



Photo: Matthew Newton

## The Skullbone Experiment

The artists at Skullbone Plains

### Issue 40 Autumn 2014

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### Clarissa Arndt | Fundraising and Community Engagement Manager

In 2011 the TLC garnered philanthropic support of \$23 million to purchase over 28,000 hectares in Tasmania, including the TLC's Skullbone Plains permanent reserve. This was the largest private conservation deal in Australian history. Thanks to the incredible generosity of supporters like you, Skullbone Plains sits proudly within our permanent reserve portfolio of protected places in Tasmania. Sharing a 16 km boundary with the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, it covers 1,600 hectares.

Since late 2012, the TLC has been working on another ground-breaking initiative in nature conservation in Tasmania, made possible through the generous support of the Purves Environmental Fund and Purryburry Trust. In February 2013, eleven high profile Australian artists were invited as guests of Rob and Sandy Purves to explore the wild and remote landscape of Skullbone Plains on a four-day artists retreat.

Participating artists included Tim Burns (TAS), Joel Crosswell (TAS), Julie Gough (TAS), Philip Hunter (VIC), Janet Laurence (NSW), Vera Möller (VIC), Imants Tillers

(NSW), Megan Walch (TAS), Richard Wastell (TAS), Philip Wolfhagen (TAS) and John Wolseley (VIC).

Aged between their mid 20s and mid 70s, they travelled from Victoria, New South Wales and across Tasmania to immerse themselves in the ancient landscape of Skullbone Plains. The wild terrain provided an opportunity for the artists to draw inspiration from the landscape, leading to the development of a major body of work that will now feature in a touring exhibition.

Well-known Tasmanian academic Pete Hay joined the artists on the retreat to interpret the landscape through prose. An exhibition catalogue has been developed which features Pete's writing and we are very appreciative of his insight and contribution to the TLC.

The TLC's conservation science and reserve management staff provided interpretation of the site over the first few days, sharing their knowledge of the site's flora and fauna and its cultural history. This included guided walks to Kenneth Lagoon and Lake Ina, high-lighting species such as the endangered Tasmanian devil, wedge-tailed eagle, Clarence galaxias and threatened

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Joel Crosswell: 'A Pagan Dream' (detail) 2013

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sphagnum moss beds and Miena cider gums.

Artists spent time by themselves and in small groups on the following days, exploring the site, collecting materials from the landscape, developing site-based interpretive work and deepening their relationship with the land. Evenings were largely social with artists and TLC staff coming together for dinner, gathering around the fire to combat the summer chill and philosophising about art and conservation.

Since then, the artists have developed work in response to their time spent at Skullbone Plains, each interpreting the landscape in their own unique way. An exhibition featuring works developed by the artists will be shown at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG) at Inveresk, Launceston from 15 March - 18 May 2014. The exhibition will also be shown at Galleries UNSW, Sydney from 19 July - 30 August 2014.

The aim of the residency and resulting exhibition is to raise the profile of the Tasmanian Land Conservancy and its work in protecting Tasmania's biodiversity, to foster the inexorable link between Australian contemporary art practice and the natural world and to expand the TLC's networks into a wider nature conservation-minded community.

It has been an absolute honour to have artists of such vision and calibre interpret our reserve. Their engagement with this landscape is a powerful way for the TLC to raise awareness of the long-term protection of biodiversity in Tasmania. Exhibiting the works in New South Wales as well as Tasmania greatly increases the exposure of the broad conservation work of the TLC and the irreplaceable landscapes entrusted to our care.

The exhibition features the work of valued TLC supporter Philip Wolfhagen who, along with wife Catherine, is also curating the show. Together they have

provided invaluable support to the TLC in facilitating the project, for which we are enormously grateful.

The works developed for the exhibition depict a diverse range of responses to Skullbone Plains. Landscape paintings, multi-media installations, drawings and sculptural objects will be featured. Returning to his studio after the retreat, Imants Tillers painted his first ever self-portrait, which was a finalist in the 2013 Archibald prize. The self-portrait is a haunting portrayal of the artist's physiological reaction to the landscape and a time of introspection. Since then, Imants has painted a number of further works in response to his experience on the reserve.

The work of John Wolseley has been pre-committed to the National Gallery of Victoria's collection following the exhibition.

Please spread the word about this exciting project which draws attention to our Skullbone Plains reserve - a landscape that is not only exquisitely rare and beautiful but also nationally significant.

Please bring your friends and family along to:

**Launceston exhibition opening: 6pm, Friday 14th March 2014**

**Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG) at Inveresk**  
Exhibition dates: 15 March - 18 May 2014

**RSVP** by calling QVMAG 03 6323 7798  
or email [bookings@qvmag.tas.gov.au](mailto:bookings@qvmag.tas.gov.au)

**Sydney exhibition opening: Thursday 17th July 2014**  
**Galleries UNSW, COFA, Paddington, Sydney**  
Exhibition dates: 18th July - 30 August 2014  
Registration to be advised

Cabbage gums (*E. pauciflora*), Skullbone Plains

Photo: Matthew Newton



Skullbone Plains and Lake Ina in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area



Photo: Matthew Newton

Photo: RiverFly Wilderness

RiverFly wilderness huts

## New Leaf recap

In June 2010, with the help of gifts and loans from philanthropic trusts including the Elsie Cameron Foundation, the Purves Environmental Trust and the Purryburry Trust, we acquired nearly 28,000 ha of Tasmanian native forests from the former company Gunns Limited. We named the project *New Leaf*, and so began an exciting multi-year program to raise funds to permanently protect important areas across Tasmania and, where environmentally appropriate, create opportunities for sustainable development.

The New Leaf properties provide habitat for all but one of Tasmania's 33 land mammals. It represents one per cent of Tasmania's private freehold land and consists of 34 properties on 94 titles. The land covered in the New Leaf purchase is vast; it ranges from serene, ancient old-growth rainforests in the Blue Tier of the north-east, through sub-alpine forests perched high in the mountains around Ben Lomond, and sweeping landscapes of towering trees, lakes and wild rivers in the central highlands, to stunning lowland forests located close to Launceston and intimate forested valleys in the southern midlands.

The huge properties of the central highlands in particular provide opportunities to manage whole forested landscapes for conservation, encompassing entire watersheds and wild river valleys. The forests in this region contain mosaics of wetlands, rivers and highland grasslands. They are vast habitats for endangered Tasmanian devils and house at least seven active nests of endangered Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagles.

## The business of conservation

Ian Hall | Business Manager

Many of the properties have been used for commercial forestry and provide us with an opportunity to restore full, high quality habitat for wildlife over extensive areas.

In March 2012, with the help of our supporters, and the Federal Government's National Reserve System program, the first New Leaf reserve, Skullbone Plains, was created. In September 2012, again with supporter help, we created our second New Leaf reserve, Blue Tier.

In parallel with the public fundraising campaigns, we developed and implemented multi-year land management plans and researched major collaborative partnerships for sustainable development. One such example is the successful completion of our carbon project (newsletter 39) that was made possible through the generous support of the Elsie Cameron Foundation and a global partnership with NGO Conservation International and BHP Billiton.

Where existing commercial agreements had been in place on New Leaf properties, we are focusing on transitioning from less environmentally desirable practices into sustainable business opportunities, consistent with the ecological values of the land (see the following article for details).

We have more exciting new plans in the pipeline and look forward to announcing them in the coming months. Thank you to everyone who has been a part of the New Leaf project to date.

Owning and managing land for conservation not only protects important natural areas for the unique plants and wildlife it supports but also provides opportunities to generate income without compromising biodiversity values. In addition to this, pre-existing agreements and arrangements that may be part of the land purchase need to be managed through the prism of protecting biodiversity.

The Conservation Business Team within the TLC works with partners and develops new relationships to maximise possible commercial returns, whilst ensuring biodiversity values are maintained or enhanced.

A good example of this is the New Leaf Project, where some relationships were inherited as part of the purchase agreement. Enterprises ranging from recreational uses through to firewood collection, quarrying and petroleum exploration were operational and needed to be managed and reviewed as part of the transitional arrangements. While many of those arrangements have not been carried forward, some have, such as pre-existing recreational uses. Carefully considering those and maintaining key relationships consistent with maintaining biodiversity values has worked very well to secure and protect our TLC reserves into the future.

New ideas and additional opportunities have been a key focus for the business unit in developing reserve income. A carbon project has been established across the New Leaf estate and, after being internationally verified and



Wedge-tailed eagle



Regrowth at Silver Peppermint Reserve after fire

Photo: Paul Wilson

Photo: Matthew Newton

## TLC reserves update

validated, has the potential to return a healthy income stream for the next thirty years. This project will provide an excellent return on investment and is clearly in line with the TLC's conservation mission and values.

Several new enterprises have been established on the New Leaf properties, capitalising on the tourism potential and natural accessible environment. *Riverfly Tasmania* offers multi-day options to fly-fish the rivers and streams of the region. *Wild Bike Tours* offers day trips on mountain bikes to explore and interpret the landscape in Tasmania's central highlands. Both of these enterprises provide a direct return to the TLC, enabling support for research and ongoing reserve management.

The TLC is also exploring other ecosystem services markets such as seed collection, natural spring water and further recreational activities that maintain or enhance biodiversity values. This is important, as owning and managing land for conservation is a significant task and we must continue to innovate in order to sustain the growing demands of stewardship and caretaker of these important natural areas that, with your support, we continue to protect. The future provides a wealth of opportunities for entrepreneurial development in line with the TLC's strong conservation ethic and focus on ecosystem services.

The Conservation Business Team will continue to look for new possibilities to reinforce and expand income streams.

Please contact Ian Hall on 03 6225 1399 or [ihall@tasland.org.au](mailto:ihall@tasland.org.au) to discuss ideas or for more information.

**Leigh Walters** | Reserves Manager

We have fantastic news! We are thrilled to report that several wedge-tailed eagle nest sites at Skullbone Plains and other TLC properties have recently been established and are active, containing newly hatched chicks.

To protect the chicks in the nests, our planned supporter trips to Skullbone Plains will not take place this autumn, as road use is an activity that may cause adult birds to desert their nest.

An entirely new nest has also been established by a pair of eagles on our Jinks Tier property. This is where we have been planning a sub-division to create conservation lifestyle properties. We have put these plans on hold due to this new eagle nest with chick close to a road and within line of sight of potential house sites. A thorough assessment of the situation will be made after the breeding season.

On other TLC reserves, the Reserve Management Team is undertaking the annual Central Highlands weeding program. This is a large and ongoing project targeting ragwort. We have planned at least 30 staff days plus the involvement of many volunteers for this activity.

A successful two-day volunteer activity at the Lower Liffey Reserve saw the continued removal of foxglove and commencement of the treatment of the blackberry infestation. Due to the large volume of foxglove in the local area our aim is to prevent further spread onto our property. From the great work undertaken with volunteers in previous years there has

been a significant reduction in effort required this year. To ensure access to all properties for management activities, fire preparedness, supporter trips and research means that road maintenance is a large and ongoing component of work throughout the summer period. We also plan to replace two timber bridges in the central highlands later this autumn.

### Bushfire

At the time of going to press, a bushfire had recently impacted our Pine Tier property. The fire was controlled and is being patrolled by the local brigade and TLC staff. We hope that some cooler weather will see the fire extinguished; however, it is likely we will need to remain vigilant for the rest of the summer period. The TLC would like to recognise and thank the Tasmania Fire Service and the local brigades that attended; without their fantastic work the fire would certainly have impacted to a far greater extent. This is also a good time to remind supporters of the investment the TLC has made in upskilling staff for fire management. The assistance that TLC staff made to the suppression and blacking out of the fire was significant. Everyone worked over quite a few long hot days: a fantastic effort from all involved.

### Pine Control

Over 18 months ago the TLC was approached by a landowner interested in removing many radiata pine trees from his native forest on south Bruny Island. These pine wildlings were severely impacting on the native forest, including the adjacent coastal reserve. Initial discussions and site visits



Swift parrot

Photo: Chris Tzoros



Liz with orphaned possum, Defno

Photo: Robyn Bartel

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estimated that across the 360 hectare property there were approximately 80-100,000 stems: a massive job! The Reserve Management Team is now working with the landowner to “give it a go”.

The native forest is habitat for swift parrots and potential habitat for white-bellied sea eagles, forty-spotted pardalotes and a wide range of other endemic flora and fauna. TLC conservation scientists made several visits to the property to assess the habitat for the threatened species. Our Reserve Management Team undertook vegetation community mapping to develop a Forest Practices Plan for the project as required for the control of the pine tree infestation. The team also investigated best management practices for the removal of pine wildlings from native forest and liaised with adjacent land managers, including the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service and Crown Land Services.

Project development took almost a year. We are now in the first stages of the project implementation and several techniques are being employed by a contractor to begin the removal job. Research and initial observation suggests that a persistent approach over a five-year period will be required to ensure that the majority of the pines are successfully treated and the native forest returned to its full potential.

We congratulate the landowners for their vision and commitment to improve the condition of the native forest on the property and thank everyone involved.

## Thank you - Liz Charpleix

**An enormous thank you to Liz Charpleix - our retiring Treasurer. Liz has voluntarily undertaken the role of treasurer on the TLC Board since 2009. Her professional accounting skills and positive attitude have contributed greatly to the robust financial management of the TLC. Thank you Liz!**

**Liz Charpleix** | retiring Treasurer

Five years ago on a TLC donors’ trip to Egg Islands, Nathan Males, the CEO at the time, discovered that I am an accountant.

**\*\*Light bulb moment!\*\***

The board’s treasurer position (always the least-coveted) was vacant. Nathan’s charm and my faith in the TLC’s work led me to take on the role in 2009. My work has always been made easy by the expertise of the TLC’s finance staff, Marilyn Pauley and Ian Hall, who ensure that the TLC’s finances are handled efficiently and transparently. I tightened some procedures which had previously missed attention and put myself on call for times when an accountant’s brain needs picking.

The on-call fee consists of cake and proper coffee.

Under corporate law, all board members share responsibility in an organisation’s operations. After a training session from me, and with ongoing assistance from Ian and Marilyn, the board members

started taking turns at presenting the financial reports to meetings. This taught them more about the TLC’s finances than listening to the treasurer’s summary ever would.

My training fee consisted of pizza and red wine.

However, on the home front, my 6.5 hectare patch of bush was overgrown with weeds (bushfire preparation is on the to-do list...). I hadn’t finished painting or furnishing the house that I started building 14 years ago. I run an accounting practice. I raise orphaned possums. I am studying for a PhD in water valuation.

Something had to go, and I decided that, like a fledgling welcome swallow, the TLC was the most appropriate thing to push out of my nest.

I hold fond memories of the TLC’s camaraderie, the incredible intellectual capacity of the staff, board and committee members, adventures on the TLC’s landholdings and the pride of seeing the TLC grow from a mid-size environmental organisation to one of the world’s leading players.

However, as The Eagles say: *‘You can check out, but you can never leave.’* Apart from any active participation, I estimate that I have 50 more years of making monthly donations before my bequest kicks in. If the bequest of my humble estate ensures the health of just one native species, my ghost will be content.

**‘protecting Tasmanian land for biodiversity’**



Bat expert Lisa Cawthen summoning the bats at the Vale of Belvoir



Masked participants in the TLCs "natural habitat" setting

## Vale of Belvoir wildflowers

Native alpine wildflowers were at the peak of their summer bloom as more than 90 TLC supporters and enthusiasts flocked to this year's Vale of Belvoir wildflower field day.

Guided tour groups at first sought refuge from the midday sun in the old-growth callidendrous myrtle rainforest, which fringes the Vale. After cooling off, participants braved the heat and climbed Daisy Hill, which was blanketed in orange everlasting daisies (*Xerochrysum subundulatum*) and crowned with the threatened and superb white grassland paperdaisy (*Leucochrysum albicans* var. *tricolor*). Everyone's appreciation of the extraordinary natural values, karst geology and cultural heritage of this important permanent reserve were greatly enriched by the engrossing interpretation provided by Sib, Christine and Dr Keith Corbett of the Australian Plant Society, along with TLC staff.

Nearly 30 people returned to the Vale at twilight to join Tasmanian bat expert Lisa Cawthen as she passionately shed light on the secret lives of Tasmania's eight micro bat species. Their patience was rewarded when high frequency echolocation calls of long-eared bats, Gould's wattle bats, and forest bats were picked up by electronic detectors and the bats' audible social calls could

be clearly heard, much to everyone's delight. The TLC would like to thank our volunteers who greatly contributed to the day's success.

**If you are interested in joining our volunteer weeding and management activities planned for the Revolving Fund property at Marakoopa Creek Saturday 22nd and Sunday 23rd March, please contact: Phill Roach, our Community Engagement Officer, on 03 6225 1399 or email [proach@tasland.org.au](mailto:proach@tasland.org.au)**



Everlasting daisies at the Vale of Belvoir

## TLC out and about

Growing our supporter base and reaching out to people young and old is essential for our long-term success. In November 2013 we participated in the Hobart Sustainable Living Festival and we have just concluded our second stall at the Sustainable Living Festival in Melbourne.

It was a pleasure to spend time with everyone who stopped by to learn more about our work.

Our program to raise funds for our long-term ecological monitoring program was of interest to many. Visitors were especially pleased to see recent photographic evidence recorded at our Silver Peppermint permanent reserve showing a diversity of Tasmanian animals, including a number of healthy-looking devils, quolls, bettongs and possums as well as a snake and birds. With the help of volunteers, children enjoyed creating masks of Tasmanian devils and quolls, dressing up in costumes and posing for photographs in our "TLC landscape".

**Thank you to Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary for supporting us in this event.**

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



CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY

