

treetalk

STORIES FROM THE SEEDLING BANK



LIFE IN THE DAINTREE

Planting for wildlife in the world's oldest rainforest

CARING FOR WILDLIFE

Native Browsing for Australia's tree-dwelling wildlife

THE LIVING CLASSROOM

Growing to connect

BUDINYA MRAATU

Learning on Country

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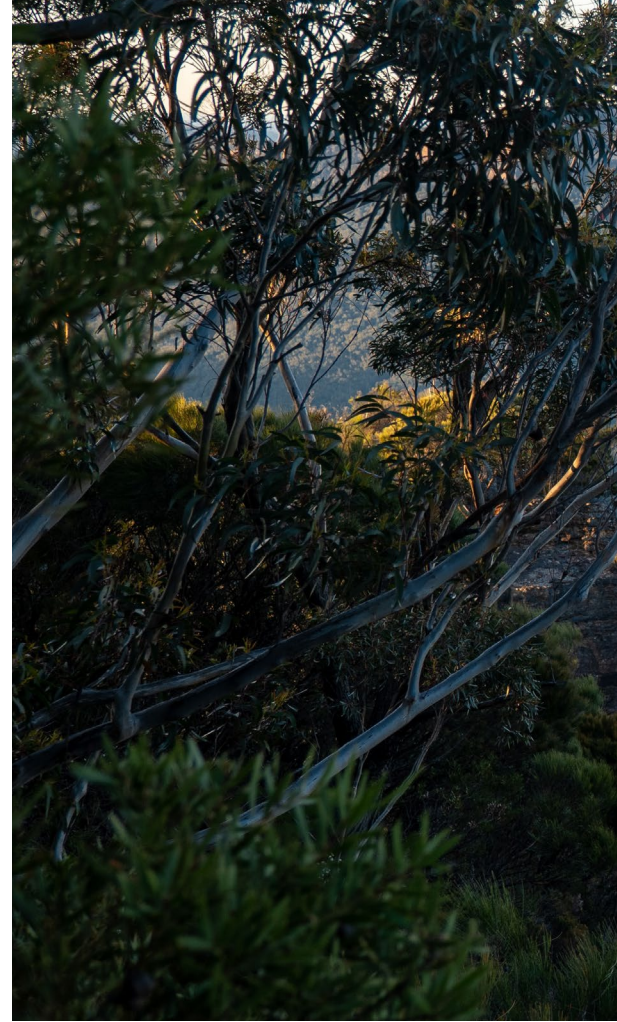
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Echo Point lookout, Katoomba. Photo: Tarryn Myburgh, Unsplash

Connection is everything. Without our relationships with each other and the natural world, humans would be lost.

The events of recent years have really hammered this home by dividing us from one another but at the same time giving us more opportunities to reconnect with nature. For many, local neighbourhoods were rediscovered through new eyes during lockdowns – a favourite walk or tree taking on greater significance as we stopped to soak in our surroundings.

Studies show time in green spaces boosted wellbeing during lockdown, supporting Planet Ark's previous research findings on the positive impact of nature on our mood, health and productivity. We need nature as much as it needs our protection, which is why we launched the nation's largest tree planting initiative all the way back in 1996 to help Australians connect with and care for the unique environment we are lucky enough to call home.

In 2019, we expanded our efforts with a grant program called The Seedling Bank that funds ongoing nature regeneration projects. Over the past three years, we have supported 90 school and community groups plant 39,000 seedlings around Australia, with another 55 groups set to plant 40,000 more this year. It's grassroots, hands-in-the-dirt work done by our National Tree Day community all around the country.

Now in its second year, *Tree Talk* is our chance to celebrate these dedicated volunteers and the

wonderful work they do. In this edition, you'll find stories from life-long conservationists preserving local habitats and Indigenous students passing on cultural knowledge through plants. We will take you on a journey around Australia to meet Seedling Bank beneficiaries including Warrawong High School, where students are regenerating a gully connected to an 11-acre permaculture farm, and the Friends of Lake Claremont, who have achieved amazing results after becoming the first group to receive a grant through The Seedling Bank.

As we emerge from a particularly challenging time in Australia, where the pandemic was bookended by devastating fires and floods, their stories of resilience give us renewed hope for the future. After two years of cancelled National Tree Day events they are all the motivation we need to get back out in nature – we hope they inspire you to get your hands dirty and sow something new in your local community too. ■



Rebecca Gilling,
co-CEO Planet Ark



Stories from The Seedling Bank

Nature can be a source of strength, especially in difficult times. It's where we go to recalibrate, destress and find stillness. The projects introduced in this edition of *Tree Talk* are preserving Australia's precious wild places and enriching communities in the process.

After Queensland's Lockyer Valley was devastated by flooding at the beginning of the year, locals noticed a lone cluster of silver wattle trees left standing by the creek bed in the town of Grantham. The trees came to symbolise the resilience of this place, inspiring a community planting project we are proud to support through The Seedling Bank. With our financial assistance, locals will plant over 1,000 seedlings for National Tree Day this year.

Established in 2019, The Seedling Bank is Planet Ark's nature restoration grants initiative. It is an evolution of the work we do through Australia's biggest tree planting and nature care event, also known as National Tree Day, which has seen Australians plant 26 million trees since 1996.

Tree planting is a vital tool in the fight against climate change, but even more important is taking a wholistic approach to ecosystem management and caring for plants as they grow. There's a big difference between planting a tree and walking away and creating a complex bionetwork of native plants and wildlife habitat. That is why we decided to launch a grant program for long-term conservation projects some three years ago.

The Seedling Bank provides funding for schools and community groups to plant native seedlings in their local area. But there is so much more to what our beneficiaries do than getting trees in the ground, as you are about to discover in the pages of *Tree Talk*, our annual magazine showcasing stories from The Seedling Bank.

This year, we will take you to into the heart of Victoria's Strzelecki Ranges where volunteers are preserving bird habitat and planting botanical bushfoods. Then, we head north to the lush green of the Daintree where a powerhouse husband and

There's a big difference between planting a tree and walking away and creating a complex bionetwork of native plants and wildlife habitat.

wife team are planting habitat for wildlife in the world's oldest rainforest. We'll also introduce you to a school regenerating a gully connected to one of the largest urban permaculture farms, explore an Indigenous cultural garden where plants tell a local creation story and take you inside a wildlife sanctuary growing flora for 'native browsing'.



These are stories of communities coming together after the storm to heal themselves and the landscape. They have united to help their towns bounce back from fires, floods and the pandemic stronger than ever before. This edition of *Tree Talk* is dedicated to their incredible displays of resilience. ■

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- 1. Warrawong High School
 - 2. Daintree Life
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 - 6. Newbery Park Primary School
 - 7. Birdlife Australia
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The Living Classroom

GROWING TO CONNECT



Warrawong students singing in the gully. Photo: Aristo Risi

A small gate overgrown with climbing vines opens to a sea of green. A lone pathway meanders down through the green to a gully growing tall with rainforest trees and wetland grasses. The scent of wet earth seeps up with every step and a gap in the canopy above filters gentle morning light down to the garden floor, where three students are swaying and singing in Kinyarwanda.

Only a short drive from Wollongong, on the grounds of Warrawong High School, two special planting projects are underway. One is a regeneration project connected to a large urban permaculture farm that employs resettled refugees. The other, an edible garden where students come together to learn about plants. Both projects are helping newly arrived community members lay down roots in Australia.

For National Tree Day this year, Warrawong High students will use funding from The Seedling Bank to expand the school's gardens, create new bee habitat and revegetate the area that connects the school grounds to the farm.

Plants provide important opportunities for cross-cultural learning at Warrawong High, where 55 per cent of students come from non-English speaking backgrounds. The school's Intensive English Centre (IEC) teaches English to pupils from Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Zambia and Myanmar, among other places. In total, 39 nationalities are represented in the student body and the school gardens provide a supportive space to bring them together to connect with nature and each other.

[Maria] describes the garden as a place to heal, connect and grow, with spontaneous singing often heard floating up from the gully.

“Working in the garden provides a safe place where we all share our stories and knowledge about plants, food and gardening,” IEC teacher Maria Schettino tells Planet Ark.

The school gardens are a second home for Maria, who has been teaching English at the IEC for over 14 years. She has seen first-hand the positive impact of the gardens in bringing students from the main high school together with the IEC students to learn about different cultures through plants.

Located beside the main school building is a space known as ‘The Living Classroom’. It’s filled with an array of Southeast Asian and South American plants, many of which are edible. The root of casava can be boiled down and sprinkled with salt, ice cream beans are a delicious addition to salads and guava is a sweet treat between classes.

Former Warrawong High student, Leatitie Umuvyeyi, has spent more time than most in these gardens. Arriving from Zambia in 2015, she has now graduated and works casually in the IEC as a learning support officer while completing a Bachelor of Science majoring in cell and molecular biology.

Leatitie couldn’t speak English when she arrived in Australia, but plants provided a source of comforting familiarity as she tackled the challenge of learning a new language and adapting to life in Warrawong. She describes the Living Garden as a special place that reminds her of home – “it means a lot to me as someone who came from a place where I used to see my dad doing gardening every day”.

Maria says the most rewarding part of her job is watching newly arrived students make friends, build confidence and settle into life in Australia as part of

the school and wider community. She describes the garden as a place to heal, connect and grow, with spontaneous singing often heard floating up from the gully.

As well as maintaining the Living Classroom, Warrawong High students have been transforming the gully behind the school that connects to Urban Grown, one of the largest urban permaculture farms in the world.

Established by Green Connect – a social enterprise that grows chemical-free food to create jobs for resettled refugees and young people – the farm sits on formerly-neglected school grounds, which were once infested with invasive lantana, plastic waste and dumped vehicles. Urban Grown employs students from Warrawong High to work at the farm on a part-time basis.

Over the last two years, students have cleared plastic and rubbish and started planting subtropical rainforest trees, shrubs and grasses in the gully. They are now looking to introduce a bee habitat garden to pollinate not just native trees, but also the fruit and vegetables growing on the school grounds and in the wider community. The Seedling Bank is supporting the project with funding for 450 trees, shrubs and grasses. ■

Tuzibagirwa imibabaro yose tuzibera mumunexero.

We will forget all the sufferings we had in this world; we will live in joy.



Warrawong students in The Living Classroom. Photo: Aristo Risi

Life in the Daintree

PLANTING FOR WILDLIFE
IN THE WORLD'S
OLDEST RAINFOREST

In the far north of Australia's Sunshine State, swathes of emerald green forest buzz with the deafening sounds of life. From the dark, damp undergrowth, through misty ferns and up into the bright heights of the canopy, the plants and animals that call the Daintree Rainforest home are making themselves heard.

At 180 million years old, the Daintree is the most ancient surviving rainforest on the planet. It's situated on Kuku Yalanji Country, where the songs and stories of Traditional Owners have echoed through the trees for thousands of years, bringing even more vibrancy to this special place. In total, 18 tribal groups occupied the Daintree, with some areas sustaining large populations, supported by the plants and animals of the forest and waterways that provided reliable food sources year-round.

This World Heritage-listed forest has the highest number of rare plant and animal species of any ecosystem in the world. Although it is brimming with life, many of those species are at risk of extinction. Together, these facts highlight the incredible capacity of the Daintree Rainforest to support biodiversity and the dire need to protect it.

Over the past 50 years, concerned community members have stepped up to protect the Daintree. Connie and Dave Pinson, the husband-and-wife team behind Daintree Life, are two locals making their voices heard.

Connie and Dave are on a mission to work with landowners, businesses, government departments



Spectacled flying foxes in care at Daintree Life. Photo: Connie Pinson

and community members to plant 500,000 trees by 2030. Since establishing Daintree Life in 2018, they have planted over 15,000 trees, primarily on old unused service roads, abandoned residential land and private properties. Their main objectives are to increase the quality of existing rainforest and connect remnant patches of old growth forest to create wildlife corridors.

The Daintree boasts one of the most dense and diverse concentrations of wildlife in Australia, including many endangered species such as the southern cassowary, Bennett's tree-kangaroo, northern quoll and spectacled flying fox. Unfortunately, these iconic Australian animals, and many others, are under threat.

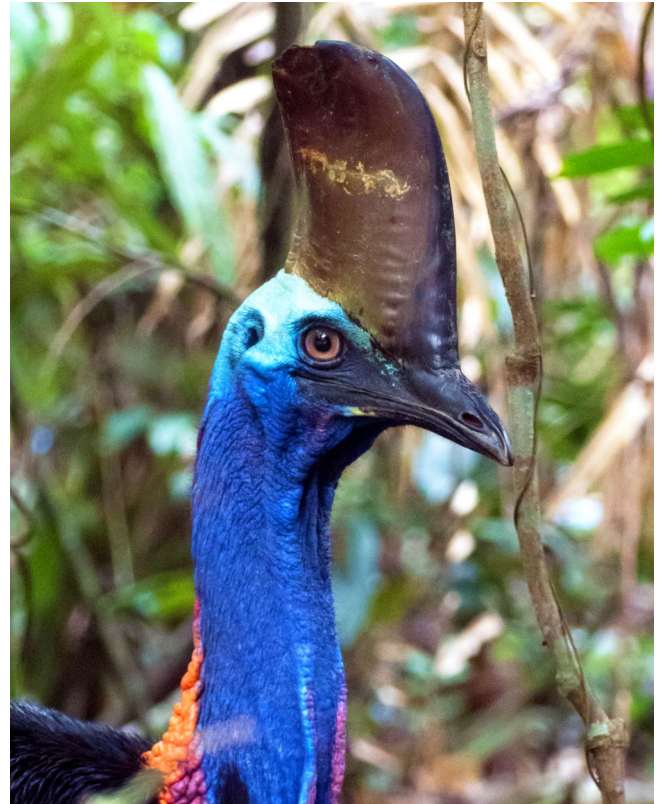
The 20th and 21st century brought change and destruction to this ancient ecosystem, with logging, grazing, tourism and residential development all taking a toll on the health of the forest and its occupants. These interventions have had a major impact on wildlife in the area, with habitat loss displacing many animals. The latest figures show approximately half of the Daintree Rainforest has been lost since European settlement.¹

Between 1870 and 1988 (when the forest received its World Heritage status), a thriving timber industry operated in the Daintree, felling red cedars and other large hardwood trees. Animal agriculture has also impacted forest ecosystems, with land clearing for cattle grazing being another major driver of habitat loss. More recently, the tourism industry has increased rates of land and water pollution and has laid roads and trails that cut through wildlife habitat.² New roads and residential developments have also increased the frequency of car strikes and cat and dog attacks on native wildlife, as humans continue to gain access to previously untouched areas of the forest.

The Daintree boasts one of the most dense and diverse concentrations of wildlife in Australia, including many endangered species.



Boyd's forest dragon in the Daintree Rainforest. Photo: Connie Pinson



Southern cassowary in the Daintree Rainforest. Photo: Connie Pinson

Rainforests have an incredible ability to naturally regenerate without human intervention. A 2021 study by an international team of scientists found that tropical rainforests can regain approximately 78 per cent of their original growth after 20 years if undisturbed.³ To speed up the process of regeneration, Daintree Life are gaining access to abandoned grazing and residential land to plant native species.

“Our aim is to remove areas of weeds and revegetate these areas that are no longer required for roads and infrastructure,” Connie says. Connie and Dave are also wildlife carers. They see a dual need to care for displaced and injured animals, while also ensuring enough high-quality habitat remains to support wildlife populations.

This year, Daintree Life and local community members will celebrate National Tree Day in November, when weather conditions are ideal,

planting 1,000 trees to transform old cattle pastures into rainforest. “Our ethos for doing this revegetation work has stemmed from being wildlife carers for over 20 years and seeing the need for expanding habitat for wildlife,” Connie explains. “Currently, in many areas of Australia, habitat destruction and human impact are the largest reasons for wildlife coming into care and we need to expand habitat to ensure better outcomes for all wildlife.”

The future of the world’s oldest rainforest, which Sir David Attenborough once described as “the most extraordinary place on Earth”, is looking brighter thanks to organisations like Daintree Life, who are committed to restoring the land and caring for a range of rainforest critters. The addition of 1,000 trees planted through The Seedling Bank will assist the revegetation effort of this ancient, unique and spectacular pocket of Australia. ■

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Stan the koala at Dutch Thunder Wildlife Shelter. Photo: Jennifer McMillan

Caring for Wildlife

NATIVE BROWSING FOR AUSTRALIA'S
TREE-DWELLING WILDLIFE

*Gulpa gaka anganya – Gaka
Yawal Ngulla Yenbena Yorta
Yorta Woka.*

**Welcome friend – come
walk with us the people,
on Yorta Yorta Country.**

**We are on Yorta Yorta Country in
northern Victoria where the Murray
River flows through one of the largest
river red gum forests in Australia.
The treetops glow orange in the gentle
afternoon sunlight and their roots stand
exposed along the edge of the riverbank.**

Australia's longest river, the Murray stretches over 2,500 kilometers and crosses through three states. It is home to hundreds of species of wildlife that depend on it for water, habitat and food. But adverse events like droughts, car strikes, fox and dog attacks, fires and accidents often leave wildlife injured and in need of a helping hand.

That's where organisations like Dutch Thunder come in, a wildlife rehabilitation shelter on a mission to grow plants for its patients, and the reason for our visit to this peaceful patch of the Murray. The Seedling Bank grant recipients are based on the edge of Cobram Regional Park, a popular spot for hiking, waterfront cook-ups and, unfortunately, animal misadventure.

The shelter was established by Kylee Donkers and her husband James over a decade ago. When we visit, animals in their care include eastern grey kangaroos, wallabies, koalas, sugar gliders, wombats, sulphur-crested cockatoos, birds of prey, reptiles, dingoes and even a pelican who suffered a nasty bite wound from a fox.

Many of the animals Kylee and James rescue rely on native foliage, grasses and dirt as staples in their diets. To meet these needs, Dutch Thunder volunteers regularly partake in an activity called ‘native browsing’ – the process of collecting flora for animals by mimicking their natural behaviours and only taking small amounts rather than cutting down trees.

To give you an idea of just how demanding this feeding technique is, let’s take a look at the dietary requirements of Australia’s most iconic mammal – the koala.

The koala’s name is said to come from the Dharug peoples word meaning ‘no water’. The tree-dwelling species relies on the moisture in eucalyptus leaves for most of its hydration needs, and they prefer new growth on the tips of branches, which is where they find the juiciest leaves. Their diets vary depending on location and the koalas from this area feed predominantly on river red gum.

An adult koala eats around one kilogram of leaves each night. To keep enough supply of leaves for the fifty-plus animals in their care, Dutch Thunder volunteers need to undertake native browsing two to three times per day. To make this meal even more enjoyable for their patients, they store collected leaves in a ‘foliagenator’ – a solar powered refrigerator which mists the foliage to keep it cool, fresh and up to the koalas’ standards.

To make the native browsing process easier, the team has a dream to revegetate a section of the wildlife shelter’s property with native feed trees that will provide habitat and food sources for the animals in care. When they arrived at the property, they planted 1,000 seedlings, and this year, funding from The Seedling Bank will help expand this native browsing garden with a further 900 trees, 400 shrubs and 400 grasses.

Flowering gums will be planted for the sugar gliders, bottlebrush for the possums, a range of eucalypts for the koalas, and grasses for the kangaroos, wallabies and wombats. Farmers surrounding the property have also planted a small selection of native trees so that animals in the care of Dutch Thunder can enjoy a ‘soft release’ back into the wild.

The koala’s name is said to come from the Dharug people’s word meaning ‘no water’.

During her 15 years of caring for wildlife Kylee has released hundreds of koalas back into the wild. She will be sharing some of the lessons she’s learned in this time when the community gathers for the shelter’s National Tree Day event, including what they can plant in their own gardens to support native wildlife. In the future, she plans to give the local school access to the shelter’s garden for educational purposes including bush kindergarten and environmental science.

As we drive through the land, Kylee recognises a familiar Gurburra (koala). “There’s Burnie!” she says, pointing out a grey-brown bump high up in a gum. Burnie suffered severe burns to both hind paws, front paws and her nose after walking through a campfire not properly extinguished by campers.

“She was treated for burns and her dressings took up to four hours to change every day,” Kylee recalls.

Burnie made a full recovery and was released two months ago. She and some of the other ex-patients often return to the area surrounding the refuge to munch on their favourite leaves. The Dutch Thunder team has high hopes that Burnie’s descendants will be enjoying the leaves of native trees planted on National Tree Day for many decades to come. ■

A New Home for Quendas

CONSERVATION AND
COLLABORATION TO GIVE
AN ICONIC AUSTRALIAN
MARSUPIAL A FIGHTING
CHANCE



Southern Brown Bandicoot/Quenda. Photo: Wright Out There, Shutterstock.

A stone's throw from the striking aqua waters and white sands of Cottesloe Beach lies the lush green haven of Lake Claremont. It's a seasonal lake, which fills in the wetter months of the year and is teeming with life, both aquatic and terrestrial.

Historically, Lake Claremont was an important hunting and gathering site for the Mooro people, with the wetland and surrounding vegetation supporting a diverse range of flora and fauna. The lake is surrounded by dense bushland covering an area of approximately 70 hectares in metropolitan Perth. It is also an ecological corridor, connecting inland bush with the Swan River and Indian Ocean.

Since European settlement, Lake Claremont has lived many lives – first as a farming and grazing site, then a rubbish tip and, most recently, a golf course. From 2009, the council adopted a plan to restore the area to the native bushland it once was, with some spaces also reserved for recreational use. Working closely with the community, they have created a thriving patch of forest where native insects, reptiles and small mammals can be found scurrying through the undergrowth while birds flit through the canopy above.

The Friends of Lake Claremont (FOLC) community group are the team behind much of this change. They started small in 1987, with locals coming together to begin restoring the wetland, which was suffering after over a century of disturbance.

More than three decades later, these dedicated conservationists are now bringing native wildlife back to this inner-city biodiversity hotspot, with National Tree Day events a key date on their calendar.

Planet Ark has had the privilege of supporting this ongoing work through The Seedling Bank since 2019, when FOLC became our very first grant recipient. This year, the team has planted 1,050 seedlings with its funding, including a mix of shrubs and groundcovers to increase plant diversity and provide habitat for native animals inhabiting the area.

Of the seedlings funded by The Seedling Bank grant, 700 were pellitory, an endemic ground cover that FOLC is working hard to return to the area to attract native pollinators like the yellow admiral butterfly. Pellitory and other nettles provide the perfect place for these butterflies to lay their eggs, as the larvae feed on the plants as they grow. In addition to planting for pollinators, 350 shrubs created new habitat for reptiles and mammals, including the endangered quenda.

Quendas, also known as southern brown bandicoots (*Isoodon fusciventer*), are small, ground-dwelling marsupials, often mistaken for fat rats, found in southwest Western Australia. They rely on shrubby habitat for nesting and protection from the watchful eyes of predators. Quendas are facing multiple threats, including loss of habitat that is forcing them into residential areas where safe

... native insects, reptiles and small mammals can be found scurrying through the undergrowth while birds flit through the canopy above.

havens are in short supply. Predation by foxes, cats and dogs is also common.

FOLC volunteers are working with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) and the local council to relocate quendas to Lake Claremont. DBCA found that the proposed release sites had a suitable diversity and density of vegetation for high quality habitat and in February 2022, the first group of quendas made themselves at home. Over a period of six weeks, 38 quendas were released, with another five joining them in May. There was an even mix of males and females (six of whom had young in their pouch) released to encourage population growth.

Most of these animals came from locations around Perth where their habitat was set to be converted into residential housing. Some were also removed from a site where they were found to be eating the eggs of the critically endangered western swamp tortoise.

The FOLC team has committed to a monitoring program for the quendas that were relocated, with camera traps being installed in the area. Prior to the release, FOLC also worked with local schools to create nesting boxes the team calls ‘bandicoot bungalows’ and set up water stations to maximise the critters’ chance of survival.

“The aim of the relocation project is to establish a viable population at Lake Claremont which, as

Quenda released at Lake Claremont. Photo: M. Fontaine.





FOLC meeting shed before planting and painting. Photo: Naga Srinivas



FOLC meeting shed after planting and painting. Photo: Naga Srinivas

the population grows, will disperse into nearby reserves,” FOLC coordinator Nick Cook explains.

The quenda population will hopefully thrive at Lake Claremont, especially with increased habitat thanks to FOLC. However, predation by domestic cats remains a serious threat in this area. FOLC has been advocating for the development of a local cat law to address this problem.

“The recent quenda relocation program only adds weight to our position, with quenda juveniles particularly prone to predation by cats,” Nick says. “We have over 100 species of birdlife that will also benefit from these added protections. It is well known that contained cats live longer and healthier lives, so cat containment laws will lead to better outcomes for both pets and our precious wildlife.”

A book published by the CSIRO, *Cats in Australia: Companion and Killer*, published in 2019 found that in Australia, cats kill an unbelievable 1.5 billion native animals per year. Feral cats do the most damage, killing an average of 740 animals each year. However, our domesticated feline friends also kill around 75 native animals annually¹.

Small mammals are faring particularly poorly in Australia. Quendas are just one native animal whose population is declining due to predation by invasive species (like cats) compounded by habitat loss, climate change and disease.

In the three years that have passed since we partnered with FOLC, there has already been incredible progress, with the planting site now unrecognisable in the best way possible. The 1,000 seedlings sown in 2019 have transformed the once bare area around the group meeting shed, filling the space with a range of native shrubs and trees. It’s a real testament to the hard work of this community group and their love for this local sanctuary.

“Lake Claremont is a very special place. Not only is it a vital refuge for our precious wildlife, it is an oasis in suburbia that is a critical asset to the community,” Nick says. “Our volunteers and the community have given so much to rebuilding this wetland, I find them all truly inspiring.” ■

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Recovery Through Plants

FINDING REFUGE AFTER THE FLOODS

Acacia podalyriifolia. Photo: Mauricio Mercadante

On the traditional lands of the Ugarapul and Kitabul peoples in Queensland's Lockyer Valley, rain clouds have given way to blue skies and locals are coming together to plant for their future.

Earlier this year, the small country town of Grantham received almost a year's worth of rainfall in just three days. The floods brought devastation to local people and wildlife in the area. The community also recently commemorated ten years since the 2011 floods, where 12 people tragically lost their lives.

Now, locals are uniting to safeguard their township for the future with a community-wide planting effort that will control erosion, slow runoff and connect fractured koala habitat.

The man leading this regeneration movement is Kemp Killerby, founder of local nature regeneration and education service Flora 4 Fauna.

Growing up in a biodiversity hotspot of Western Australia, Kemp became fascinated with plants.

He went on to spend nearly a decade researching agricultural ecosystems, working with the Department of Agriculture on a plant breeding project and even creating his own type of permaculture.

Kemp was mentored by Indigenous Australian elder Dr Noel Nannup, who expanded his understanding of native bush foods and bush medicines as well as Indigenous philosophy, culture and religion. Noel taught Kemp how to read signs in the landscape to find water, food and places of cultural significance.

He started Flora 4 Fauna with the mission of teaching locals about the benefits of Australian native plants, including bush foods and medicines.

"Once people realise what's in the bush, their desire to preserve it increases," Kemp says.

When natural disaster hit Grantham, this business found a new purpose: bringing the community together to regenerate what was lost and take lessons from the resilience of native trees.

A number of Australian tree species have evolved root systems that stretch 5-20 metres deep, which

help prevent erosion and regenerate and preserve riverside habitats.¹ During the floods, wallabies found refuge underneath the canopies of these deeply-rooted trees and, when this year's storm passed, a stand of silver wattle (*Acacia podalyriifolia*) remained along the creek bed at Sandy Creek – the last line of defense against further erosion.

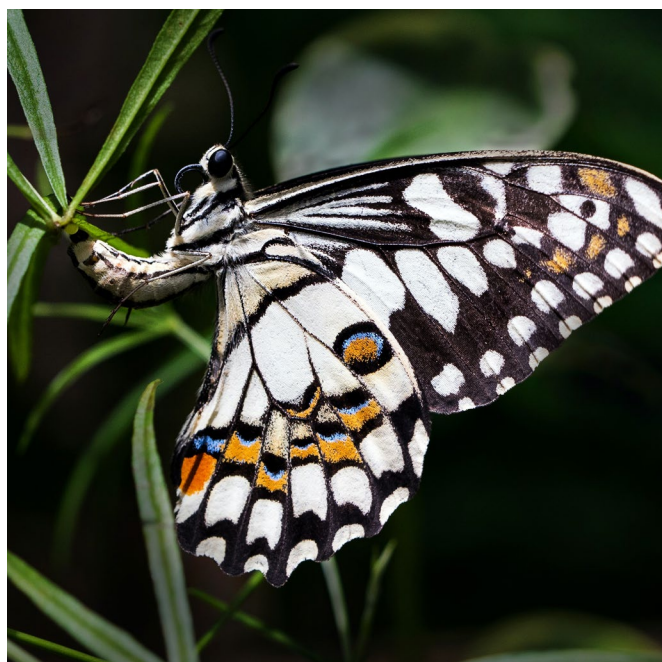
Witnessing the dense canopy of acacia trees standing tall after the floods, Kemp was inspired “to revegetate the estate to not only provide climate resilience, shelter, habitat and protection to the human population, but to the local wildlife too”.

The trees have also become a symbol of hope and strength for the local community, motivating an effort to prevent further damage and increase natural capital in the area. With Kemp at the helm, locals will be picking up shovels on National Tree Day to bolster the resilience of the landscape by putting new plants in the ground.

The Seedling Bank-backed planting will create a ‘tree neighbourhood’ by connecting properties, thereby building wildlife corridors for the local fauna including koalas and glossy black cockatoos. A total of 70 native and endemic species will be planted including lophostemon, melaleuca and corymbia as well as a wide range of koala food sources and host plants.

In areas where multiple trees cannot be planted, shrubs will be installed to create an understorey for koalas to rest and recuperate in. These plants will have multiple uses as native insect, bird and marsupial host plants and attractors.

The trees have become a symbol of hope and strength for the local community.



Dainty swallow-tailed butterfly. Photo: David Clode, Unsplash

Host plants are plants that another organism lives on and off, by both nesting in and eating the vegetation. Many butterflies rely on these plants for their survival – they seek out the host plant to lay their eggs on, which hatch into caterpillars that eat the leaves and eventually become butterflies before the cycle restarts. The finger lime is a host plant to all the citrus swallow-tailed butterflies such as the orchard swallowtail (*Papilio aegaeus*), dainty swallowtail (*Papilio anactus*) and lime swallowtail (*Papilio demoleus*).

“If the adult female butterfly cannot find a suitable host plant, she cannot lay her eggs and therefore the species risks extinction,” Kemp explains.

A total of 750 trees and 350 shrubs will be planted through this community-led regeneration effort. Any remaining trees will be donated to wildlife carers who are in desperate need of fauna food sources.

After the tragic flooding events of this year brought the community together, Kemp says the planting will give people something more uplifting to bond over “this event will give us all something in common that is a positive influence in our lives”. ■

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Budinya Mraatu

LEARNING ON COUNTRY

Photo supplied by Newbery Park Primary School

The town of Millicent is hemmed in by the dramatic volcanic landscapes of Mount Gambier and the Kanawinka region, where lava flows forged a network of spectacular mountains, limestone cliffs and crater lakes millennia ago.

In South Australia, primary school students have gathered by a series of grassy mounds to learn about a local Dreamtime story. This marks the opening of a new cultural garden at Newbery Park Primary School in Millicent, a regional hub on the state's 'limestone coast'. Craitbul Dreaming tells the local Boandik people's story of how the four craters of Mount Gambier were formed.

The garden's mounds represent the nearby mountains that star in this yarn and each one is covered in freshly planted native grass secured with help from The Seedling Bank. It took a total of 2,000 seedlings to bring this garden to life

as part of a plan to green the school and provide opportunities to learn on, and from, Country.

Newbery Primary has its own on-site nursery where 400 plants were propagated for the area surrounding the grassy mounds. After 18 months of planning, the school officially opened the garden in June of this year. It is named 'Budinya Mraatu', which translates to 'learning on Country', and will be the site of many future classes led by the school's Aboriginal community education officer Donna Baker and eco-learning student support worker Angela Jones.

Angela said the project had been a great journey and one she thoroughly enjoyed being able to share with students.

"I love plants, everyone knows that. Finding out about plants and being able to bring that hobby into our school ... it's amazing to teach the children all about it," she said.

The day-long festivities included an interpretation of the Craitbul story by Year 3 and 4 students, a narration from Boandik elder Aunty Michelle

Jacquelin-Furr, a smoking ceremony, and cultural activities including boomerang throwing, weaving, planting native grasses and shrubs, cooking and art. These activities celebrate the rich cultural heritage and knowledge of the area's Indigenous community.

“Boandik people are connected to land. They are connected to the flora, the fauna, the whole theme of this land,” Aunty Michelle said.

The new cultural garden will help young Indigenous and non-Indigenous folk tap into the collective intelligence of the world's longest continuing culture. It is a place where students, families and the wider community can come together to learn and play. With an outdoor classroom and meeting area for students, it will act as a forum for cross-curriculum education.

To help visitors better understand local flora, QR codes have been signposted around the area to provide information on different plant species and their practical and cultural uses. These include the grasses planted with support from The Seedling Bank, which will attract pollinators including birds, butterflies and insects back to this once barren area.

The kids who transformed this part of the playground couldn't be happier with the result. As their Dreamtime retelling makes clear, they are proud as punch of the oasis they've created with their own hands.



Photo supplied by Newbery Park Primary School

Aunty Michelle sees this project as an important step towards creating a just and equitable society for all Australians.

Aunty Michelle sees this project as part of a much larger picture, saying it is an important step towards creating a just and equitable society for all Australians.

“This is a really good sign of reconciliation and something the children will get a lot of benefit from.” ■



Photo supplied by Newbery Park Primary School

Ornithophile Paradise

BUILDING BIRD-FRIENDLY HABITAT IN
THE LAND OF THE LYREBIRD



Superb Lyrebird. Photo: Geoffrey Moore, Unsplash

Gippsland’s Strzelecki Ranges, also known as “the land of the lyrebird”, run across 100 kilometres of southeast Victoria on Gunaikurnai and Bunurong Country. There is a stark difference between the eastern and western ranges, with the rolling green hills of the west dotted with farms that form a productive agricultural area. While, on the wild eastern peaks, deep valleys are covered with ferny forests dominated by the mighty mountain ash.

Mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) is the world’s tallest flowering plant, with the largest trees reaching towering heights of over 90 metres. The flowers on these hardwood giants are an important food source for pollinators including butterflies, bees and the thousands of birds that reside in the ranges.

Though the area is named after Australia’s iconic feathered copycat, the lyrebird, the Strzelecki Ranges and surrounding Gippsland Plains are home to a whopping 345 bird species.¹ The diverse landscape supports birdlife ranging from shorebirds such as pelicans, crested terns and hooded plovers that rely on the coastal and wetland areas, to powerful owls, fairy wrens and lyrebirds found in the woodlands and forests.

It’s an ornithophile’s paradise, and the site of an exciting bird conservation project Planet Ark is

proudly supporting through The Seedling Bank. The Birdlife Australia team has received funding for a National Tree Day planting that will restore forests in the eastern Strzelecki Ranges and expand local bird habitat.

The largest bird conservation group in the country, Birdlife Australia, is dedicated to providing a bright future for Australia's native birds through science-backed conservation programs and advocacy.

Australia's endemic birds have faced huge declines since European colonisation, with human activities such as forestry, agriculture, urbanisation and mining driving extinctions and diminishing populations.² A 2022 study mapping bird habitat found native birds have significantly declined across 69 per cent of Australia since European occupation. Furthermore, ten species have become locally extinct across 99 per cent of their historic range.²

A threat facing birds all over Australia is habitat loss, and the Strzelecki Ranges is no exception. The area has changed drastically in the last 200 years, primarily due to pressures from residential and industrial development. Now one of the most populated regions of Victoria, Gippsland has seen much of its forested areas cleared to make way for housing.

The agriculture industry has driven land-clearing in the western ranges, where alluvial soils are

considered ideal for productive dairy, beef, sheep and potato farming.³ The more heavily forested eastern side has not escaped development either, with many areas suffering from fragmentation and degradation.

A threat facing birds all over Australia is habitat loss, and the Strzelecki Ranges is no exception.

To counteract the damage done to native flora and fauna by land-clearing, conservationists are working hard to revegetate the land and preserve remnant old growth forest. The team at Birdlife Australia is at the forefront of this effort to safeguard the future of birds and other wildlife that lives in these magical misty forests that pervade the land of the lyrebird.



Eucalyptus Forest High Country, Victoria, Australia. Photo: Kathie Nichols, Shutterstock

Birdlife is teaming up with local community organisations and members of the public to plant 150 trees, shrubs and grasses to create the Wulgunggo Ngalu Bird Friendly Habitat Space on National Tree Day. Located on the former Won Wron prison grounds in the eastern Strzelecki Ranges, the area is also a designated cultural learning place for Aboriginal men undertaking Community Corrections Orders. Nature care is taught on site and a dedicated bird habitat zone was established here in 2019.

The Birdlife planting will focus on expanding this important habitat area and creating a safe corridor between the habitat space and nearby remnant lowland forest. Many hours of back-breaking work have already gone into preparing the site, with dense crops of noxious weeds being removed over the past three years.

“Our new space will include lots of locally indigenous plants to create a multi-layered habitat, including ground cover plants and grasses, small/medium shrubs for density and some trees to provide year-round food and shelter to benefit the many different bird species and insects that call Wulgunggo Ngalu home. A new bird bath will also be installed providing permanent water,” Sam Monks, Woodland Birds Project Officer at Birdlife Australia, says.

The collaborative efforts of Birdlife Australia and other environmental and community groups have

seen the bird habitat site flourish since the first seedling was planted in 2019.

“Over the past three years, the garden has thrived and now attracts lots of small birds and insects,” Sam explains.

“This year in partnership with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, we are extending plantings in adjoining areas to increase the overall size of the Wulgunggo Ngalu Bird Friendly Habitat Space.”

The seedlings planted on National Tree Day will grow to provide space for nesting, feeding and perching, ensuring the survival of our feathered friends of the Strzelecki ranges for years to come.

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Crested tern. Photo: David Clode, Unsplash



Superb fairy wren. Photo: Cameron Gilroy, Unsplash



Photo: Rene Riegal, Unsplash

Acknowledgements

Report Production

Authors: Sarah Chaplin and Jennifer McMillan

Editors: Lucy Jones and Liam Taylor

Contributor: Simone Horder

Designer: Sarah Wiecek

Cover Photo: Saskia Wilson

Partnership: Toyota Australia

After 23 years of partnership between Toyota Australia and Planet Ark, we have seen thousands of environmental projects completed and over 26 million trees planted across the country as part of National Tree Day. After listening to the community and identifying a need for funding to support schools and community groups in their tree planting efforts, Toyota Australia assisted Planet Ark in launching The Seedling Bank in 2019. Three years later and we are proud to share the stories of some of the beneficiaries of these grants, highlighting the important work of community-led environmental projects across Australia.

Content Contribution and Consultation

Maria Schettino – Warrawong High School

Leattie Umuvyeyi - Warrawong High School

Connie and Dave Pinson – Daintree Life

Kylee Donkers and James Leonard – Dutch Thunder Wildlife Rescue

Nick Cook – Friends of Lake Claremont

Heidi Hardisty – Friends of Lake Claremont

Kemp Killerby – Flora 4 Fauna

Angela Jones – Newbery Park Primary School

Sam Monks – Birdlife Australia


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