



The **Running**Postman

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

The Running Postman

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

The Running Postman is 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 1000 people. These people range from graziers and farmers with extensive operations in the Midlands, through to people with two 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, Parks, Water and Environment website:

www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/plcp

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Private Land Conservation Program participants as at November 1 2009

Number of covenants	505
- hectares	54,660
Land for Wildlife members	728
- hectares	48,963
Gardens for Wildlife members	269

Please note that some landowners are registered with more than one program and there is some overlap in the figures presented.

The Running Postman is printed on Monza Satin recycled paper, derived from sustainable forests, elemental chlorine free pulp and certified environmental systems.

*On the cover: Couser Reserve, Saltwater River. Photo by Geoff Couser.
Above: The Running Postman (Kennedia prostrata) Photo by Dr Greg Jordan, UTAS.
Design and layout: ILS Design Unit, DPIPW.*

The fantastic drenching rain that soaked the state for several weeks over winter has made a dramatic difference to the landscape that has suffered at least five years of punishing drought. Parched paddocks, dustbowl wetlands and tinder-dry bush have been the normal state of affairs for some time, so the verdant outlook is a very welcome change.

We have seen a huge burst of growth of native vegetation, and stories of brilliant wildflower displays in the Northern Midlands have come my way for the last couple of months. This ability of the natural world to bounce back from prolonged hard times is inspiring and impressive. It gives hope that no matter what we throw at nature, given a bit of time, it will recover.

However, for this recovery to occur, vestiges of the original vegetation and habitat must still be there. Without this, the gradual decline of the unique natural values of the land is assured. The clear evidence of this is abundant in large parts of Australia, and most visible locally in parts of the Midlands where almost

all native vegetation has been either cleared or altered in some way.

Future changes to the climate are likely to be noticeable in their impacts on native vegetation, as rainfall patterns, frost days and hours of sunshine all change somewhat. It is possible that droughts of the length and severity as the one that has just broken will be a more normal part of climatic cycles than in the past. It is therefore possible that the visible decline associated with long dry times will be accelerated and become more pronounced.

Changes to ranges in plant distribution and consequential impacts on habitat for dependent organisms (from fungi to tiger quolls) are difficult to predict, but likely to be pretty dramatic in some cases. It is also likely that invasions of exotic plants, animals and diseases will be ready to exploit new opportunities.

Your contribution to conservation of these natural values is obviously all the more valuable in the face of this decline. The potential

for movement of species within and between landscapes is much higher where these landscapes are connected by native vegetation, particularly when it is in good condition. So whilst the Copenhagen discussions may not yield much hope, back home, real meaningful action is being taken – by you.

This edition of *The Running Postman* once again highlights a few examples of work done by the PLCP Monitoring and Stewardship team that may be useful in detecting some of these changes over time. The information will hopefully be of interest and use to you in managing your conservation areas.

As always, feedback and suggestions for future editions are encouraged.

John Harkin

Photo Competition – and the winner is . . .

There was a particularly strong field of contestants in the first PLCP photo competition – probably not surprising given the inspirational subject matter that many of you have to choose from. The cover shot on this edition was taken by

Geoff Couser, and features his family enjoying their reserve at Saltwater River on a misty morning.

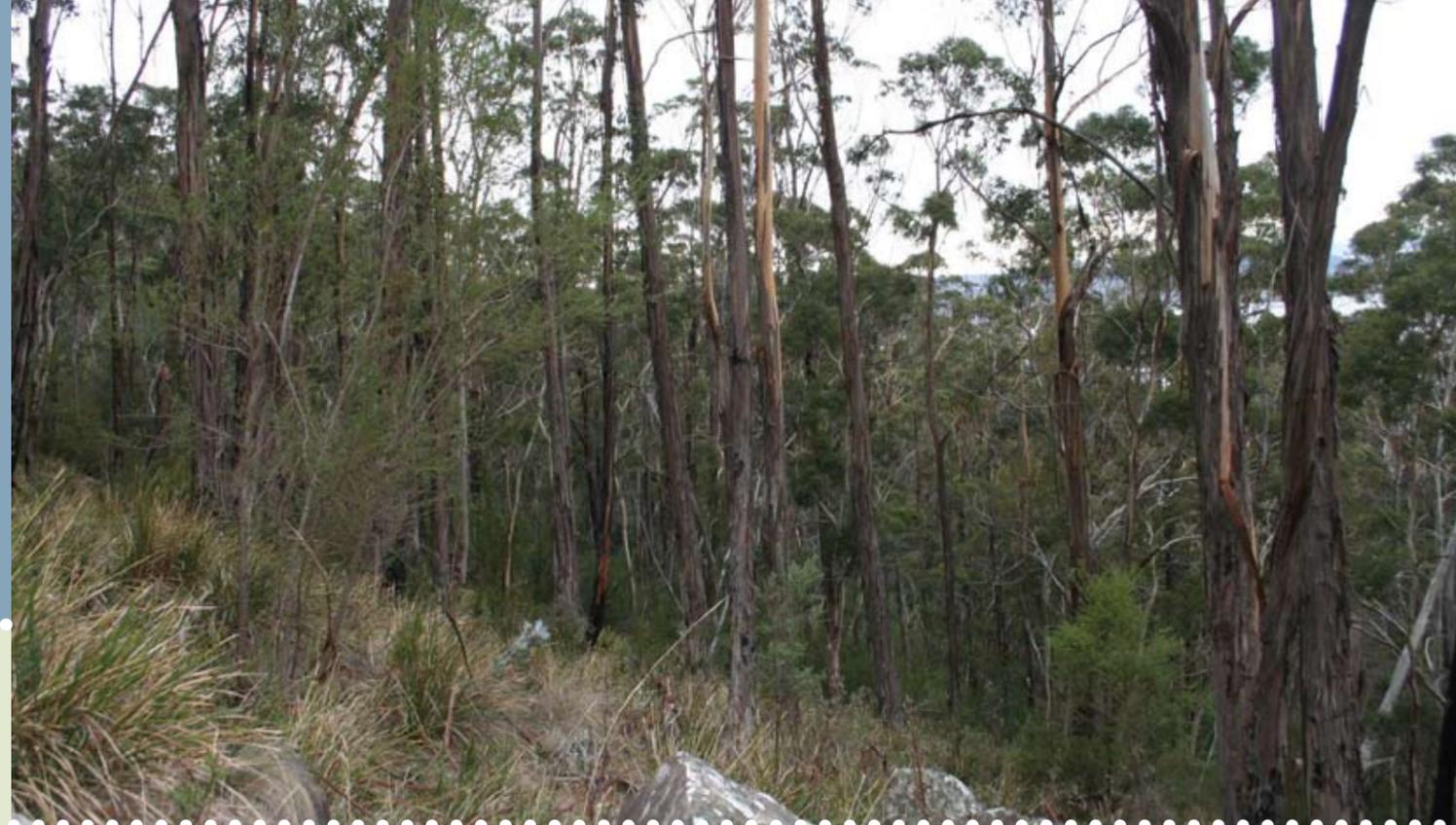
There were at least two other photos that were within a couple of votes of Geoff's effort; these will be featured in future editions. We

will also be posting a selection of photos on our website for all the world to enjoy.

Both Geoff and the runner-up (Owen Smith) received a prize pack for their work. Thanks to them and all the other entrants.



Up on top of the ridge one can walk away from the few tracks and stand in undisturbed bush and, on a quiet day, can neither hear nor see anything of man, a rare thing when surrounded by urban sprawl.



Conservation haven on the edge of Hobart

Our property is set in the Tarroona hills and comprises a mixture of paddocks and Eucalypt forests of blue gums, swamp gums, white gums and white peppermint. Many years ago, the lower parts of the property were grazed by dairy cows providing milk to Hobart. At this time there was a permanently running creek, but the last two decades have seen this source dry up and the creeks now rarely run. The 1967 bush fires burnt through much of the land.

In 1982, we purchased 250 acres from 500 acres owned by a Sydney development company, on which to live and graze angora goats. When we took over the property, the two previously cleared small paddocks totalling about 15 acres were covered in head high blackberries which we slashed once and left to the goats. Now one can't find any blackberries but, if we removed the goats, they would quickly take over again.

On the ridge-top part of the property, in our experience, if we were to run a large herd of goats there, it could only feed them for at most six months. It would take about three years to regenerate because of the fragility of the native bush and restricted rainfall.

Because of this we have always tried to minimise the impact of the goats on the bush areas to protect the native flora and fauna, which we value for the pleasure it gives us and for the habitat it provides for a great variety of birds, animals and insects.

Initially we intended to run a herd of some 300 angoras but we quickly realised that this would devastate the native plants and animals. We try to protect the land because of the pressure on the native species that comes from spreading suburbs and the activities of people generally. In fact, as a result of people trespassing with bikes, dogs, chain saws and rubbish, we have, as much as possible, closed the land to them.

Up on top of the ridge one can walk away from the few tracks and stand in undisturbed bush and, on a quiet day, can neither hear nor see anything of man, a rare thing when surrounded by urban sprawl.

A number of studies have been done of the flora and fauna of our land. One study revealed that of the 11 bird species endemic to Tasmania, eight have been present here. Because the land has been relatively undisturbed for many years we have a diversity of threatened creatures which we

wish to protect into the future. The area is habitat for swift parrots, forty-spotted pardalotes, bettongs, eastern barred bandicoots and some very large snakes.

A covenant under the Private Forest Reserves Program is the best way, at the moment, of providing the protection we want.

The positive aspects of this have been the assistance and advice provided by the DPI/PWE on a variety of matters such as biodiversity and weed control, as well as the provision of all legal documents required for the covenant process. We also received some compensation for the loss of use of the covenanted land for grazing and funds for fencing and weed control.

The negative aspects are that it is not possible to run a commercial farming venture involving grazing animals, the money allocated for fencing and weed control proved to be insufficient and there is no

avenue to address these latter problems. Our fear is that future governments will renege on the commitment to honour the covenant if faced with growing demands for urban development resulting from increased population and rising sea levels.

Overall, however, we are glad we entered into the covenant. Our hope is that the covenant sufficiently protects the land so that it remains a protected habitat and reservoir of the native flora and fauna forever.

Judith Paxton and David Meade, landowners

Footnote. *Judith and David are in the process of entering into an additional covenant with the Protected Areas on Private Land (PAPL) program to protect a further 12 hectares of forest on their property.*



Photos (L to R): Eastern spinebill. Photo by Judith Paxton. Tarroona bushland. Photo by Lyn Pullen.



Reining in **weeds**

Rain at long last. Many of our private reserves have been suffering the drought as badly as any pasture or crop. Within fragmented landscapes this is a serious issue. The most frightening aspect is a prolonged period where new growth is severely impeded, in this case for almost a decade. Combine this with overriding issues such as dieback and increased browsing pressure and we have ended up with a number of reserves having priority conservation values at real risk of not recovering.

And then of course, it rains.

And yet regretfully the forest is not the only thing that has been waiting for this moment. Something else has been waiting, patiently, as if with all the time in the world. Something much better prepared to take advantage of the situation. It is able to remain dormant for long periods, capable of extremely rapid growth, adept at reproducing in frightening brevity and abundance. These are the characteristics of the

super plant, your arch enemy, the environmental weed.

When our immune system is weakened by poor nutrition, dehydration and exposure we are at our most vulnerable to attack. Recovering from such an attack is quite a lot more difficult than if we were fit and healthy, when our immune system might just brush away the intruder. Your reserve is no different.

Weed characteristics make them excellent exploiters of weaknesses and rapid colonisers of disturbed areas. Being outside their natural range and having no effective competition they have nothing to 'pull them up'. Ideally, we need to 'nip em in the bud' now. But first, we have to find the blighters, not always an easy task itself.

Making this an even more challenging problem is the fact that many of these weeds are not at all familiar to us. 'Emergent weeds' are ones that we may not have seen in

large populations before, and they too are looking to take advantage of these more favourable conditions. The DPIPWEE has identified about a dozen such weeds that are either new to Tasmania, or have populations that have not yet spread beyond a fairly limited extent.

The characteristic that they share is that they have all become highly invasive in comparable latitude and climatic zones. An obvious complication is the changing climate, which may open new possibilities for a range of hitherto unseen weedy plants.

Some of these plants have the potential to be extremely costly to control, and may be impossible to eradicate if they get established.

The best way of preventing establishment is early detection and prompt action.

Illustrating the importance of being alert was the recent discovery of highly invasive serrated tussock, which was recently found cunningly disguised amongst some native tussock grass within a private reserve in the north of the state. It has most likely been there for years just slowly but surely expanding its range, taking advantage of exposed patches of soil. A control program is now in place, and with appropriate resources, eradication is possible.

Serrated tussock and other grass weeds like Chilean needle grass are more likely to become established under recent conditions. The abundance of drought stricken bare earth, followed by weeks of drenching rain and then relatively warm conditions make the germination and spread of such weeds into native grasslands and woodlands a pretty sure bet.

From a production perspective, they are problematic as they are less palatable and less nutritious

than pasture species. From an environmental perspective, they have the potential to obliterate the natural diversity of these areas, replacing it with a highly simplified system that provides less habitat for native plant and animal species.

So while it's nice to sit back a moment and enjoy the fresh flushes and rumbling streams, be careful not to rest your powers of observation. Take a deliberate walk. Perform your own inspection.

Keep a lookout for plants you have not noticed before, that you don't recognise, particularly ones that seem to be gaining a rapid foot hold.

If you're suspicious but not sure then take a photo and send it through to anyone in the

Monitoring and Stewardship team. It might just save you a bunch of dollars, effort and heartache later on.

Perhaps you recognise a weed but are not completely sure of how to approach it. Once again, jump on the phone. Stu and Lyn can help you with information, advice and strategies to deal with your unwanted intruder.

Don't let a weed ruin your enjoyment of this wonderful and wet time.

Stu King and John Harkin



Many LFWers and landowners with conservation covenants are supporting local platypus populations by protecting platypus habitat on their property.



Sarah Lloyd of Birds Tasmania has conducted a successful pilot survey using digital sound recordings to ascertain the bush birds present in an area.

Protecting the platypus



Platypuses are common and widespread in Tasmania, but are becoming increasingly subject to human disturbances of their freshwater environments. Unfortunately, there are regular reports of platypuses being killed by dogs, run over by vehicles, or drowned after entrapment in illegal nets or fish traps. A less dramatic, but potentially more serious problem for platypuses is the loss or degradation of their habitat.

Platypuses require habitat with an abundant source of invertebrate prey, good water quality, and sufficiently large areas (ideally kilometres) of continuous riparian vegetation along suitable waterways.

The burrows of these elusive creatures are typically three to eight metres long, but breeding burrows may be as long as 20 metres with multiple chambers. Thus high banks stabilised by the roots of native vegetation provide ideal nesting habitat for platypuses and should be protected if platypus are known to reside in the area.

Sustainable land management practices such as maintaining vegetated riparian buffer zones

around waterways and dams can enhance conservation outcomes in general and provide benefits for not only the platypus but other wildlife. As a bonus, such practices are widely recognised for the benefits to landowners, such as reduced erosion and soil loss, buffering nutrient leaching into waterways (leading to better water quality) and less opportunity for weed invasions in these sensitive areas.

Another fairly recent problem facing the platypus, is the introduced fungus, *Mucor amphiborum* which causes infection and the disease mucormycosis. Affected platypuses develop ulcers on various parts of their body and then die due to secondary infection or an inability to maintain body temperature. This disease was first observed in platypuses in 1982 in the Elizabeth River near Campbell Town.

Interestingly, this fungus occurs on the mainland (in particular northern New South Wales and Queensland) without any observed mucormycosis in platypus there.

It is not known how the fungus was introduced to Tasmania, although it is thought that infected frogs from

the mainland may have been the vector. Field surveys conducted in 2008/09 indicated that disease prevalence (proportion of infected animals) has declined since the late 1990's. Nevertheless, efforts should continue to be made to protect platypus habitat where possible, and to keep tracking the disease.

Many LFWers and landowners with conservation covenants are supporting local platypus populations by protecting platypus habitat on their property.

People can also help by reporting observations (including location details) of both diseased and healthy platypus. to: PlatypusEnquiries@dpipwe.tas.gov.au or by contacting the Biodiversity Conservation Branch on 6233 6556.

Further information about platypus conservation and the mucormycosis disease may be found at www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/WebPages/BHAN-53573T?open

Iona Mitchell and Nick Gust

Twitching technology



Birds have long been recognised as good indicators of the health and status of the environment. Bushland with a range of strata and in good condition has been found to contain a higher diversity of bird species than degraded bushland. Conversely, several bird species are recognised indicators of degraded habitat - whether in urban gardens or natural bushland.

Many Gardens for Wildlife members have planted out their gardens using local native plants, and have reported great success in increasing the number and variety of birds that now visit or live in their garden.

The presence of smaller birds, such as wrens, robins and smaller honeyeaters, are reliable indicators of native vegetation in good condition with a diversity of plant species and strata. The presence of understorey vegetation creates physical structure and complexity essential for providing habitat for moving, foraging, resting, breeding and avoiding predators.

Where this has been removed, species such as noisy miners and kookaburras tend to move in and

dominate.

Sarah Lloyd of Birds Tasmania has conducted a successful pilot survey using digital sound recordings to ascertain the bush birds present in an area, using Zoom H2 digital recorders. Thanks to a number of volunteers she has obtained over eighty 20-minute recordings and compiled species list from a variety of sites across the state.

Recordings are made over 20 minute intervals, site data are documented and then the recordings are analysed to produce a complete list of avifauna in the survey area. The method provides a permanent audio record of bird species in an area, recordings can be played back at any time and if necessary, other people can be called upon to verify species identification for unfamiliar calls.

Based on the success of Sarah's pilot survey, bird surveys are now being used as a complimentary tool for the existing monitoring program of private reserves in Tasmania. The NSW Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife provided funds to the Private Land Conservation Program for the purchase of

four digital recorders to collect bird recordings while monitoring reserves and Land for Wildlife properties.

We hope that this will provide a better understanding of interactions between bird species, habitat types and condition, as well as providing useful information for landowners and managers. Recordings made on the private reserves will also be given to Sarah to give her study greater coverage.

On occasions, recorders will be lent to GFW, LFW or conservation covenant owners willing to participate in the project. The recorders are extremely simple to use even if landowners lack skills to identify bird calls – they just need to place the recorder in a suitable location and press a button to start the recording.

This is the PLCP's first foray into the world of remote monitoring technology – we eagerly await the results and we'll let you know if we hear a yowie.

Iona Mitchell



Your commitment adds value far and beyond your reserve boundary.



The protection of private reserves

Motivations for establishing a private reserve are as varied as the reserves themselves are diverse. However most owners would agree that it is the statutory backing of a covenant that provides the peace of mind their patch will be preserved, perpetually. Yet beyond the management prescriptions signed up to, many will not pay much further attention to the matter of compliance.

I once had a discussion with a Park Ranger who was, at the time, unconvinced of the value of private reserves. However, when we moved onto issues in managing the public estate it became apparent to me that a significant advantage of private reserves is often overlooked, private reserves have a 'ranger' for each and every one, a person contractually obliged to protect it, although by and large these folk are devoted to the reserves' preservation independent of any legislation.

Private reserves are comprehensively assessed for natural values, prescriptions are developed very rigorously and third party damage is uncommon. These

are enviable characteristics for any kind of reserve at the national and global scale.

When a landowner signs up to a conservation covenant, they become the legal guardian of not just the land, but the land's natural values. The value of this is intrinsic to the strength of that reserve, and indeed to that of the entire private reserve estate. Stop and think about that for a moment. Your commitment adds value far and beyond your reserve boundary. And really it's about compliance.

Disregard the authorised activities in your reserve and there's a potential breach of covenant. Were this not enforceable, then the value of each and every other covenant would be subsequently diminished. It's a team effort, literally.

Conservation covenants are enabled under Part 5 of the *Nature Conservation Act (2002)*. The covenant itself spells out the nature of activities that are or are not authorised to be undertaken in the reserve. An Operations Plan or Nature Conservation Plan summarises the values within the

reserve and details the nature of any authorisations, for example, timing and limits for certain activities, monitoring, notifications, etc.

All these documents are linked back to the *Nature Conservation Act*, where a failure to comply represents a breach under Part 5, Section 46(1). Fines and compensation are possible outcomes.

It all sounds pretty heavy, but it is the instrument that ensures your reserve is protected, no matter who owns or manages it in the future. It is the collective strength behind the estate. By continuing to work within its bounds you solidify the value of a reserve system of global importance.

Oh and hey, if you think some clarification or adjustment is needed, give Lyn or me a call.

We all have the best interests of your reserve in mind, and we are here to support you.

Stu King

The changing face of wetlands

Now the drought has broken, water is again filling up our wetlands and waterways, but what can we expect to see 'bouncing back'? Many wetlands are now brimming with water, regenerating plant and animal life not seen for quite a few years.

When discussing the wetland in the reserve on her property, landowner Louise Osborne noted "This is the second time in five years it has filled up. There are lots of plant species coming up that we have never seen before, both in our wetland and grasslands."

Indeed, wetland vegetation can change rapidly over both time and space. As we have seen recently, a single large rainfall can convert a dust bowl into a lake overnight. The dry herbaceous zone that was the whole wetland may rapidly become partially or entirely replaced by an inundated aquatic herbaceous zone.

This provides us with an invaluable opportunity to monitor or observe wetlands in an inundated state and ask questions such as, 'what is there?', 'where is it?', and 'how does it change over time?'

The PLCP monitoring team has been donning the waders this season and asking these questions so as to develop easily used approaches that will inform management practices in and around wetlands in conservation areas.

In terms of what you can see in your wetland at any given time, wetland plants (aquatic macrophytes) have a variety of specific needs. For example, terrestrial species (e.g. native grasses and shrubs) require dry or damp conditions whereas amphibious species are adapted to survive water level fluctuations by either tolerating (e.g. reeds and low growing herbs) or responding to (e.g. pond weeds and running marsh flower) water level changes.

The potential range of flora of a wetland includes not only the species growing in the wetland but those species represented by only buried seeds and/or roots.

The water regime (i.e. water level fluctuations) is the most important factor in determining vegetation patterns or zones in wetlands. Different vegetation zones will be present as conditions change in the transition from dry land to mudflats, to shallow water, to deeper areas, depending on various plant adaptations and strategies to cope with changing water levels.

As wetland soil becomes saturated, aquatic plants germinate or grow from roots and tubers. As water deepens, terrestrial and low growing wetland herb species that have colonised the dry areas are drowned. These species can survive in the short-term but if inundated

for long periods will die. Plants adapted to inundated conditions grow up through the water column and become dominant. If conditions permit they will flower, set seed and/or increase root mass, to enable persistence over time.

Once inundated, the length of time taken for wetland plants to regenerate depends on the persistence mechanisms of the species present, for example, regeneration from rootstock is often quicker than from seeds.

Obviously, this has important implications for management practices in these areas. Landowners have to manage these areas to ensure that activities conducted in the dry times still allow those wet species' roots and seeds to persist in the soil so they can bounce back when the rain comes.

Wetland areas in conservation reserves are an increasingly important haven for plant and animal species and an important scientific reference point – as well as just being simply beautiful.

If you happen to be passing Oatlands in the next few months, it's worth swinging in to have a look at the newly recharged Lake Dulverton. It's quite a change from the parched image that can be seen on Google Earth.

Janet Smith

2009 Tasmanian State Landcare Conference

Selling Property?

Last month the biennial Tasmanian State Landcare Conference was held at Swansea. The theme was 'Landcare in a changing climate' and Professor Ian Lowe gave the keynote address with a gripping account of how people worldwide need to cooperate to solve the climate challenge. Biz Nicholson of 'Bonneys Plains' gave a heartfelt account of community and connection to landscape.

A number of covenanted and LFW properties featured on the conference field trips. Delegates visited 'Llechwedd-y-Creigiogg', a covenant at Cherry Tree Hill and heard from the owners about how the covenant suits both their desire to protect the property and provides enough flexibility to live on and enjoy the property.

At 'Kelvedon' delegates visited a covenant area specifically designed to protect the swift parrot. The Mt Paul conference and events centre, near Coles Bay hosted lunch for the northern field trip. The owners spoke to the group about how their LFW membership reflects their love of the property and forms an important component of their ecologically focused business enterprise.

Following the field trips, the State Landcare Awards were held at the 'Kelvedon' property. Minister Llewellyn announced the winners of 11 categories of awards. To see the 2009 award winners visit www.taslandcare.org.au/tlca.html

President of the Tasmanian Landcare Association, Mr Lyndley Chopping said the awards were an excellent opportunity for the Tasmanian landcare community to reward volunteers for their efforts protecting our precious natural resources. "For every winner announced, there are hundreds of others in landcare making incredible inroads into solving some of the state's land and water degradation issues." "It's always valuable for the individuals and groups that make up the Tasmanian landcare community, to come together and see firsthand what their peers have achieved. It is inspiring to see what can be accomplished with hard work and determination," Mr Chopping said.

In a sense, the owners of covenants and LFW properties deserve an award too. The contribution to nature conservation you have all made and continue to make has a huge impact on protecting Tasmania's unique natural environment.

Dean Vincent

Winners of the 'Leighton Holdings Indigenous Award' – Greening Australia, the Indigenous Land Corporation and Weetapoonna, receive their award from Minister Llewellyn.

Photo by Scott Donovan.

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.

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