



# TASMANIAN | Land | CONSERVANCY



## Conservation in Tasmania's biodiversity hotspot

Photo: Matthew Newton

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**We are pleased to announce seed funding for a new and very important midlands conservation initiative with partners Bush Heritage Australia (BHA) and the Tasmanian Government Department of Primary Industries and Water (DPIW).**

Drought-ravaged landscapes, dust storms and plans for grand irrigation schemes, it all sounds like the Murray–Darling basin, but surprisingly, these images describe the current situation in Tasmania's midlands.

Whether it is climate change at work or just a blip in the weather patterns, drought is not the only issue. Land managers in the region are also concerned about the long-term viability of farming systems, their impact on the environment and the potential social and cultural effects on their rural communities.

A proposal for a significant increase in the area under irrigation in the midlands may provide new agricultural opportunities, but is potentially a new threat to the midlands native grassy ecosystems.

The underlying message is clear: action is urgently needed in this region if we are to keep the island's unique wildlife.

"Beaufront" near Ross in the Tasmanian midlands

The land between Tasmania's Great Western Tiers and the east coast range represents one of Australia's handful of national biodiversity hotspots, the grassy lowland plains of the Tasmanian midlands. The region was defined as a hotspot due to the large number of species that are endemic (unique) to the area, and because it is a refuge for a number of marsupials that are endangered on the mainland, such as the spotted-tailed quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*) and the eastern barred bandicoot (*Perameles gunnii*).

There is also significant pressure on these natural features from a range of land-uses that has altered habitat over the years.

Although federal funding has been invested in a system of protected areas on private land in recent years, there are still large gaps. Critically, less than four per cent of the midlands region is protected in secure reserves, making the region a priority for conservation. Because 98 per cent of the land is privately owned, frequently by families who have been in the area for generations, working with landowners is the only way to achieve effective conservation in the midlands.

Recognising this, Bush Heritage, the Tasmanian Land Conservancy and

'protecting Tasmanian land for biodiversity'



Ephemeral wetland on Wetmore in the heart of the midlands



Photo: Daniele Sprod

Photo: Department of Primary Industries and Water

Silky bushpea (*Pultenaea prostrata*)

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The Department of Primary Industries and Water have formed a partnership to provide new opportunities for landowners in the midlands who are interested in making their conservation efforts generate income. The partnership will explore new and existing models of conservation management on private land, with a particular emphasis on multi-generational timescales.

The partner organisations are already working with a number of landowners, as the two groups share many common conservation goals. For landowners, any conservation initiative must also take into account the social and economic impacts on their farms and on the broader midlands community.

A key message from landowners is that conservation agreements and support for conservation action need to be ongoing and keep pace with the costs of management.

“Since I started farming more than 30 years ago I have had a growing awareness that biodiversity conservation and its broader benefits, provision of clean water, carbon sinks, plant pollination, natural pest control, healthy soils, nutrient recycling, etc, should be an integral part of the farming enterprise and balance sheet. This new partnership recognises this reality and I look forward to being part of making it happen,” states Andrew Cameron, farmer and partnership coordinator.

The partnership received initial financial support from The Myer Foundation and

the Australian Government’s National Reserve System Program, to develop a Conservation Action Plan and a business plan addressing the long-term implementation of the project.

The completed business plan explores new and existing models for protecting conservation values, and provides investors with costings and likely outcomes.

It proposes a two-pronged approach encompassing both the acquisition of land and conservation covenants with current landowners, and the establishment of a long-term fund to pay for conservation actions by partner landowners.

The project’s commitment to both socially and ecologically sustainable outcomes has led to The Sidney Myer Fund recently committing \$2 million additional support to the project.

This seed funding will be used to begin work on both arms of the project – initial acquisitions and set-up costs for landowner partnerships, and to establish a trust fund which will provide funding down the generations.

While considerable further support will be required to secure the project, this generous initial funding has recognised the significance of Tasmania’s midlands.

The foundations are in place and the process of seeking funding, building new partnerships and strengthening existing reserves is about to begin.

*Matt Appleby (BHA)*  
*Nathan Males (TLC) and*  
*John Harkin (DPIW)*

## Midland's ecology

Many visitors to Tasmania are surprised when they see the dry midlands landscape. In fact the lowland grasslands receive around 450 mm of rainfall a year, comparable to famously dry areas of inland Victoria and New South Wales such as Bendigo and Dubbo. The surrounding ranges soak up most of the rain, leaving the midlands in a rain shadow.

The lowland landscape formed along a geological fault, which filled with water to form a shallow lake that over thousands of years silted up to become an alluvial plain. Dotted along the fault was a chain of volcanoes that helped to create the fertile basalt soils that occur on the valley floor.

Far from being a drawback, the combination of fertile soils and low rainfall provides perfect conditions for grassy ecosystems to thrive. The mosaic of grassy ecosystems, dry woodlands and forests provides a complex pattern of habitats that are ideal for wildlife, such as the endangered Tasmanian devil (*Sarcophilus harrisi*).

The grasslands and ephemeral wetlands are particularly important as they form the stronghold for a range of threatened and endemic species: the pungent leek-orchid (*Prasophyllum olidum*), silky bushpea (*Pultenaea prostrata*), grasslands paper daisy (*Leucochrysum albicans*) and midlands buttercup (*Ranunculus prasinus*) to name a few. The surrounding woodlands and forests are also home to the Tasmanian bettong (*Bettongia gaimardi*), a species now extinct on mainland Australia.





Photo: Malcolm Wells

Golfers leek-orchid (*Prasophyllum incorrectum*)

Photo: Jim Mulcahy

FOR SALE - Risdon Peppermint, near Hobart



Photo: Department of Heritage, Environment, Water and the Arts

Federal Environment Minister, Peter Garrett

## Midland's orchids

Ecologists use a number of different techniques to gauge the health of ecosystems. The presence of particular species that play a key role or reflect a functioning ecosystem are often used as a surrogate for more detailed investigations.

In the Tasmanian midlands, orchids are often a useful indicator. Native pastures that have been disturbed in the past by ploughing and fertilisers will usually have few orchids other than the common onion orchid (*Microtis unifolia*). These disturbances harm the delicate symbiosis between mycorrhizal fungi and the roots of the orchids.

Orchids usually depend on insects to pollinate the flowers, and in some species the orchids have developed flowers that mimic the shape of a particular insect in order to attract them. The flow-on effects of disturbance can be far-reaching in both composition and resilience to future disturbances.

Today there are six species of orchid endemic to the midlands that are either endangered or critically endangered. Most are found only in a handful of sites, such as the pungent leek orchid (*Prasophyllum olidum*) and the midlands greenhood orchid (*Pterostylis commutata*). Native grasslands and grassy woodlands are of high conservation priority as those patches in excellent condition are habitat to most of these orchids.

If you represent a community group or are a community-minded individual and require a facility for meetings, workshops or exhibitions, please contact us if you would like to use our Gallery meeting room at 827 Sandy Bay Rd.

## Revolving fund

The Australian Government has recently announced an extension of the Forest Conservation Fund's Revolving Fund for a further five years until 30 June 2014.

The revolving fund of over \$6,000,000 has allowed the TLC to invest over \$3,000,000 in high conservation value properties across Tasmania.

If you are interested in finding out more about these wonderful properties that are now covenanted and available for sale, please contact either Rod Pearse or Jim Mulcahy at the TLC, or visit our website.

We currently have ten properties for sale with more becoming available shortly. Please contact us if you can imagine yourself owning your own Tasmanian nature reserve!

### Properties for sale include:

#### Chimneys Lagoon

On the fringe of St Helens, this tranquil 27.4 hectare conservation treasure offers a perfect retreat and lifestyle opportunity. Comprising both coastal forest and a gorgeous wetland, it offers home to diverse water-birds and an array of threatened species. Offers around \$197,500 invited.

#### Risdon Peppermint, Bridgewater

With spectacular views of the Derwent River, this 31 ha property features the rare Risdon peppermint eucalypt, and is also habitat for the rare Swift parrot. It offers several great house sites and could accommodate a range of pursuits. Offers around \$370,000 are invited.

## Supporter news

The bank of the Huon river at Franklin provided the perfect location to celebrate the official inclusion of the Egg Islands reserve into Australia's national reserve system, and the public launch of our Vale of Belvoir campaign.

On 28th January 2009, nearly 200 TLC supporters joined the celebration with special guest speakers, Federal Environment Minister, Peter Garrett and Professor Jamie Kirkpatrick, UTAS. The federal government granted \$800,000 towards the purchase of the Vale, and in a very sad but wonderful act of generosity, the Duncan family, Fred, Peter and Breona donated \$2000 in memory of Diana Duncan, who had died that morning. Their donation reflected Diana's passionate work for Tasmanian conservation, and marked the official public launch for the Vale of Belvoir.

Thank you to our guest speakers, the Living Boat Trust and the Wooden Boat School for their involvement and support for the event.

We will be writing to all our supporters shortly to update you on the Vale of Belvoir appeal and to let you know how you can help us to reach our goal.

### TLC reserve management

Call for volunteers - We are organising volunteer working bees on our reserves. If you would like to find out more, please call the office on 6225 1399 or email [volunteer@tasland.org.au](mailto:volunteer@tasland.org.au)



Tom Hay relaxing in Melbourne

Photo: Kate Kelly



Lindsay Whitham at the Waterworks

Photo: Wendy Whitham

## TLC bequests

One comfort regarding our mortality is to know that a portion of our accumulated wealth will be clearly allocated to a worthwhile cause upon our death. Concerns for future biodiversity in our magnificent island home are high and to know we continue to help past our lifetime is very gratifying.

To have supporters nominate the TLC as a beneficiary in their will is of incredible importance and significance to us. Ensuring the TLC's vision of protecting biodiversity over time is essential. Our ongoing ability to continue our urgent and exciting conservation efforts is underpinned by the generosity of our bequesters.

One such person was Tom Hay who will be remembered by many as a beautiful and insightful young man with a passion for the natural environment and social justice. In Tom's will he bequeathed the bulk of his estate to us – a most humbling and moving gesture.

We would love to assist with any questions for information regarding our bequests fund, so please call Amanda Sully on 03 6225 1399 or see our website for more details.

Our heartfelt thanks go to those who have included us in their wills and for the generous foresight of those already departed.

## Celebrating the life of Lindsay Whitham

In 2008 the TLC received a generous bequest from the will of loyal friend, Lindsay Whitham. Lindsay had been a strong supporter of the TLC since 2003. In his memory, his children Wendy and Philip, have provided an insight into his affinity with Tasmania.

“Dad was born in Lindisfarne in February 1918. He died in Hobart in April 2008, aged 90, after living most of his life in Tasmania. He knew the island well, having spent his youth moving from place to place as his father took up new teaching positions. At different times and for varying periods, he lived in St Helens, Macquarie Plains, Forest, Lindisfarne, Strahan, Deloraine, Geeveston, Launceston, Ulverstone, Sassafras, Devonport and Hobart.

He became familiar with more of the state through his work for the Hydro-Electric Commission as a civil engineer, through bushwalking from the 1940s, and later through his increasing interest in the old railways and tramways of Tasmania, especially on the West Coast. He joined the Hobart Walking Club in 1945, becoming president in 1957/58. His interest in history led in 2002 to the Tasmanian Historical Research Association publishing his book, *Railways, Mines, Pubs and People*.

While he was happy to travel, especially within Australia, Dad's real love was

Tasmania and in particular the bush. As children, we were taken to many of Dad's favourite locations, including Mt Wellington, Lake Dobson and Tarn Shelf, and the Hartz Mountains.

Dad did some longer walks as a young man, including Precipitous Bluff via the Southern Ranges and the Cradle Mt Lake St Clair overland route, but most of his walking was in the form of day walks. In his retirement, he started walking with a group of friends on Fridays, a day that was the highlight of his week for over 30 years. He walked well into his 80s and whenever we returned to Hobart to visit him we enjoyed walking with the Friday Walkers as honorary members of the group.

While he didn't claim any particular expertise, Dad enjoyed identifying the plants he saw during his walks, an interest he passed on to both of us. In his later years, he developed a special interest in Tasmania's native orchids and would frequently visit particular locations to check on progress. A favourite spot for a short "orchid walk" and a cuppa was the Waterworks. It was at the Waterworks that we also celebrated his 90th birthday in February last year.

During his life, Dad was a generous supporter of a number of bodies associated with conservation, including the Tasmanian Land Conservancy.”

We are grateful to the following organisations for their support in recent months

