

The
RunningPostman

Newsletter of the Private Land Conservation Program

December 2008
Issue 3
ISSN 1835-6141

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





The Running Postman

Our newsletter is named after a small twining plant that is widespread in Tasmanian dry forests (*Kennedia prostrata*)

The **Running Postman** will be published three times per year, and circulated to all the participants in the various *Private Land Conservation Program (PLCP)* initiatives, as well as other interested groups and individuals.

The *PLCP* Conservation Covenant partners, Land for Wildlife members, and signatories to Vegetation Management Agreements now extends to over eight hundred people. These people range from graziers and farmers with extensive operations in the Midlands, through to people with ten hectare bush blocks on the fringes of Hobart, with just about everything in between.

More information regarding the *PLCP* (and an electronic version of *The Running Postman*) can be found on the Department of Primary Industries and Water website:

<http://www.dpiw.tas.gov.au/runningpostman>

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Private Land Conservation Program participants as at 21 November 2008

Number of covenants	421
- hectares*	44,750
Land for Wildlife members	671
- hectares*	48,034
Garden for Wildlife members	146

*Please note that there may be some overlap

*On the cover: Louise Mendel assessing the vegetation in a private reserve.
Above: The Running Postman (Kennedia prostrata). Photo by Dr Greg Jordan, UTAS.
Photos provided by Private Land Conservation Program staff unless stated otherwise.
Design and layout: Design Unit, Information and Land Services Division, DPIW.*

Message from the Program Manager



In the last few months we broke a significant milestone for the Private Land Conservation Program: our 400th covenant was registered on title, bringing the total area then under conservation covenants in Tasmania to over 43,000 hectares. This translates to 0.6 % of the total land area of the State and 1.4 % of the 44 % of the State that is under reservation of some kind or other – and growing daily. On the national and international scale, these figures are impressive, particularly when the contribution of the Land for Wildlife program is added.

What the numbers don't tell however, is what is going on in these areas; that is to say what is the outcome of all this covenanting and associated work we do with landowners *in ecological terms*?

Whilst we can't answer that question with certainty, this issue features articles on our monitoring program that aims to inform us about long-term outcomes when managing properties for conservation.

From the golf course of Campbell Town to the far west of the State, the monitoring staff of the PLCP spend their working lives talking to landowners, measuring, counting and working out what it all means. This provides us with information about the state of the covenanted areas and the likely effects of a variety of management regimes.

The monitoring team also does a great job of communicating their findings to landowners after property visits, something that I get plenty of positive comments

about. It seems that everyone who manages for conservation is happy to see a photo of an orchid that they didn't know existed on their property.

Over time, we hope that this monitoring will provide us with more certainty about the real long-term successes of the work we do, and of the effects of the effort from our partners in conservation management of private land.

“Tasmania has fantastic opportunities for nature conservation on private land. We aim to work with you to make the most of them”

John Harkin

Arrivals and Departures

We were very sorry to farewell our Biological Monitoring Officer Kerri Spicer earlier this year. Kerri is well known to many landowners around the State, and her enthusiasm and dedication will be sorely missed. The other departure in the last few months was our Project Officer Sophie Marshall. Sophie worked in the Quality Assurance team preparing documents for execution and registration, and has now moved into a similar role at the Tasmanian Land Conservancy.

We wish Kerri and Sophie well in their new roles, and thank them both for their great contributions to building a solid private reserve system.

Joining the team over the last few months was one familiar face from the Private Forest Reserves Program; Janet Smith has returned. Janet has replaced Kerri in the Biological Monitoring Officer position, and brings a wealth of experience to this role. Our other new arrival is David Rayner, who is in his first full-time

job having recently graduated from university. Dave will be working behind the scenes to ensure that PLCP data and mapping is ship shape.

Finally – farewell and thank-you to Nick O'Brien, our industrial placement PLCPer from the University of Queensland who has spent the last three months working in the monitoring team, with a focus on fire management.



Vital signs - Monitoring the condition of Private Reserves

Through the great contributions to nature conservation made by many private landowners, we are fortunate in Tasmania to be able to boast a large and growing system of over 400 private conservation reserves.

These reserves occur on private land throughout the State, from the historic agricultural properties of the Midlands to bush blocks tucked away in more remote areas. They cover a total area of over 44 000 ha.

Most significantly, these reserves contain a great diversity of values, including threatened and high priority plant communities, threatened plant and animal species, and sites of geoconservation and heritage significance. They are also places of great aesthetic value.

A major role of the Monitoring and Stewardship team of the Private Land Conservation Program is to monitor the biological values in these private reserves, to track any significant changes to values over time and to help maintain these values into the future.

One of the tools we have been using to collect baseline information for ongoing monitoring of reserves is the Tasmanian TASVEG Vegetation Condition Assessment (VCA) Method. This method combines field measurements of seven different components of the vegetation, and three 'landscape context' components. These combine to give an overall assessment of the condition of the vegetation.

For example, in forest vegetation, we collect data on large old trees, tree canopy cover and health, weeds, understorey structure and diversity, regeneration of trees and shrubs, and cover of litter and logs. These are indicators of the condition or health of the vegetation, and also the habitat that the vegetation provides for a range of native fauna.

The 'landscape context' part of the assessment includes information on the size of the patch of native vegetation, the extent of native vegetation around the patch and how far the patch is from a large core of native vegetation. This is

important in terms of how well the patch of vegetation is buffered from external influences that may impact negatively on condition, or its 'resilience'.

To date, we have conducted over 380 VCA's in over 110 private reserves across the State. This includes assessments of the condition of more than 30 different plant communities.

The good news is while there is variation, around 70 % of reserves assessed have vegetation in high to very high condition. This tells us that not only do these reserves capture many important plant communities and species for conservation, but that they are also currently in pretty good health.

"... these reserves contain a great diversity of values, including threatened and high priority plant communities ..."

Louise Mendel

“... it is important for the future
as a record of what was there
and how it may improve”

Louise Osborne, landowner



Information for landowners

All of the information collected in individual reserves is also reported back to landowners to provide them with a better understanding of the values and condition of their reserves. We consider this a very important part of our monitoring work.

We hope that this sharing of knowledge increases understanding of native vegetation, its condition, the particular values in reserves, and critical issues of reserve management, such as weed control.

There are also a number of threats to reserve values and issues that may need to be addressed in future reserve management. The condition assessments allow us to identify some of these.

For example, we can look at how many reserves there are that do not currently have enough regeneration of eucalypts to replace the tree canopy over time. Factors such as the long drought, past over-grazing, a lack of burning in some areas and changing climate may contribute to poor regeneration in some reserves.

Landowners agree about the value of these reports. Louise Osborne, owner of two covenants in Epping Forest says “It has been valuable in the construction of our property management plan as it contains precise data about the species, and it is important for the future as a record of what was there and how it may improve. It’s also interesting to browse over as an educational tool.”

Len and Pat Doherty who have a covenant in Loongana agree “We found it quite interesting for us but also being a tourist operator it has been valuable for tourists, particularly international tourists, with interests in native flora and fauna. We also found the information provided on weeds helpful for our management.”

The information we have captured thus far should prove invaluable in the future. Repeated measurements at the same sites, using the same standardised vegetation condition assessments combined with other monitoring techniques, will have the additional benefit of allowing us to

identify and track changes in the condition and natural values over time.

Furthermore, repeated measurements will enable us to determine if the current management regime is adequate to meet the conservation objectives of the reserve, and thus enable us to learn about managing our natural systems and improve and adapt our management of reserves in the future.

Most importantly, it is this long-term monitoring data that will help us to help you manage your valuable conservation reserves into the future.

More information on the Tasmanian TASVEG Vegetation Condition Assessment Method can be found on the DPIW website at: www.dpiw.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/ThemeNodes/LJEM-6PE7J4?open

Louise Mendel



Orchids in the Rough - monitoring disturbance

Disturbance can often create the opportunity for a known threat to gain a foothold. Weeds are a good example. We know, however, that disturbance also drives a wide range of positive functions in the natural environment.

What happens though when we ourselves have, over time, become an integral part of this cycle? Matt Larcombe of the Biodiversity Conservation Branch of DPIW has placed himself right in the middle of this very question.

Matt's particular interest is in orchids, and to find out exactly what he's up to you will have to visit an unexpected location, the Campbell Town Golf Course. On the day I visit, Matt is discussing management activities with Club President, Morris Hughes and Secretary, Brian Johnson.

Morris and Brian know very well the values within the Course even though all 119 members may not. The roughs are home to 11 threatened plant species, including a leek orchid found almost nowhere else in the world; the 'Golfers leek orchid' (*Prasophyllum incorrectum*).

Prior to its use as a common, a horse track, a bicycle track and finally a golf course, periodic fire would have run through the tussocks and opened the gaps between them from time to time. This cycle, driven by irregular patterns of burning, maintained a mosaic pattern of habitats.

When it became a golf course the roughs were subsequently slashed once or twice a year to keep the vegetation at around 10 cm in height. The orchids have responded favourably to this disturbance. As it's a large undertaking the slashing has been done on a patch by patch basis which mimicked the mosaic pattern (similar to what a fire might produce).

Care has been taken to slash when soils are firm to avoid compacting the seed bank. In years of good flowering slashing waits until flowers have set seed, to keep the soil seed bank 'stocked up'.

Matt is now setting up a number of survey sites where he hopes to better understand the relationships between disturbance and the persistence of native grassland plants.

"I'll be setting up ten paired plots, one of each pair will be slashed as per the existing regime while the other will be burnt at two year intervals, if fuel load allows" Matt tells me. This work may help to answer questions such as: What is the best regime for slashing? How long after a wildfire should we wait before a prescribed burn? What's an indicative tussock gap that would suggest a most diverse and resilient community?

Matt's work is supported through a 'cross regional NRM project', where the three regional NRM bodies have jointly provided financial backing.

Next time you're passing the Campbell Town Golf Course and you see someone poking around in the grass, it may be much more than a lost ball they're seeking.

For more information visit the DPIW website: www.dpiw.tas.gov.au

Stuart King

Photos (L to R):
• Monitoring plot at the Campbell Town Golf Course. Photo © Matthew Larcombe (DPIW)
• Golfers leek orchid. Photo © Peter Tonelli

“Monitoring wetland health can be difficult due to their dynamic nature”

Janet Smith



Monitoring wetland health

With all the recent talk of climate change and our prolonged reduced rainfall, the PLCP monitoring team are turning some of their attention to assessing the health of the wetland communities present within the Tasmanian Private Reserve System.

There are approximately 704 ha of wetlands in the State, including both freshwater (aquatic herbfield and sedge/rushland) and saline (saltmarsh, sedgeland and herbfield) vegetation communities.

Monitoring wetland health can be difficult due to their dynamic nature. Often during their dry stage, the vegetation community is found only in the seed bank and roots buried deep in the soil. Water level fluctuation is a natural disturbance of wetlands and aquatic plants and animals have developed many strategies to persist over time and 'bounce back' after dramatic changes in water level. In fact in many cases, a drying stage is required for persistence and regeneration of both plant and animal species.

A major threat to wetland communities is a change to their natural pattern of water level fluctuations. Increasing the period of inundation prevents some species from germinating on the dryer mudflats, thus reducing species richness. Increasing dry periods may reduce species richness due to loss in viability of seed and rootstock. Wetlands in the Midlands have been known to 'bounce back' after a ten year dry period.

It is the longer term drying associated with draining (and potentially climate change) that would have a greater effect on our wetland systems. The length of wet periods is also a factor. The inundation period needs to be long enough for plants to grow and reproduce so they can put down seeds and roots for future generations. Short inundation periods reduce the seed stock and prevent some short-lived seed bank species from persisting in the community.

So how do we look at these communities? How do we describe them? How can we measure their health?

Often if you know the characteristics of the plant species that are present in a wetland prior to drying you can predict how the community will recover or 'bounce back' when wetted up again.

Information on plant species can be obtained from past knowledge (e.g. prior studies, landowners), and present studies (e.g. standing vegetation, seed banks, root bank). The monitoring team will explore ways of determining wetland health by using a combination of these methods.

Information sheets on wetlands are available from <http://products.lwa.gov.au/themes/water/rivers-and-wetlands?page=3>

Janet Smith



Official launch of the **Gardens for Wildlife** scheme

'Gardens for Wildlife' (GFW) is an exciting new voluntary scheme which made its first public appearance in the DPIW tent at AGFEST in early May this year. The Minister of Primary Industries and Water, David Llewellyn, officially launched the scheme at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens on 29 August.

The GFW scheme is an initiative of the DPIW Private Land Conservation Program and has been developed as a sister program to the hugely successful, long-running Tasmanian Land for Wildlife (LFW) scheme. It provides an opportunity for the wider community to get involved in conserving native species.

There are already more than 140 GFW members and the overwhelming message from these members is of the need to promote the role home gardeners can play in biodiversity conservation and to encourage others to welcome wildlife into their gardens. A number of LFW members have also joined GFW.

As well as the support provided by the Tasmanian Government, GFW is actively supported by non-government and other government partners. These include Sustainable Living Tasmania Inc., Understorey Network Inc., Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, WILDCARE Inc., the School of Geography and Environmental Science of the University of Tasmania, the Local Government Association of Tasmania, Australian Plant Society Tasmanian Branch Inc., and the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Regions.

Visit the website at www.gardensforwildlife.dpiw.tas.gov.au or contact the Coordinator, Iona Mitchell on (03) 6233 6427 or iona.mitchell@dpiw.tas.gov.au

Iona Mitchell



Working towards

Full membership in the Land for Wildlife (LFW) scheme applies to properties 2 ha or greater which have at least 1 ha of natural bush.

However, another form of registration applies to landowners who are revegetating areas on their properties to create wildlife habitat and wish to work towards full membership. 'Working towards' members receive everything that full members receive except the metal sign.

Interestingly, there has been a growing number of 'working towards' property registrations. This suggests an increased interest among landowners wishing to create and provide wildlife habitat and restore previously cleared land. It is amazing to see what people can achieve with their revegetation work, either through natural regeneration or active planting, and such landowners are keen and proud to show their efforts and to receive their LFW sign.

Monitoring the progress of 'working towards' LFW properties is a good means of learning what types of restoration, or revegetation methods have been successful. Indeed, some



Land for Wildlife

landowners develop their own techniques through trial and error and can therefore increase our knowledge of new approaches.

Remember though, it's not solely about planting trees but also understorey species – to use the tag line of the Understorey Network, 'it's not the full story without the understorey'. Diversity in vegetation will provide diversity of wildlife species and habitat.

The Understorey Network is a good voluntary organisation to contact to obtain information on local species to use, or source of plants (www.understorey-network.org.au). The person to contact is the Understorey Network Project Manager Ruth Mollison on 6234 4286 or 0407 352 479 or ruth.mollison@understorey-network.org.au

Iona Mitchell



Reducing the risk of bird strikes

"Short of habitat destruction... studies clearly indicate... that more birds are killed at sheet glass rather than any other human-associated avian mortality factor worldwide. Glass is not only universal, but also totally indiscriminate, killing the fit and the unfit." (Daniel Klem Jr., www.wildlifeprotection.net). Windows with large panes (greater than 2 m²) near the ground or greater than 3 m in height are usually the worst offenders.

There are steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of bird strikes, such as:

- Replace clear or tinted panes with frosted or non-reflective glass;
- Windows on opposite sides of the room create an inviting flight path. If corner windows or others give the sense of a clear throughway they should be covered with curtains, blinds or shades to block the perception. Deterrents (e.g. paper spots) can be placed on or in front of windows;
- Cobwebs can be left around windows to provide a visible barrier; they are also used by birds as nesting material.

If you find a stunned or injured bird:

- Approach the bird quietly from behind, directly opposite the way its beak is pointing;
- Quickly (but without startling the bird) cup your hands around the bird and place it into a small box which can be closed;
- Put the box in a dark, quiet place and let the bird rest for an hour;
- After about an hour check the bird or listen for signs of activity. If the bird is alert, it can safely be released. To release a bird, take it to a quiet place. Either place the bird on the ground or allow it to fly of its own accord;
- If the bird has not recovered, take it to a veterinarian.
- If the bird is suffering an obvious injury (such as a broken wing) it should be taken to a veterinarian who specialises in native wildlife.

For immediate help or advice you can phone the DPIW Injured and Orphaned Wildlife Hotline on 6233 6556.

Sarah Lloyd
LFW Volunteer Assessor

Photos (L to R):

- Official launch of the Gardens for Wildlife scheme. Photo © Simon de Salis (DPIW).
- 'Working towards' LFW property.
- Eastern spinebill. Photo © Sarah Lloyd.



Managing gorse in conservation covenants

Tasmania's first conservation covenant was registered in 1999 and there are now some 400 across Tasmania. One of the greatest threats to this private reserve system is from invasive plants, and gorse is the most widespread and prolific weed present. Gorse can completely alter the structure of vegetation communities, outcompete threatened species and may increase fire severity.

It can also be a major financial burden for landowners. One property owner in the north of the state estimates that gorse control costs him \$50,000 per annum across the property!

So dealing with the gorse threat to private reserves is a major management issue for the Private Land Conservation Program (PLCP) and landowners. A fundamental task for the Monitoring and Stewardship team of the PLCP is to determine the extent and impacts of invasive plants such as gorse and monitor changes to this over time.

To do this, the team has developed a system for documenting the occurrence of gorse in reserves.

During initial reserve assessments and monitoring and stewardship

visits, invasive plants are mapped and previous management information recorded. This information is then used to prioritise weed works and develop a strategic approach to gorse management across the reserve system.

Following property visits, the team provides landowners with a map of invasive plant locations and management advice. Occasionally, PLCP staff assist with gorse control in the field to help develop the skills of landowners. This also helps the PLCP team to develop an understanding of management issues faced by landowners, and some appreciation of the effort required to control weeds.

Control techniques include a combination of burning, spraying, mechanical removal and cutting and painting. Four biological control agents have been released throughout Tasmania, which are useful in reducing the plants vigour where infestations are too difficult to access or control is cost prohibitive.

Prior to covenanting, many of the reserves had a history of light grazing by sheep under conditions that allowed for the maintenance of

the natural values. Restricted sheep grazing is therefore permitted in the conservation management plans for many reserves. This can also be a bonus for gorse control, as sheep tend to browse young gorse seedlings, often killing them or at least preventing flowering and seeding.

Gorse patches can serve as habitat for native animals, particularly in landscapes where there has been significant land clearance and loss of shrubs. In such cases, removing gorse may need to be done gradually and also require replacement with local native shrubs to provide habitat.

There is no doubt that invasive plants like gorse are having significant impacts on private conservation reserves in Tasmania. The PLCP is committed to action that will manage the impact of gorse strategically over time. This action will compliment the fantastic efforts made by landowners to help control gorse, and in some cases eradicate it from their properties altogether.

Louise Mendel

Photos (L to R):

- Gorse. Photo © Weeds of National Significance Program.
- Mechanical control of gorse infestation.



Fire and the Tasmanian landscape

Fire has been a part of the Tasmanian landscape for millions of years as the result of both natural and human ignition and as such, many plants and animals have evolved to survive with it.

A number of vegetation communities are largely dependent on fire for their ongoing reproductive health, including those found within the dry eucalypt forests that make up about 80 % of the current private reserves.

In these fire-dependent areas, managed fire can have a number of essential and beneficial effects including:

- triggering plant regeneration;
- maintaining the habitat elements required to conserve plants and animals;
- assisting with management of weeds; and
- reducing the likelihood, extent and damage of high intensity wildfires to both natural and human assets through the reduction in fire fuel.

The effectiveness of the fire in relation to achieving these effects is determined by the fire regime for that site. The fire regime consists of a number of factors; most

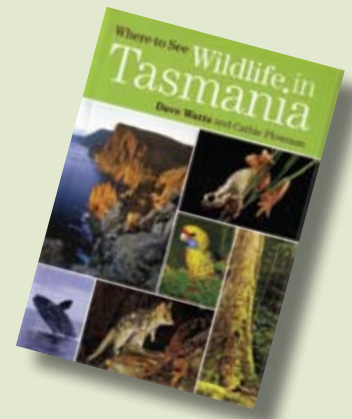
importantly the frequency of fire (how often), but also intensity (how hot), scale (how widespread), and season of burning.

Typically, within any given site, different regimes favour different species. As such, the most effective fire regime in an area is generally highly varied and implemented in a mosaic fashion. This will help to ensure the maintenance of a range of species, vegetation age classes and habitat types.

Fire management in private reserves is therefore a complex issue, but is essential to consider if the health and diversity of the vegetation is to thrive and provide habitat for fauna over the long term.

My work over the past three months with the PLCP has been to collate available research on fire, organise and run a fire management workshop for staff, and help to develop a structured approach to making decisions regarding fire on a site-by-site basis. This work will hopefully assist the PLCP to work with landowners to manage fire to the advantage of individual reserves and of the reserve system in general.

Nick O'Brien
University of Queensland
Industrial Placement Student



Book Review

'Where to see Wildlife in Tasmania' by Dave Watts and Cathie Plowman (Jacana Books, Allen & Unwin Publishers, Australia)

'Where to See Wildlife in Tasmania' is a recent publication that provides a useful guide for visitors to Tasmania or people who are not familiar with Tasmanian wildlife. The book details the types of animals which may be encountered at 29 sites across the State, thereby providing a good guide of where to go to see particular species, such as birds, platypus, or wombats.

The book is divided into regions and provides detailed maps for each site. A wildlife year planner enables people to time their visits to maximise chances of seeing specific wildlife species.

Dave Watts provides beautiful photographs of species and scenery. Indeed, the quality of the photographs and the comprehensive number of wildlife species throughout the book provide a useful means of identifying species.

Cathie Plowman provides an excellent guide to the wildlife species which may be encountered at each location.

This book is recommended for people who wish to see Tasmanian wildlife in their natural habitat.

Iona Mitchell

Protected Areas on Private Lands Program – a new focus

The Protected Areas on Private Lands (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 is now being rolled out nationally.

The Australian Government is now funding PAPL programs around Australia through the National Reserve System program based on the Tasmanian model. Apart from being good news for Australian conservation, it's real praise for the work done by everyone involved in the Tasmanian program to date.

Our next round of PAPL has commenced, and will have a somewhat different focus from

the past. PAPL continues to engage with landowners interested in covenanting their land for conservation, and has recently started focusing on people and 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

Can we help?

Landowners interested in conservation on their land have a range of possible opportunities for funding and support. The following programs may be of interest:

Non-Forest Vegetation Management Program

- Property-based vegetation management agreements, conservation covenants, and on-ground incentives for landowners to manage and protect threatened non-forest native vegetation, including grasslands, wetlands, heaths and scrubs.

- **On-going assistance may be available from this major initiative.**

- Ph: 6233 8538 or see <http://www.dpiw.tas.gov.au/inter:nsf/WebPages/LBUN-5WF6Q9?open>

Protected Areas on Private Land Program

- Voluntary conservation on private land in Tasmania (conservation covenants and management agreements)

- **On-going assistance and benefits available.**

Ph: 6233 5292

See also: <http://www.dpiw.tas.gov.au/inter:nsf/WebPages/SSKA-6B56K5?open>

