



SPRING 2020

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Acacia sp. at Tinderbox Hills. Photo: Andy Townsend

Protecting irreplaceable places is fundamental to the work of the Tasmanian Land Conservancy (TLC), yet conservation is so much more than a line on a map. Establishing a reserve is a promise to future generations and a powerful expression of how the community values nature. In this newsletter we are thrilled to announce the TLC's newest reserve, acquired in June 2020 thanks to the generosity and foresight of the McGregor family.

As an organisation we feel incredibly privileged to work alongside committed conservationists such as Bruce and Ann McGregor. Through the estate of Bruce's father, David McGregor, they have enabled the protection of 1,534ha of some of Tasmania's most significant and threatened ecosystems. If any of you have, like me, travelled through the Prosser gorge between Buckland and Orford on the East Coast and gazed

northward into the ancient stands of blue gum and callitris and wondered if these areas were protected... thanks to the McGregors the answer now is, yes, and forever. On behalf of all of us at the TLC we sincerely thank the McGregors and celebrate David's legacy and this enduring gift to nature.

We are thrilled to welcome our new Head of Science, Dr Alex Kutt, who joined the TLC team in June. As we move into the field season, our science and reserve management teams will be busy at work across the TLC's reserves and we hope to have more opportunity for all of you to get out and involved in our conservation efforts.

While 2020 has had its challenges and our thoughts are with those still impacted by the continuing disruptions, we have been buoyed by the support and commitment of the TLC community.

A huge thank you also to all those who have contributed to our current campaign to protect Tinderbox Hills: we are closer than ever to securing this reserve.

National Threatened Species Day on 7 September, marking the death of the last known thylacine in 1936 at the Hobart Zoo, shines a spotlight on plants and animals in danger of extinction. Protecting habitat is the first step in safeguarding a future for our threatened species. In this newsletter, learn more about the work of many dedicated landholders who protect and manage threatened species' habitat across the state. We look forward to a future where we can celebrate the species we have saved rather than mourning the species we have lost.

James Hattam
Chief Executive Officer

HIGHLIGHTS



David McGregor. Photo: Freya McGregor

Page 3

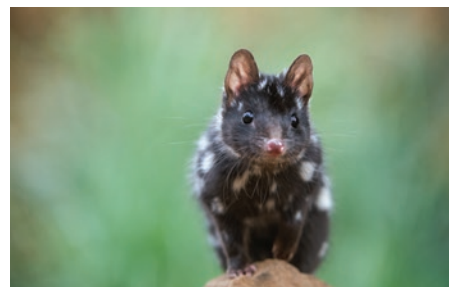
Announcing a new East Coast reserve, thanks to a generous gift from a committed conservationist.



TLC's Skullbone Plains Reserve. Photo: Matthew Newton

Page 4

Get an update on our bequests program and find out about upcoming trips for Natural Guardians.



Eastern quoll (*Dasyurus viverrinus*). Photo: Sean Crane

Page 5

On Threatened Species Day, and every day, TLC is monitoring rare and vulnerable creatures on our reserves.



KEEPING TRACK OF CONSERVATION

The Houston family. Photo: Eddie Safarik

Long-term TLC supporters, the Houston family, are the proud owners of a stunning conservation property at Rocky Hills on Tasmania's East Coast. The Houstons come from a farming background and have a passion for the Tasmanian environment, with the younger generation involved in environmental science and education. As the Houstons came to know their new property, they realised they could share their story with their many visitors, a story of conservation and the impacts of climate change on Tasmanian landscapes.

So last year, Anthony Houston got in touch with the TLC's science team. He'd been seeing changes in the landscape, but he wondered if he could use our WildTracker program to tell that story better, anchoring his observations in robust scientific data about wildlife populations, vegetation and carbon sequestration.

WildTracker is an ecological monitoring system developed by the TLC. As part of this citizen science program, the TLC is working with landholders across Tasmania, building a network of long-term wildlife monitoring sites on private land. WildTracker's information will be used to identify wildlife hotspots and target conservation activities.

Over the past few months we've been working with the Houstons to set up 20 monitoring sites at Rocky Hills. Sites were established in native grassland, Oyster Bay pine forest, grassy woodland, and along seasonal creeks. Wildlife cameras have been collecting data and have detected Tasmanian devils, bettongs and a healthy population of

wombats. Of special concern has been a noticeable decline in the health and extent of Oyster Bay pines, perhaps attributable to climate change and a recent string of extremely dry years.

Long-term ecological monitoring with WildTracker at Rocky Hills will give the Houstons vital information that can guide management interventions such as grazing, ecological burning, or feral animal management. But climate change impacts can be difficult to mitigate at a local level: the data from these monitoring sites will also provide a solid base of evidence to support the family's advocacy for the environment and management of the land. Rocky Hills can be used as a demonstration site for sustainable land stewardship and an example that can get people thinking about the wider implications of climate change.

As Anthony says, 'We acquired a property through the TLC for the sole purpose of storing carbon and building the biodiversity to help offset the emissions from our agricultural enterprise. An important part of targeting a zero-carbon future is to be able to scientifically track carbon sequestration and improvement in biodiversity, which we're able to do in partnership with the TLC, using their expertise and WildTracker.'

Tinderbox Hills. Photo: Andy Townsend

TINDERBOX: THE FINISH LINE APPROACHES

We are so grateful to everyone who donated to protect Tinderbox last financial year. We've been talking a lot about this property, and some of you are probably sick of hearing about it, so it's even more heart-warming that in June you contributed so generously towards our target. We now have about \$300,000 to raise to protect Tinderbox Hills in perpetuity.

A diverse, beautiful woodland on the fringe of Hobart, this special property has been more expensive than other acquisitions. We also build in a contribution to the TLC Foundation endowment, which gives us the security (from interest earned) to manage and monitor this property, forever. With your help, we hope to make Tinderbox a reserve by the end of 2020.

During June, we made some videos at Tinderbox Hills so even those stuck at home could share in its incredible natural values. Sally Bryant gave us an informative primer on the property's birdlife and Andy Townsend led a rain-soaked photography tour, explaining how he makes his beautiful images of nature. To watch, visit the 'Tinderbox Hills' playlist at www.facebook.com/taslandconservancy/videos

ACT

Find out more about WildTracker and register your interest in joining at tasland.org.au/projects/wildtracker

GIVE

Get the Tinderbox Hills campaign over the line by making a donation at tasland.org.au/donate-now, or call the office on 03 6225 1399



NEW EAST COAST RESERVE

Looking over the East Coast reserve. Photo: Rob Blakers

Just outside Buckland on the way to Tasmania's east coast, the Prosser and Back Rivers cut their way through a valley of grassy woodland, scattered with critically endangered black gum (*Eucalyptus ovata*). Along the Prosser's banks, old-growth blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*) is a haven for the critically endangered swift parrots (*Lathamus discolor*) that nest and feed here. The 12km of river frontage is a hotspot for threatened flora, as well as being breathtakingly beautiful. Deep gullies and gorges are lined with Oyster Bay pine (*Callitris rhomboidea*) and to the north, an escarpment rises above the woodland where old-growth forest towers over the property. Some of the trees on this ridge are hundreds of years old and the property hosts three wedge-tailed eagle (*Aquila audax fleayi*) nests.

In June last year, over a coffee in Melbourne, long-time TLC supporters Bruce and Ann McGregor explained to TLC staff that they were looking for land to protect. Bruce's father had died and left most of his estate (acquired with his late wife Jean) to be devoted to securing and maintaining a parcel of land with high conservation values for the protection of endangered wildlife and their habitat. Guided by our world class reserve system, the TLC compiled a shortlist of priority properties across Tasmania. This decision support tool uses various indicators, including known species, habitat, connectivity in the landscape and threats to ecological values, to direct our conservation efforts.

Last December, during those heady days of interstate travel, the McGregors accompanied TLC staff to visit the shortlisted properties and it was a property near Orford that caught their eye.

Following further ecological surveys on site, more than half the area scored high or very high on the world class reserve system, thanks to the threatened and old-growth vegetation communities, threatened species and freshwater ecosystems. It also sits in a popular farming region, which means it could easily have been bought and turned over to irrigated agriculture. The combination was compelling, and so the McGregors committed to protect the area, underpinned by David's bequest.

'Both Mum and Dad loved camping in the bush and wanted to retire to a place where they could see the mountains and the sea,' said Bruce. 'For decades Dad spent a lot of his spare time growing threatened plant species and planting them in his garden, around their farm and along waterways. He loved the small native plants, native birds and restoring gurgling creeks. This property not only helps TLC's vision but also reflects Jean and David's values.'

With boundaries adjusted, the TLC is now the proud owner of 1,534ha that will protect threatened vegetation communities and 11 threatened plant and animal species. As well as those already mentioned, this property is home to clubmoss everlasting (*Ozothamnus lycopodioides*), forest germander (*Teucrium corymbosum*) and a new population of Barber's gum (*Eucalyptus barberi*); Tasmanian devil (*Sarcophilus harrisi*), eastern quoll (*Dasyurus viverrinus*), spotted-tailed quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*) and eastern barred bandicoot (*Perameles gunnii*); masked owl (*Tyto novaehollandiae castanops*), grey goshawk (*Accipiter novaehollandiae*), white-bellied sea eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) and Wielangta stag beetle (*Lissotes latidens*).

As TLC Conservation Ecologist, Matt Taylor, said after visiting this property for the first time, 'The scale and quality of this property is incredible! Working as an ecologist, finding a property that has this many amazing features is a dream. But then to top it all off there is this hidden valley along the Back River, which takes you back in time to pre-European days. So much of our valley ecosystems have been lost but here, remarkably, there is this beautiful intact river flat with big old trees, perfect to stretch your swag under.'

As outlined in Sharnie Read's (nee Everett) Prosser Catchment Aboriginal Heritage Management Plan 2014, the property is also a site of significant cultural heritage. This area was the home of the Payintaymirimina band of the Oyster Bay tribe. A road used by the band ran along the banks of Iiyamangina minanya (the Prosser River) and was known as makuminya. After colonisation, parts of that road were repurposed, laid with blue stone bricks by convicts and later known as the 'old convict road'.

Because this property carries so many layers of human history and conservation significance, we are consulting widely on what to call the reserve. We look forward to announcing the name and running supporter trips in the future. Our heartfelt thanks to the late David and Jean McGregor for their commitment to nature, and to Bruce and Ann McGregor for entrusting the TLC with this powerful bequest to enable an extraordinary conservation legacy.

We are really thrilled to add this very special place to our suite of reserves.



LEAVE A LEGACY

Along the Prosser. Photo: Andy Townsend

Each year, we at the TLC update our supporters about leaving a gift in their will to protect nature. Usually we come together for a wonderful evening of stories, conversation and information sharing. This year, everything was different. With our planned Natural Guardians evening cancelled due to coronavirus, we instead prepared a package of written information and videos.

Our brand-new booklet is now posted on our website. You can download a copy at tasland.org.au/bequests-to-the-tlc. It includes information about how bequests help to support our work and provides wording you can use in your will should you choose to leave a bequest. You can also find out about joining Natural Guardians, our community of bequesters, and about the special reserve trips we take each year.

We made three short films as part of the package. CEO James Hattam explains why bequests are so important to the TLC. Board Chair Jennie Churchill talks about the Foundation fund she and her husband Rob have set up, and about the governance measures the TLC has established to ensure your gift does what you want it to. And Conservation Scientist Rowena Hamer explains how bequests help to fund the TLC's scientific monitoring work. You can also watch our film, 'A simple way to help nature', which includes beautiful footage of our reserves and some thoughtful, heartfelt messages from those who have already left bequests. All these videos are available on the TLC's YouTube channel in the Bequests playlist.

If you're wondering how much difference a gift can make, read the article in this edition about our newest property, near Buckland. We were able to protect this important habitat thanks to an incredibly generous bequest from David and Jean McGregor. The McGregors were not wealthy people – David was a busy pharmacist, taking breaks to travel into the bush whenever possible. David and Jean were both very active in their local church and had a strong commitment to making the world a better place. In 1979 they retired to the country, buying a farm near Mansfield in Victoria; Jean sadly died in 1988. David devoted himself to restoring nature on the farm: it soon teemed with native birds and he registered it as a Land for Wildlife property. Because of his love of nature, David left most of his estate to be devoted to preserving endangered wildlife species and bushland habitat.

After David's death, his son Bruce and daughter-in-law Ann did significant research on how best to fulfil this wish. Bruce said that 'as long-time supporters of TLC we knew of and had seen their highly professional approach to nature conservation. We have great confidence in TLC's ability to do the job'. They settled on funding the TLC's purchase and protection of a property on the Prosser River between Buckland and Orford (see the previous article about this incredible place). Later this year we'll be running a trip to this property for our Natural Guardians community of bequesters – we'll be sending invitations to you all in coming weeks.



Dr Alex Kutt. Photo: Phill Laroche

TLC PEOPLE

We are very excited to welcome the TLC's new Conservation Science and Planning Manager, Dr Alex Kutt. Alex has made a significant shift in habitat: his last posting was in desert north Queensland, where he was Healthy Landscape Manager for Bush Heritage Australia, keeping an eye on the extremely elusive night parrot.

Not only did Alex arrive at the start of a chilly Tasmanian winter, he landed into COVID restrictions and spent his first two weeks quarantined in a Hobart hotel. He has since been immersing himself in his new landscape, visiting reserves across the state and acclimatising.

As a wildlife conservation scientist, Alex has worked across Australia with government, CSIRO, industry and for-purpose (not-for-profit) organisations. His research has focussed on species, landscape and community ecology, particularly threatened species, threatening processes, conservation planning and understanding people's connection to land through their social and environmental values.

PROTECTING THREATENED SPECIES



Tasmanian masked owl (*Tyto novaehollandiae castanops*). Photo: Eric Woehler

At the end of July, a joint research project from Australian scientists revealed that three billion wild animals had been killed or displaced by the previous summer's bushfires. Another study found that 49 Australian species would likely have become threatened. The researchers called for an urgent reassessment of the species' listing under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act.

July also saw the release of a review of that Act, which found it 'is not fit to address current or future environmental challenges ... it is not surprising that the list of threatened species and communities has increased over time and there have been very few species that have recovered.' It is an urgent and dire situation that drives us to do our best work for nature every day.

September 7 is National Threatened Species Day, commemorating the death of the last known thylacine; it is a particularly poignant day for Tasmanian conservationists. Protecting Tasmania's threatened species is at the heart of what we do at the TLC. Our Little Swanport and Tinderbox Hills reserves protect habitat that the critically endangered swift parrot (*Lathamus discolor*) needs to survive; Tall Trees Reserve harbours the endangered Tasmanian devil (*Sarcophilus harrisi*); Rubicon Sanctuary is a hot spot for threatened orchids. Our Midlands Conservation Fund helps protect one of the most

threatened ecosystems in the world - temperate grasslands and grassy woodlands. And the forest on Egg Islands Reserve provides critical foraging and nesting habitat for the endangered grey goshawk (*Accipiter novaehollandiae*) and wedge-tailed eagle (*Aquila audax fleayi*).

In May, one of the TLC's volunteers, Steve Smith, was toiling over footage from Egg Islands Reserve, identifying species. This usually involves squinting at blurry images of half-obscured creatures as they scurry out of frame. Imagine his delight on finding, instead, an endangered Australasian bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*) posing beautifully right in front of the camera. Habitually shy and with a talent for camouflage, the Australasian bittern's most identifiable feature is a loud booming call, heard at dusk and dawn throughout the breeding season. This cryptic bird is usually only picked up on acoustic monitoring, so there was delight throughout the TLC when our science team shared these candid photos. Results like this - the continued existence of a species under threat - inspire us in our work of protecting nature on private land.

EXPLORE

The TLC made a submission to the EPBC Act review, which you can read at tasland.org.au/about-the-tlc/tlc-submissions

BIRD SCHOLAR SEEKS OWLS

This year's Bird Conservation Scholar has been selected! Adam Cisterne, who is completing a PhD as part of the Difficult Bird Research Group at the Australian National University, will work on the conservation and ecology of the endangered Tasmanian masked owl (*Tyto novaehollandiae castanops*). We know the owl nests in tree hollows, but Adam will investigate the detail of what habitat it requires. He will also make a genetic analysis of the owl's population size and look at changes in genetic structure and diversity within that population. The key research outcome will be a model of masked owl occurrence based on the cavity-bearing capacity of habitat within the broader context of forest cover at the landscape level.

Adam is also looking at whether rodenticides have become an issue for masked owls. Owls prey on rats and mice and we don't yet know how they are affected by anticoagulant poisons. Adam will be analysing the livers of dead owls and looking for any residual poisons in owl pellets. He will be working with an owl-detection dog who searches for the elusive bird's pellets.

Adam says, 'Thank you to the TLC for acknowledging the value of bird conservation and the contribution of student research, and for supporting graduate research and education through the provision of this valuable scholarship.'



Eastern bettong (Bettongia gaimardi). Photo: Matt Palmer



East Coast reserve. Photo: Andy Townsend

WHAT'S ON

AGM - 22 NOVEMBER

We are finalising details for our AGM this year and ensuring it meets requirements to be COVID-safe. The event may be either partially or entirely online. At the AGM, as well as sharing our Annual Report, we'll be revealing the details of our new Strategic Plan for the next five years, developed in consultation with focus groups of supporters. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the plan's development.

RESULTS FROM 2020 BIRD CONSERVATION SCHOLARSHIP

2020 Bird Conservation Scholar, Amy Wing, will share the results of her work on 40-spotted pardalotes and manna gum. If you are a supporter of the Bird Conservation Fund, keep an eye on your inbox for invitations. Read more about the Bird Conservation Fund at tasland.org.au/projects/bird-conservation-fund

OTHER NEWS

We want land!

The TLC's Revolving Fund is an innovative way to protect habitat. We purchase, protect (through the establishment of a conservation covenant) and re-sell land to new owners keen to support conservation. We've already protected more than 6,00ha of natural ecosystems under the fund. Now we need more land! If you know of a property for sale of more than 20ha with threatened vegetation communities, threatened species or old growth forest, email Revolving Fund Coordinator Jarrah Vercoe at jvercoe@tasland.org.au.





Volunteers are back

Volunteering in person on TLC reserves has now resumed. Huzzah! Thank you for the terrific volunteer response to the late-August Egg Islands weeding opportunity. Astonishingly, spaces on this activity filled within half an hour, so you will need to nimbly respond to future opportunities.

The safety of volunteers remains central to our planning. All future, scaled-down opportunities will be conducted in a COVID-safe manner in line with regularly changing Tasmanian and Federal Government rules and guidelines. Accordingly, we won't be announcing any future opportunities until we are confident that they can progress.

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