

Warralakin Block

The Bush Blocks Guardians Inc. Newsletter



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FIRST MILESTONE REACHED!

We are delighted to announce we have completed the first step in our journey to help preserve Western Australia's unique ecology: the purchasing of our first bush block, located in the Wheatbelt! We could not have done this without the incredible support of everyone receiving this newsletter; thank you for your donations and for making our goal become a reality! We would also like to extend thanks to Gondwana Link Ltd for their continued assistance.

Large areas of native bush are rarity in the Wheatbelt, as it has undergone widespread clearing for agriculture and is now restricted to small isolated patches. Due to its long unburnt vegetation and the neighbouring Class A Chidarcooping Nature Reserve the block immediately caught the eye of what were to become the Bush Blocks Guardians (BBG). In 2019 members visited the block and saw the diverse environment and recognised its potential as a conservation property with rich ecological values. This drove the formation of the BBG, beginning an almost two year journey to raise funds, purchase the land and essentially expand Chidarcooping Nature Reserve.

After 18 months of growing the BBG and sourcing funds, the opportunity was nearly lost when the property went under offer. Fortunately for BBG the finances fell through, and the near loss only increased our drive to secure the land. After additional donations from supporters like yourselves and the committee further increasing our donations, we finally secured the block on the 19th November 2021! Now the conservation efforts at the block can begin!



Meet the BGG

The Bush Blocks Guardians (BBG) are an Incorporated Association managed by a committee of seven members, ranging from wildlife ecologists (meet three below), to environmentalists and others with handy backgrounds. Members were brought together by their shared motivation to start a long-term project to conserve Western Australia's unique landscapes and species through purchasing and rehabilitating land. Purchasing the Warralakin block is an initial step in our aims, with plans including rehabilitation, fire and predator control and long-term monitoring of flora, vegetation and fauna to determine the effectiveness of our conservation efforts, as well as purchasing other blocks to conserve other areas.



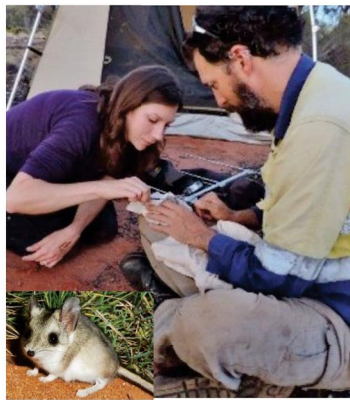
We are now a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) and hope to register as a Deductible Gift Recipient, which will help secure additional donations and benefits.



**SAMANTHA
LOSTROM**

Project Ecologist

Sam is an ecologist who currently conducts wildlife surveys across Western Australia, from the forests of the southwest to the remote central deserts. Prior to this she worked in Africa on large predator conservation and behavioural research (including leopards, lions and African Painted dogs). The opportunity to live in the field, experience the unique beauty of remote WA and develop an understanding of the fauna she studies has fueled her drive for conservation, and has lead to her long-term goal of purchasing land to conserve wildlife and share ecology with others,



**JEFF
TURPIN**

Project Ecologist

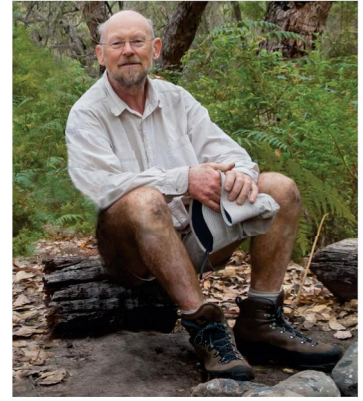
Jeff is an ecologist, coordinating biological surveys across Western Australia. Jeff's interests are in the conservation of Western Australia's unique wildlife and he is currently undertaking a PhD on the fauna of the Great Victoria Desert. Jeff, and his partner Jo, have lead research on the threatened Sandhill Dunnart (pictured above) and look forward to many camping trips under the stars with their little son Aiden.



**ANDREW
MCCREERY**

Project Ecologist

Andy is an ecologist working on biological surveys mainly in the south-west and Pilbara, but has experience throughout Western Australia. Prior to this he worked at a bird migratory monitoring station in Canada, a bird banding project in the Colombian Andes and as a wildlife tour guide in the Kimberley region of WA. His exposure to natural areas has enabled an appreciation for the bush and the value in conserving these areas.



**PETER
EWING**

Project Treasurer

Peter has been active in WA voluntary conservation since the late 1970s, working on protecting karri forest, energy, climate change and helped to setup and serves as a Trustee on the Conservation Council of WA's Trust Fund since its inception 25 years ago. Before retiring he worked as an engineer and is a keen black and white landscape photographer. In 1985, together with seven other families, purchased and has preserved 345ha of wilderness on the south coast.

Introducing the Bush Block

A DIVERSITY OF HABITATS

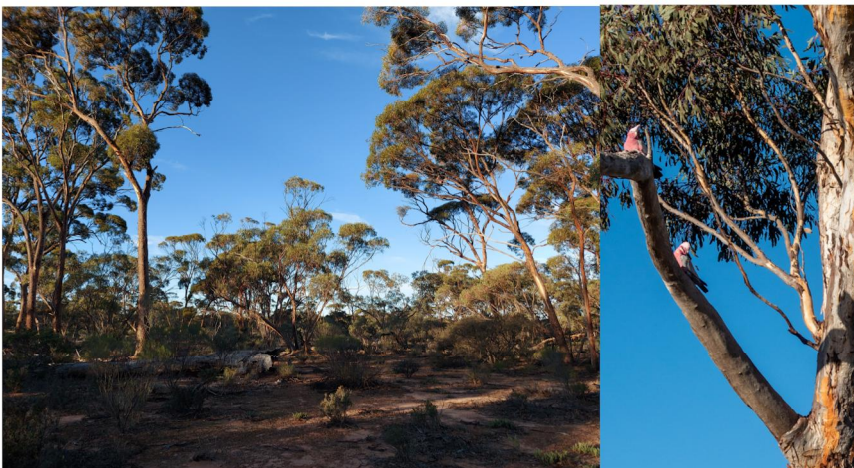
As we continue our work on the block, we are beginning to understand the range of habitats and landscapes present.

The southern portion is characterised by large granite slopes intersected by dense thickets of Sheoak and Paperbark shrubs. The granite slopes hold small pools of water following rains, and have large boulders and crevices forming shelter for small mammals and reptiles.



The eastern portion comprise shrubland and tall Wheatbelt Wandoo and Salmon Gum woodlands. The old large gums have formed hollows and shelter a high diversity of breeding and roosting birds. There are also hollow logs, which we are hoping house some interesting mammals!

The block is also intersected by a line of rocky breakaway, providing alcoves and crevices.



MALLEEFOWL

Two areas of the block were cleared in the 80s and have been left to revegetate. They now comprise dense Acacia shrublands. Fortunately, the dense shrubs and leaf litter are perfect for the threatened Malleefowl, which have been breeding in this habitat!

Malleefowl are ground-dwelling birds that construct large mounds from soil and leaf litter, as pictured above. The birds dig a cavity into the mound to lay eggs before burying with leaf litter, which decomposes and generates heat to incubate the eggs. Adults will add or remove leaf litter to maintain nest temperature. When chicks hatch they emerge from the nest independent.

Due to their ground-dwelling nature, Malleefowl are susceptible to cat and fox predation and are listed as Vulnerable under state and federal legislation.

We have found 11 mounds on the block and are continuing to record more. Some mounds are currently in use, like that pictured above. We aim to conduct long-term mound monitoring, and are hopeful Malleefowl abundance and breeding will increase once non-native predator control commences.

Long-term Monitoring

TRACKING PROGRESS

One of BBGs aims is to conserve and improve the ecological values of the block. This will involve rehabilitating vegetation and controlling fire, weeds and non-native fox and cat predators (which have major negative effects on native animal populations).

To understand the effectiveness of our efforts, we aim to describe species abundance, spread and diversity over the long-term. Initially, we will undertake surveys before any changes are made so we have a comparable baseline. By using repeatable methods, such as set monitoring locations and constant effort, we will collect long-term comparable data.

We have started this process with motion camera deployments and bird census monitoring, and are looking forward to beginning other programs!

BIRD CENSUS

Committee ecologists Sam Lostrom, Jeff Turpin and Andy McCreery designed an annual bird monitoring program during their last visit to the block in June. 20 minute searches were completed in set locations covering all the main bird habitats on the block, such as shrub thicket, granite outcrops, Salmon Gum woodland and mallee shrubland. Searches were also completed in the cleared paddocks so we can detect how bird species and abundance change as we revegetate.

We found 54 species from 17 searches, including the Mulga Parrot, Western Yellow Robin and Rufous Treecreeper shown below, and counted 573 birds!



MOTION CAMERA DEPLOYMENT

During March and April 43 motion cameras were deployed throughout the block. Motion cameras are units that take photos when movement is detected in the field of view, and are excellent non-invasive ways of determining what species occur on the block. We have placed ours

in a variety of habitats as well as on features that will help us understand animal activity, such as Malleefowl mounds, tracks (a good way to determine non-native predator presence), rock faces, water sources and hollow logs. Special thanks to Cheryl Lohr, who helped deploy them!

We just retrieved the cameras, and hope to analyse the images soon (to be shared in a follow-up newsletter!). As a small bonus during collection our ecologists bumped into a Common Scaly-foot (*Pygopus lepidopodus*), pictured below. This animal may look like a snake, but is a harmless legless lizard.

Animals photographed by motion cameras will help indicate ecological health and non-native predator presence, and we are hoping for other threatened species to add to Malleefowl! We aim to repeat this study to build a record of fauna on the block and see how this changes as we implement conservation controls.



Other News and Events



DISTURBANCE AND REHABILITATION

PADDOCKS

200ha of the block were cleared for cropping, and are of minimal ecological value. We seek to restore these areas as closely as possible to their original ecological value, beginning with revegetation. After a successful visit in February, we have contracted Carbon Positive Australia to revegetate and have now signed a formal agreement (see Carbon Positive's consulting native plant argonomist Dr Steve Woodall sampling seeds during the visit above). Like BBC, Carbon Positive Australia is a not-for-profit organisation, and we are excited to be working with them. You can find out more about Carbon Positive here: <https://carbonpositiveaustralia.org.au/>

Seed collecting will take place in Spring 2022 and direct seeding and hand planting will occur in winter of 2023, with the aim of restoring vegetation values that are assessed as likely present before clearing. The planting will be done with seeds collected locally so as to retain the genetic purity of the flora. Fingers crossed we receive good rains after the plantings to give everything a kick start!

FIRE

In March lightning caused three fires in the southern bush - one large which the adjoining farmer noticed and extinguished before it spread too far. The BBC are very grateful for their efforts. The smaller fires were only a few square metres and did not spread. This highlighted the need to source and maintain a small fire truck to help in future and develop a fire management plan.

FARMHOUSE AND SHED

In purchasing the property we own a modest farmhouse, which we had not been able to inspect until after settlement, and thus had no idea of its condition. We've now had a good look around and have decided it is worth repairing, mainly as a base for research and environmental education. Quite a bit of work is required and we have committed money to buy new storage batteries and an inverter to get the 240v electrics working again, with lots of help from member, Simon. This will also get the water pump working to provide water to the sink and bathroom. We are beginning to make the house a home thanks to donated furniture. Thank you to Len and Charmaine Butler for recently providing a dining table and chairs, among other items!

We have also inherited 50+ years of various machinery and scrap, and a large farm shed (also full of scrap and rural collections!). We seek to use two bays of the shed for Carbon Positive Australia seed collections, so are working on clearing this and sourcing a scrap metal collector. The property has lots of old farm machinery and several dead cars and trucks (plus old fridges, washing machines and freezers on the verandas), which need to be removed.



NAMING THE BLOCK

We are keen to find an appropriate Aboriginal name for this block and are in the process of reaching out to work with the Traditional Custodians of the region.



Socials and Support



The BGC project has become a reality with the support and dedication of many, and it has only just begun! We are looking forward to continuing to restore and describe the Warralakin block, engaging communities to share Australia's unique ecology with others, and seeing just how far our conservation efforts can spread!

We are in the initial stages of the project and are laying down groundwork that involves a range of tasks (some are listed on the right). So whether your help comes in the form of ecological research, building and machinery maintenance/restoration, seed collecting and planting, website and socials design, clean-up, lending equipment, donating supplies/ furniture, or funds it would be greatly appreciated.

If you'd like to help, feel free to **let us know via our website at** <https://bushblocksguardians.org.au/contact-bbg/>

FOLLOWING THE JOURNEY



In addition to sending detailed newsletter updates to donors, we will share our general progress on Facebook and Instagram. These are being set up, so in the meantime please refer to our website: <https://bushblocksguardians.org.au/>

WANT TO LEND A HAND? HERE'S OUR UPCOMING TASKS AND EVENTS!

CLEAN-UP

Carbon Positive will be storing seeds for revegetation in the shed; only problem is it's currently home to many years of collections we acquired with the property! We aim to clear the shed prior to September, and are looking for a scrap metal dealer, extra hands and trailers to help.

SEED COLLECTING AND PLANTING

Carbon Positive will begin collections this September, and aim to plant in May or June of 2023.

FARMHOUSE

The farmhouse needs quite a bit of TLC, including adding appliances and furniture (beds, couches, lounge chairs, outdoor seating, fridge, microwave) and patching/ fixing walls, floors and electrical wiring. If anyone has items to donate or time to help fix up the house, please get in touch.

