational requirements and commitment to deliver positive conservation outcomes.

The TLC was enlisted as a key partner and conduit for this work. Roaring 40s provides the funding for the TLC to operate the Program, which encourages private landowners to establish protected areas around eagle nesting sites on

their properties. These areas are then covenanted and owners are provided with appropriate support and management assistance from the PLCP.

The Eagle Nest Protection Program began in late February 2008 and has agreements for ten nest sites and surrounding habitat underway. The average size of these protected areas is around 30 ha, which should help to provide a sufficient area that is free from disturbance for nesting eagles. Providing these larger protected areas with minimal disturbance is an important step towards the ongoing survival of the two eagle species.

The TLC hopes to continue the program into the future, working with Roaring 40s, the PLCP and private landowners to make a major contribution towards keeping our majestic eagles soaring in Tasmanian skies.

Leigh Walters

Tasmanian Land Conservancy

Based on article by the same author published in the Tasmanian Land Conservancy newsletter, Issue 19 Summer 2008.

Log on and get more for your land

While most owners of covenanted land or Land for Wildlife properties are well aware of the natural values on their property and know that these areas play an important role in the conservation of natural values, how a property fits into the wider landscape can be a bit of a mystery, especially for people new to an area.

These days there is a wealth of information available to anyone with internet access that may help to cast a little light on the case. Google Earth is the most obvious resource that is freely available and is great entertainment. For more specialised information about natural values in Tasmania, a couple of websites associated with the DPIW site are well worth a close look.

TheList:

www.thelist.tas.gov.au

The information made accessible online by the Land Information System Tasmania (the LIST) can be divided into two main areas. The first area provides access to live and scanned documents and information held by the Land Titles Office such as Title, Valuation and Property Sales Information. The second area includes spatial information which is accessed through the LISTmap online map viewer, allowing users to view and create maps, and find out additional information about the features shown.

Users can view, create, print and share maps created from over 200 spatial datasets stored in the LIST using layers that include topographical data, natural resource data, roads and community facilities, cadastre (property boundaries), aerial imagery, administrative boundaries, area information, survey control points and nomenclature.

Layers of interest for landowners may include Aerial Imagery, the Private Reserves layer, the Public Land Classification layer and the Natural Values Atlas threatened species layers.

The LIST also has a comprehensive tutorial and help section detailing all of the various features, search options and map viewer tools. For more information contact:
listhelp@dpiw.tas.gov.au

The Natural Values Atlas:

www.naturalvaluesatlas.dpiw.tas.gov.au

The Natural Values Atlas (NVA) provides access to a database of comprehensive information on Tasmania's natural values (e.g. flora, fauna, geoconservation) through an easy to use online interface.

It can be used to search for information on over 20,000 plant and animal species from Tasmania, and can create reports and display maps showing their location. The application maintains species taxonomy and provides access to management documents such as listing statements and recovery plans.

To access the NVA you must first register as a user. This involves filling out and returning the NVA Access and Data License Deed that is found on the web page. Once registered and signed in, users can begin searching for information. The comprehensive help section may be a useful reference for first time users as it clearly explains the search features, options and related fields.

The NVA has a number of search options including Species, Observations, Individuals and populations. A Species Search allows users to find and download information about species from species census lists. An Observation Search allows users to find and download data about species observations that have been made in Tasmania since they were first recorded in the early 1800s. Users can search by species name, location or for a certain period or on a particular date. An Individual Search allows you to find and download records for individual plants and animals by identifier type or number, age, species name or location.

Interacting with the LISTmap interface to provide location based searches, the NVA is a powerful tool for nature enthusiasts. For more information contact:
NaturalValuesAtlas@dpiw.tas.gov.au.

David Rayner



Agfest, Tasmania's premier agricultural field day event, is being held Thursday 7 May to Saturday 9 May. The PLCP will have a display in the DPIW tent and we look forward to seeing you there. A number of our staff will be on hand so please come along and say hello.

If you would like more information about Agfest you can call 1300 243 378 or visit the website www.agfest.com.au/

Private Land Conservation Program participants as at 1 March 2009

Number of covenants	446
- hectares*	46,900
Land for Wildlife members	689
- hectares*	48,509
Gardens for Wildlife members	199

*Please note that there may be some overlap

Protected Areas on Private Lands Program

The Protected Areas on Private Land (PAPL) Program has been operating in Tasmania now for some ten years. The great results of this program in terms of areas reserved and partnerships formed has been well recognised locally, and has now made a real impact nationally.

The Australian Government has continued to fund PAPL through its National Reserve System program, and has recently commenced working with all other states and territories to establish replica programs based on the Tasmanian model. It's real praise for the work done by everyone involved in the Tasmanian program to date.

Dean Vincent is now coordinating the PAPL team (comprised of Matt Taylor, Andrew Cameron, Daniel Sprod and Leigh Walters), which

works out of the Tasmanian Land Conservancy. PAPL continues to engage with landowners interested in covenanting their land for conservation, and has recently started focusing on properties in particular areas (e.g. the Midlands) and properties that cover particular elements of the environment (e.g. eagles' nests) for conservation agreements.

Over time, we are aiming to make PAPL more targeted, and hope to be able to offer a range of incentives to people entering into perpetual conservation covenants through this program.

For all PAPL enquiries, contact Dean Vincent in the PLCP at DPIW on 6233 5292.

Selling Property?

If you have a conservation covenant over your property and are thinking of selling, you should keep in mind that anyone involved in the sale process (e.g. agents, lawyers) need to be informed of the covenant and its implications.

Prospective buyers and new owners must also be informed of the covenant on the property title so that they can factor this into their decisions.

A covenant may appeal to particular purchasers and should be promoted as a valuable aspect of the property. The PLCP Stewardship Officers (Stu King and Lyn Pullen) are happy to talk to prospective buyers regarding the natural values and how to manage them in accordance with your agreement.

We often find that buyers of Land for Wildlife (LFW) properties are keen to enter the program so that they can get involved in more active conservation management. We therefore also ask LFW owners who are selling to notify us so that we can make contact with the new owners and see if they would like to keep the property in the program.

PLCP Contacts

Stewardship

Stu King 6336 5427

Lyn Pullen 6233 3117

General

Annika Everaardt 6233 3654

Land For Wildlife

Iona Mitchell 6233 6427