

AUTUMN 2020

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Buzzy (*Acaena novae-zelandiae*) at Blue Tier. Photo: Andy Townsend

It has been a busy start to 2020 for the Tasmanian Land Conservancy (TLC), with our field season for the Reserve Management and Science teams in full swing. Now in its ninth consecutive year, the annual Central Highlands weeding program has yet again delivered significant results. The team is seeing marked declines in invasive species across our highland estate, with volunteers coming from far and wide to contribute. Thanks to all our volunteers, many returning for another year to maintain our efforts. We are always inspired to hear of our volunteers' motivations for protecting nature and we have a story in this newsletter that I think is a first for the TLC.

The summer's devastating bushfires on the mainland have also seen the TLC contribute to recovery efforts. While Tasmania was largely spared widespread

fires, a number of conservation landholders were affected in the Fingal and Derwent Valley fires. Our staff have been working with these landholders to support them in the recovery efforts. On the mainland, the Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA), of which the TLC is a founding member, has been working closely with the federal government and relevant agencies to support our interstate colleagues and conservation landholders across fire-impacted regions. Some ALCA members have been affected by the fires, and the alliance is doing all it can to provide vital support in the response and recovery efforts across government and in communities.

The end of 2019 saw us also celebrate the incredible contribution of retiring Chair Stuart Barry, after 10 years of service on the board and four years

as Chair. Stuart's expertise, passion, knowledge and not to mention his sense of humour have guided the TLC through many significant projects and impressive outcomes. We thank Stuart for his commitment and dedication to the TLC over so many years and we are thrilled to welcome Jennie Churchill to the role of Chair.

Our autumn newsletter is full of great stories from across our programs, including local connections at Tinderbox Hills and some welcome summer residents on Mt Communication Revolving Fund properties. We are all energised for the year ahead and the outcomes we can achieve together for nature across Tasmania.

James Hattam
Chief Executive Officer

HIGHLIGHTS



Mt Communication. Photo: Andy Townsend

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Deb and Julian thought they were buying a home for themselves – they didn't realise they were also protecting a home for swift parrots.



Echidna (*Tachyglyssus aculeatus*) at Tinderbox Hills. Photo: Andy Townsend

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While providing essential habitat for threatened species, Tinderbox Hills also holds many memories for the Hale family.



Ecological monitoring at the Vale. Photo: Phill Laroche

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Monitoring pays off while searching for threatened plants at the TLC's Vale of Belvoir Reserve.



FIRE AND CONSERVATION

Recovering from fire at Silver Peppermint Reserve. Photo: Matthew Newton

After a terrible bushfire season on the mainland, with people, homes and more than a billion native animals affected, we at the TLC have been thinking about our private land conservation colleagues and landholders whose properties have been affected by fire.

The TLC is a founding member of the Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA), a national organisation representing the interests of private land conservation organisations. Many ALCA members have been affected by fires, including Bush Heritage Australia, Trust for Nature, the South Endeavour Trust and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC). Now these organisations are demonstrating how to rehabilitate wildlife and habitats after fire.

Bush Heritage is implementing its Fire Recovery Action Plans, ensuring safe access, feeding wildlife where necessary, working with local community groups to repair and replace fencing, understanding and addressing threats such as feral animals and weed incursions, setting up monitoring and working with local communities to help them get involved in recovery efforts.

AWC is working with Kangaroo Island Land for Wildlife and local landholders to protect the few Kangaroo Island dunnarts who survived the fire there. They have a cat trapper on the ground, leading efforts to control feral predators, and are setting up a feral-proof fence to protect remnant habitat. Across other mainland properties,

they are conducting targeted surveys, assessing damage to habitat, providing strategic advice and carrying out urgent interventions to protect surviving populations of threatened species. AWC ecologists are helping out at fire sites around the country, assessing damage to important habitat.

Here in Tasmania, our summer's fires have had nothing like the extent and ferocity of those on the mainland. However, fires in both the north and south of the state did affect covenanted properties and one TLC property. The TLC worked with agencies at the fires, ensuring Incident Management Teams were aware of properties with conservation covenants, and supporting attempts to protect them.

Sometimes, emergency firebreaks are constructed through properties at risk. Over the past few months, the TLC's Anna Povey and Oliver Strutt, who work with covenant landholders, have been liaising with affected landholders to determine whether firebreaks (constructed during last summer) should be rehabilitated or retained.

Anna and Oliver are also reassuring landholders about natural regeneration and working with them to ensure that further impacts such as weeds and feral species don't take advantage of the situation.

Continuing regeneration work in the years after a fire is also important. Our science team has been monitoring the damage caused by the January 2019 fires in the TLC's Five Rivers Reserve, where stands of endangered cider gums

were burned. Shortly after the fires, our surveys showed that although many of the older, mature cider gums had been killed, many of the younger trees and saplings were starting to resprout.

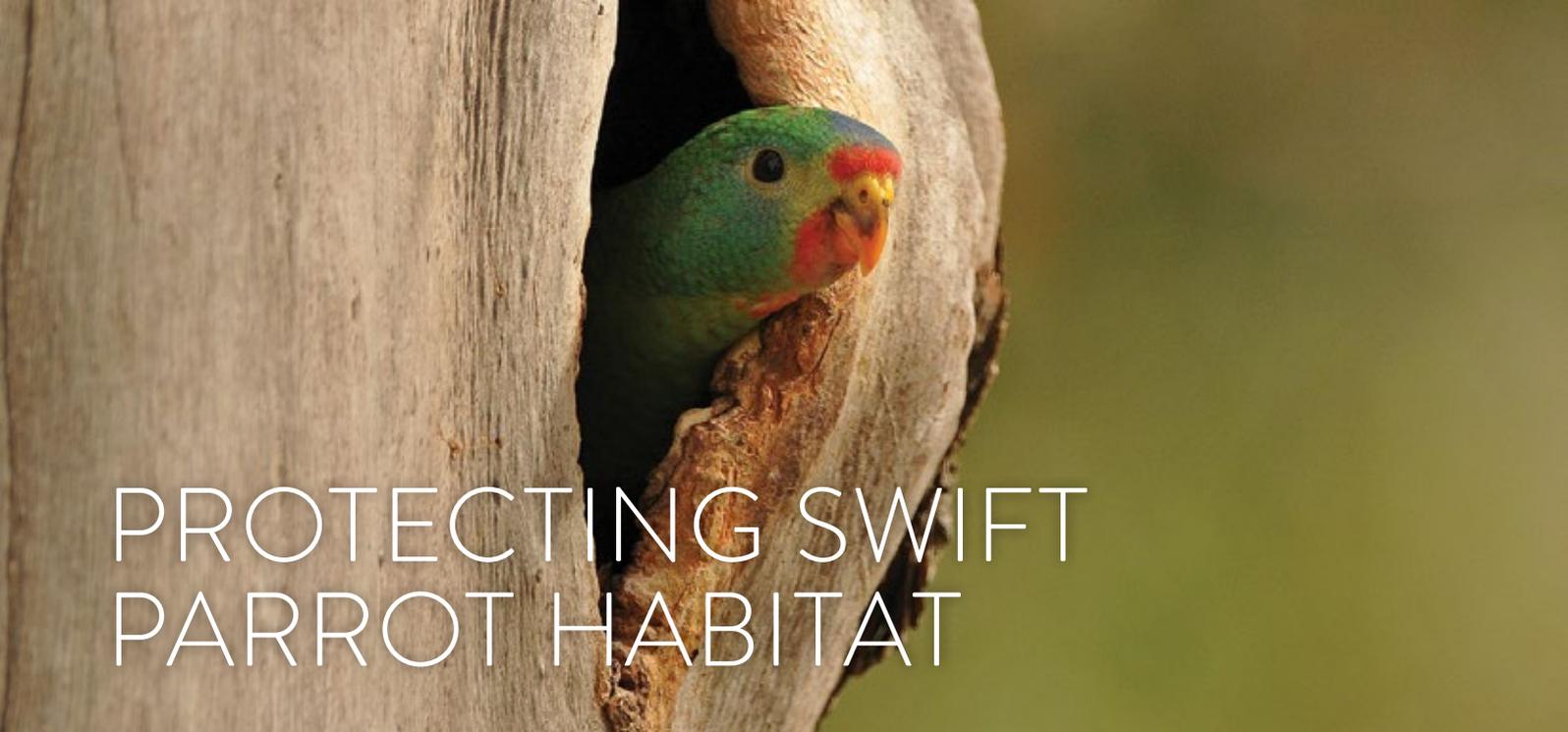
Unfortunately for the gums, this new foliage proved very tasty and we saw some significant grazing that threatened the gums' futures. To give the cider gums the best chance of recovery, TLC staff and volunteers caged regrowth so that it wouldn't be eaten by native and introduced species. We are now assessing how successful that measure has been.

In the aftermath of the 2019-20 fires, ALCA has been participating in multiple Ministerial and Parliamentary Roundtables at the national level, working with the federal environment minister to draw on the expertise and experience of conservation landholders, and advocating for these landholders to get the funding and support they need to respond to and recover from fires.

Recovery from fire and the role of private conservation landholders will be a big part of ALCA's 2020 National Private Land Conservation conference, to be held in Sydney 13-15 October.

EXPLORE

Visit the TLC's blog, In our Nature, to keep up to date with our monitoring and recovery activities on our reserves
tasland.org.au/blog/



PROTECTING SWIFT PARROT HABITAT

Swift parrot (*Lathamus discolor*) at Mt Communication. Photo: Dave James

When you think about things you can do to help nature, buying a new home might not be on your list. But it should be! Ecologist Dave James explains how the TLC's Revolving Fund has helped save habitat for this iconic bird.

Every October to December, observers from the Australian National University criss-cross southeast Tasmania counting swift parrots (*Lathamus discolor*). In 2019, through spring and into summer, blue gums in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel area, north Bruny Island and the Tasman Peninsula bloomed and snowy eucalypts were everywhere. Swift parrots returning from winter migration got busy on the nectar and started breeding. But where?

On the Tasman Peninsula many of the flowering blue gums are remnant or roadside trees and not necessarily in forests with suitable hollows for breeding. A history of logging in remaining forests means hollow availability is patchy. But recently, the TLC sold a number of Revolving Fund properties in this area, covenanted for conservation, to private buyers. Would we find tree hollows, suitable for breeding, on these properties? Owners around Mt Communication kindly gave access to conduct some breeding season surveys to discover the where, when and why of swift parrots in Tasmania.

We knew the parrots were feeding around Nubeena and along the Roaring Beach Road and we suspected they may be breeding at Mt Communication.

With much bird surveying, hearing is often more important than seeing. It's not uncommon to hear several swifties but see none. Nesting birds are quite discreet: often a male sitting quietly near the hollow may be suspicious, perhaps offering a soft 'twee-twee-twonk'. Sometimes the tiniest flight call can be heard in the distance, repeating with rhythm, increasing in volume as the bird approaches until it stops. Sometimes a female emerges from a hollow you could never see because it faces straight up: you wonder why it doesn't fill up when it rains. Sometimes the male will feed the female at the entrance, sometimes they fly off to a tree a hundred metres away. When the chicks are very young and the forest is quiet, the faintest of begging calls can trickle out of the hollow and later still chicks at the hollow's entrance call loudly for another feed.

At Mt Communication, the diversity of vegetation, some great flowering blue gums in the gullies and the availability of hollows made for good conditions for the swifties. Five active nests and, best of all, fledglings were recorded. A significant proportion of the swiftie population was using Mt Communication in the 2019 season. In late 2019, new Revolving Fund property owners Debbie and Julian reported a flock of approximately 100 flying around their block, probably a mix of fledglings and adults. Flocks this size are rarely seen these days. Good numbers of fledglings are especially encouraging, given the catastrophic predation by sugar gliders that has been recorded in many other breeding sites.

During the survey period fledglings and adults seemed to be congregating obligingly around Debbie and Julian's campsite.

'When we looked at buying the property, we noted swift parrot habitat, but we never imagined that we would find ourselves the custodians of an important breeding and feeding area. Arriving in the afternoon and finding our first swiftie feeding quietly on the ground next to our campervan was a very special moment.'

Every day after that we watched adults and fledglings flying around us calling and sitting in the tops of blue gums in the morning and evening sun. It was very special and reinforced for us the importance of private protection of land through covenanting.'

- Debbie and Julian

Mt Communication really is a vital area for the birds' survival. The TLC has done important work securing these properties and ensuring their future management with covenants. It is validation too for the new owners, who have taken a step of faith investing in the future of Tasmania's biodiversity.

ACT

To find out more about the Revolving Fund and see properties for sale, visit tasland.org.au/properties-for-sale/ or sign up for our properties email newsletter at tasland.org.au/subscribe-to-our-newsletter/



MEMORIES OF TINDERBOX HILLS

A lovely spot for a picnic. Photo: Andy Townsend

In late 1946, Diana Hale's father came back from the war. He'd been stuck mopping up in Papua New Guinea, and by the time he got home most of the soldier settlement blocks had already been taken. On his way to look at orchards in the Huon Valley, his wife asked if they could take a little detour to see the beautiful view from the Tinderbox Peninsula.

When he saw the peninsula, he was hooked. Asking if there were any properties for sale, he was sent up to 'old Mrs Brooks' place'. Mrs Brooks already had some cashed-up potential buyers, including an ex-Lord Mayor, but she liked the look of this young returned soldier wanting to build a family, so she cut him a deal.

There must be something in the water on the Tinderbox Peninsula. When Diana, now a West, was selling part of the family property recently, she decided the TLC would make a better owner than someone wanting to develop the area for housing or tourism. She wanted it to be a place her family could still visit.

'We used to camp there,' she says of the property. 'All dad's kids, grandkids and now great-grandkids have learned how to camp in a tent up there. They've learned how to build and put out a camp fire. There was a spot under an old blackwood tree – we'd drag a couple of logs around it and have a picnic.'

Her dad used to spend a lot of time up on the hill. 'He'd learned his bushcraft as a jackaroo in western NSW, and he

loved being outdoors. He liked to go up into the bush and listen to birds. He recognised all their songs and he could tell which direction they were singing from, and after a bit he could point them out to you.'

A vibrant landscape of dense forest and diverse woodland, Tinderbox Hills is still alive with the song of birds. This 67-hectare property just south of Hobart is home to two endangered bird species – the swift parrot (*Lathamus discolor*) and the forty-spotted pardalote (*Pardalotus quadragintus*). In fact, Tinderbox Hills is one of the last spots on the Tasmanian mainland where these tiny, rare birds still nest.

More than 80% of the Tinderbox Hills property is blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*) dry forest and woodland community, recognised at state and national levels as a high priority for protection.

A spot to walk and picnic, a place to look at the views, a reserve where trees will flourish and birds will sing: as a protected reserve, Tinderbox Hills will conserve the nature and the long, rich history of this part of Tasmania.

GIVE

To contribute to the conservation of the TLC's newest reserve, or to find out more about Tinderbox Hills, visit tasland.org.au/donate-now



Jennie Churchill with outgoing Chair, Stuart Barry. Photo: Matthew Newton

TLC PEOPLE

Welcome to the new Chair and Vice Chair of our Board. Jennie Churchill, Board Chair, has been a member of the Board since 2012 and has more than 30 years leadership and management experience across media, veterinary science, small business, not-for-profit leadership and government advisory roles. A former CEO of the Veterinary Science Foundation at the University of Sydney, Jennie held senior roles with a number of NFPs including Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities, and the Australian Common Ground Alliance.

Julian von Bibra, the TLC's new Vice Chair, is a farmer at 'Beaufront', a family property in the Midlands of Tasmania, with considerable conservation values. He was educated in Commerce at Melbourne University and The Royal Agricultural College Cirencester in the UK.

The TLC also has two new Reserves Officers. We're very excited to welcome Belle Monk (working from Hobart) and Grant Houniet (Launceston).

Belle has a degree in Natural Environment and Wilderness Studies. She has been working as a Project Officer at Greening Australia and has seven years' experience as a volunteer firefighter. Belle has a passion for working outdoors and being part of practical efforts to look after and improve natural places.

Grant has qualifications in project management and leisure management, and comes to us from Conservation Volunteers Australia, where he was the State Manager. He was previously Operations Manager for the Tasmanian Walking Company. Grant loves hiking, fly-fishing, and stonework.



ON THE RESERVES

Staff and volunteers at the Vale of Belvoir. Photo: Phill Laroche

THREATENED PLANTS AT THE VALE OF BELVOIR

The Vale of Belvoir Reserve is a hotspot for threatened plants. It is home to two particularly important species, alpine candles (*Stackhousia pulvinaris*) and grassland paperdaisy (*Leucochrysum albicans* var. *tricolor*). While these plants can be found elsewhere, the Vale hosts the largest populations of each, and their continued flourishing in this location is vital to their future. February's visit by the science team and 14 volunteers set out to determine how these plants and others are faring.

Clear skies and sunny days made the intensive vegetation monitoring activities a genuine pleasure. The team was at the Vale to complete three important tasks: repeating some long-term monitoring (both vegetation transects and wildlife cameras); repeating monitoring quadrats for alpine candles and grassland paperdaisy; and monitoring the impacts of fire and cattle grazing.

Disturbance is a key part of managing grassland areas at the Vale – without enough disturbance, large grass and sedge tussocks start to dominate and shade out small herb species, lowering the species diversity. Cattle have grazed at the Vale each summer for at least the last 100 years, however their numbers have been slowly reducing since TLC purchased

the property and have been excluded from parts of the Vale to protect sensitive wetlands. Four members of the team set out to compare flora diversity in grazed and un-grazed areas. They found the two areas are now almost indistinguishable – cattle populations have been dropping and the cows are roaming a larger area, so their impact has been reduced. Most of the grazing these days is from wombats and wallabies. Part of our ongoing work will be to determine the impacts reduced cattle grazing has had and whether we need to undertake management actions in response.

While the data from this monitoring exercise hasn't yet been analysed, the initial impression was that there has been a decline in the number of *Stackhousia* and *Leucochrysum* plants, likely due to grazing. This highlights the importance of monitoring to show us species changes. Before you can fix a problem, you have to know the problem exists, and it's been wonderful having a reliable baseline we can measure against. Once we confirm that plant numbers have reduced we can alter our management to rectify the situation, and continue to monitor its effectiveness.

The contribution of our volunteers to this monitoring program has been invaluable. We would like to thank all the volunteers who have been part of the program this summer, and also everyone involved in previous seasons.

ROMANCE AMONG THE RAGWORT

Bali? No? I know: Mallorca. Perhaps somewhere closer to home... the Whitsundays? Where would you (or did you) choose to go on your honeymoon? asks Phill Laroche, the TLC's Community Engagement Coordinator.

For young, newlywed Hobartians Brodie and Madeleine, the choice was a curious and ultimately selfless one. As keen bushwalkers and nature photographers, this unconventional bride and groom eschewed luxury linen, cocktails and day spas for sleeping bags, Boags draught, safety goggles and overalls – by signing up for a few days volunteering on a TLC Central Highlands weeding trip instead.

'We spend a lot of time in the outdoors, often for our own benefit, so it's nice to give something back by contributing to restore and improve nature,' explains Brodie.

The couple completed a 20-strong crew of TLC staff and volunteers scouring the vast network of former forestry snigs across beautiful Five Rivers Reserve. Their target: invasive ragwort. Teams have also been weeding up at TLC's Silver Plains New Leaf carbon property. The project is now in its ninth year. Weed numbers are down.

Often working in areas affected by the January 2019 bushfires, volunteers witness signs of renewal and resilience everywhere – blackened earth punctuated by profusely flowering guitar plants, shadowed by towering eucalypts fringed with bright epicormic growth.

'It's been such a rewarding experience,' reflects Madeleine.



WHAT'S ON

Lichenomphalia umbellifera at Rubicon Sanctuary. Photo: Heath Holden

TLC FOUNDATION FUND FOUNDERS – RECHERCHE BAY RESERVE VISIT

Saturday, 16 May 2020

Foundation fund founders are invited to experience the unique and lesser-visited Recherche Bay Reserve, protected in 2006. Come aboard the *Odalisque* for a day excursion out of Dover and hear some of the many stories of this nationally significant property. Invitations will be sent to Foundation fund founders.

SAVE THE DATE – BEQUEST & FOUNDATION INFORMATION EVENING – HOBART

Thursday, 4 June 2020

Leaving a gift to the TLC in your will or establishing a named fund within the TLC Foundation are two of the most powerful ways to ensure that the natural places you value today are protected and managed into the future. Join TLC staff and guest speakers to learn more about how you can create your lasting legacy for nature.

For more information, contact Planned Giving Coordinator, Sophie Marshall on smarshall@tasland.org.au.

TLC SUPPORTER EVENING – SYDNEY

Saturday, 13 June 2020

Celebrate the contributions and successes of private land conservation in Tasmania. This event, in Surry Hills, Sydney, is hosted by TLC Board member Clare Bower and husband Ian Breedon. Hear about our latest campaign and meet TLC staff and supporters.

For more information, contact Philanthropy and Engagement Manager, Margie Jenkin on mjenkin@tasland.org.au.



Bennetts wallaby (*Macropus rufogriseus*). Photo: Andy Townsend

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