

WINTER 2021

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Kelvedon Hills detail. Photo: Andy Townsend

Building strong and enduring relationships with landholders is at the core of the Tasmanian Land Conservancy's efforts to protect nature across Tasmania. Private landholders are the custodians of some of the most important areas for nature conservation in this state. From the last remaining lowland native grasslands in the Midlands to the depleted blue gum forest of the east coast, these important habitats support many of our rare and threatened species. Finding pathways to conservation for these areas is key to ensure the very elements of Tasmania's uniqueness, its natural places, are conserved for the future.

We are thrilled to announce our latest reserve acquisition campaign

to purchase and protect Kelvedon Hills. This once-in-a-generation opportunity is testament to the confidence and trust put in the TLC by the Cotton family, allowing us to become the future custodians of this ecologically rich and iconic landscape. We thank Jack, Anna and Edward for the opportunity and legacy that such a substantial reserve will create.

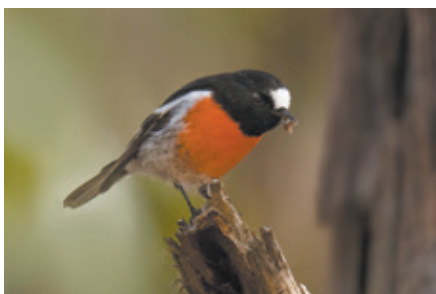
One of the most rewarding aspects of working at the TLC is connecting with people and places. Thank you to all who attended our Prosser River Discovery Day on 8 May, and those that shared their knowledge and expertise with the TLC community. Walking with TLC supporters out of the Back River valley, climbing the ridgeline through the most exquisite

eucalypt woodland and arriving at a well-stoked campfire with fresh baked scones and billy brewed tea to share stories, knowledge and connections was a real treat and something I am deeply grateful for.

It has been an incredibly busy field season across all our programs and in this newsletter, you will hear more about how we are working with landholders across the state through the Land for Wildlife program, the giant freshwater crayfish partnership project with Cradle Coast Authority as well as the ecological burning program at Rubicon Sanctuary.

James Hattam
Chief Executive Officer

HIGHLIGHTS



Scarlet robin. Photo: Andy Townsend

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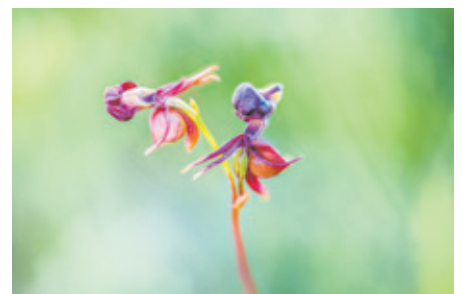
Be part of protecting Kelvedon Hills, home to wonderful woodland bird communities.



Bob Graham telling stories the Discovery Day. Photo: Eddie Safarik

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It was a grand day out at Prosser River Reserve.



Flying duck orchid (*Caleana major*). Photo: Andy Townsend

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A planned burn helps orchids thrive at Rubicon Sanctuary.



PROTECTING KELVEDON HILLS

The Meredith River, Kelvedon Hills. Photo: Andy Townsend

Bounded by rivers and building connections across the landscape, Kelvedon Hills is a property of size and substance. Healthy, diverse communities of plants and animals have been supported through decades of care from previous stewards – protecting them into the future will make Kelvedon Hills a keystone of conservation in Tasmania.

Just south of Swansea on Tasmania’s picturesque east coast, Kelvedon Hills’ 1,300 ha lies between the Meredith and Stoney rivers. Rolling hills of grassy woodland and forest extend back into the Great Eastern Tiers, providing a critical link to other protected areas for the many species that live here.

As a reserve, Kelvedon Hills will take its place among 3,500 ha of contiguous private reserves in this landscape, creating a critical corridor of protected areas along the east coast. Ecosystems will be protected from the TLC’s nearby Little Swanport and Prosser River Reserves to additional existing private reserves along Kelvedon Hills’ boundaries. Adding this piece of the jigsaw creates a network that gives species space to move in a shifting climate.

Wet gullies and river valleys have provided refuge for tree species that are suffering elsewhere. Kelvedon Hills’ extensive eucalypt forest is predominantly threatened blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*), with large, healthy old-growth stands present in the gullies and south-facing slopes of the hills. There are also extensive

populations of rare and threatened Barber’s gum (*Eucalyptus barberi*) and warty paperbark (*Melaleuca pustulata*).

This habitat has the potential to support at least 40 rare and threatened species, as well as many of our iconic animals. The Australian grayling is a small native fish whose range has contracted significantly in recent decades – conditions for its survival are perfect in the rivers of Kelvedon Hills. The blue gum forests provide significant nesting and foraging habitat for the nationally endangered swift parrot and the grassy woodlands are home to Forester kangaroos. While these kangaroos are more common on the mainland, where they are known as eastern greys, in Tasmania they are rarely seen, reduced to less than 15% of their range at the time of European settlement.

Across the property, there is intact habitat for masked owls, wedge-tailed and white-bellied sea eagles, Tasmanian devils and spotted-tailed and eastern quolls.

Kelvedon Hills is also an important area for the ongoing protection of woodland bird communities. While we hear a lot about swift parrots and forty-spotted pardalotes, there are many other species reliant on these kinds of landscapes: flame robins, spotted quail-thrush, painted button quail and eastern rosellas, for example.

At the TLC we pride ourselves on working alongside landholders to achieve conservation. Kelvedon

Hills is part of the 5,000 ha Kelvedon Estate, which has been in the Cotton family for generations. Initially the site of successful Hereford studs and superfine merino wool growing, in 1998 the property diversified into cool-climate viticulture, with the Cottons planting one hectare of pinot grapes that became the foundation of the very successful Kelvedon Estate Label.

Current owner Jack Cotton and his daughter Anna are dedicated to combining agriculture and conservation, and the TLC has been working with the family for more than a decade, supporting conservation management on other land in the area. We are very grateful for the trust and confidence the Cotton family has shown in the TLC in allowing us to become stewards of part of this property.

To find out more about this beautiful, iconic and extensive property, visit tasland.org.au/reserves/kelvedon-hills

GIVE

Help us protect important habitat at Kelvedon Hills by visiting tasland.org.au/donate-now or calling the office on 03 6225 1399. Every dollar donated to protect Kelvedon Hills will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the Elsie Cameron Foundation up to \$1m.



DISCOVERY DAY

Sharnie Read talks about the Aboriginal heritage of the Prosser catchment. Photo: Eddie Safarik

The morning of 8 May dawned clear and crisp as 50 carloads of keen TLC supporters rolled into the Prosser River Reserve. After a quick foot-bathe to stop the spread of fungus into the property, everyone was meeting up with their team leaders and heading off on the first of the day's activities.

After 2020's restrictions on events, it felt particularly special to meet with so many other nature lovers and to provide an in-depth look at one of our newest reserves. Prosser River Reserve was made possible by a very generous bequest from David and Jean McGregor, and during the day we got to see many of its beautiful features, from the Back River valley grasslands to the blue-gum-clothed high ridges and the open woodlands along the wide Prosser River.

The Back River valley hosted the science team's conservation science workshops, giving supporters hands-on experience of monitoring and managing TLC reserves to support their natural values. While Joe Quarmby gave an insight into identifying eucalypt species and explained how seedlings are flourishing now sheep have been removed from the property, Rowena Hamer was helping supporters devise plans for animal monitoring and set their own traps (using homegrown chillies for devil bait was an interesting twist!), and Glen Bain and Catherine Young were exploring the reserve's bird life.

Among the waist-high (or head-high to a preschooler) clumps of lomandra, Kara Spence from 'Nature. Be in It.' was helping groups of kids explore the reserve at their own pace. Toddlers were busily absorbed, punching star-shaped holes into slices

of apple, while bigger kids were working together to plan and execute a zip line between two trees.

CEO James Hattam led a hearty group up a steep hill to a high ridgeline, where neighbour Bob Graham, who has lived in the area for decades, gave an insight into life along the Prosser. Not only has Bob seen ten of Tasmania's twelve endemic birds on his property (he's still holding out hope of one day sighting a forty-spotted pardalote), he also once lugged the Christmas shopping five miles by foot when a summer flood stopped him driving home from town. Bob's yarns were accompanied by date and sultana scones, whipped up by volunteer Vicki Campbell and cooked over coals by caterer extraordinaire (and the organising force behind the Discovery Day), Phill Laroche.

Down on the Prosser River banks, mycologists Julie Fielder and Grace Boxshall, uncovered the fungal web that links the forest together and gives trees a pathway to exchange resources and messages with one another. Magnifying lenses in hand, supporters spotted and identified fascinating fungi, while Grace uncovered a species she suspects is new to science. In a clearing nearby, Sharnie Read from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre told stories from the history of the Payintaymirimina band of the Oyster Bay tribe. Sharnie's storytelling was spell-binding and her invitation to adorn ourselves with ochre gathered from the region was a highlight for many.

To top off a spectacular day out, the campaign to protect Kelvedon Hills was launched at lunch time. Standing on the Back River banks, James Hattam explained

that as a reserve, Kelvedon Hills will become part of a network of protected areas stretching from Little Swanport through Prosser River and across to the Freycinet Peninsula. This is conservation at a scale that can protect species and habitat even as we head into an uncertain climate future. To tell that story while standing amid important ecosystems protected by the forethought and dedication of the McGregor family, reminded everyone how important all our contributions are to protecting nature over the decades and centuries to come. It was a heartening thought to take away from an inspiring day.

This trip was a great reminder that the TLC's reserves are settings for all kind of activity. Purchasing and protecting a habitat is the part often talked about, but creating a reserve involves building relationships with neighbours, attending to cultural heritage, undertaking scientific research and monitoring and sometimes, just walking around and being part of nature. Thank you to all the volunteers who helped throughout the day and without whom we could not run events like this, and thank you to all our supporters who came along.

**Jane Rawson
Communications Coordinator**

ACT

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GIANT FRESHWATER CRAYFISH

Giant freshwater crayfish. Photo: Ryan Francis

The giant freshwater crayfish (*Astacopsis gouldi*) is the largest freshwater invertebrate and crustacean in the world and only lives in the northern rivers of Tasmania. Unfortunately, this species is threatened and listed as vulnerable under both the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)* and the *Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*.

Formerly found in all rivers flowing into Bass Strait from Arthur River and east across northern Tasmania, giant freshwater crayfish are now much harder to track down. There have been localised extinctions and large declines in populations due to many years of overfishing, illegal fishing, loss of habitat due to vegetation clearing, livestock in rivers, sedimentation from mining and logging, river straightening and removal of instream wood and stones. This degradation has been profound in some rivers, such as the Ringarooma and Brid, and without good active management the population will continue to drop.

Crayfish are slow to grow – a 13-year-old giant freshwater crayfish may only be 6-7 inches long – and they can live for 60 years, growing larger all the time. Large giant freshwater crayfish weigh in at 2-3kg, though historical sources say they were found at 6kg. They have a small home range within their part of the river but occasionally move across land to new habitat up to a couple of kilometres away.

Their habitat consists of shaded pools, cobblestones, woody debris, undercut banks with overhanging native vegetation; that is, rivers in good condition that have experienced little disturbance or modification. Loss of claws when fighting for resources and during mating is common and females lay hundreds of eggs at a time which they carry under their tail for nine months of gestation, so life in the river is challenging!

With Fiona Marshall from Cradle Coast Authority and crayfish expert, Todd Walsh, the TLC is working on a project to protect habitat for known populations of giant freshwater crayfish in the northwest of Tasmania. This project is supported by funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program and works with landholders who have giant freshwater crayfish habitat on their land. The focus is on protecting long reaches of river with connected habitat. Cradle Coast Authority offers funded projects for fencing, revegetation and weed control while TLC provides conservation covenants to eligible properties to protect giant freshwater crayfish habitat in perpetuity.

Information sessions in 2020 were restricted by Covid, but this year 40 participants came to a field day on the Inglis River where we visited project sites, learned about habitat, met some juvenile and adult crayfish, and heard about how covenants work for conservation of the species.

Helen Morgan, TLC Conservation Programs Ecologist

LAND FOR WILDLIFE

As Covid restrictions have eased, our Land for Wildlife (LFW) program has really ramped up. Over the past couple of months LFW Coordinator, Shaun Thurstans, has been hitting the road, both signing up LFW assessors and visiting potential LFW properties.

There's been so much enthusiasm around Tasmania for the LFW program that Shaun simply can't manage to visit all the prospective properties himself, so instead he's been training volunteers to get out to farms and bush blocks in every corner of the state. We now have six volunteers who are expert in assessing natural values and giving advice on how best to manage your property to encourage wildlife. Thanks to everyone who has been through the process – you're a remarkable bunch!

During March, Shaun came close to circumnavigating Tasmania as he caught up on the backlog of property owners who'd registered their interest during Covid restrictions. Among the many fabulous properties he visited, some standouts were a forest enclave amid a logged landscape in the north-west, where a group of seven young friends had got together to protect wildlife and make a space for their future dreams, and a creekside property near Boat Harbour, where giant freshwater crayfish and spotted-tailed quolls were making their homes alongside a couple who had moved down from NSW.



BURNING FOR ORCHIDS



A successful ecological burn. Photo: Leigh Walters

Sun orchid (*Thelymitra* spp.). Photo: Phill Laroche

In a farming landscape, Rubicon Sanctuary is an oasis of heathy woodland and seasonal wetlands. The almost 20 ha property near Squeaking Point supports a range of threatened species; it was the first property sold for conservation under TLC's Revolving Fund in 2007. There are over 60 terrestrial orchid species here, five of which are threatened, including the critically endangered marsh leek-orchid (*Prasophyllum limnetes*) that occurs nowhere else. This orchid is named after the habitat where it occurs (marsh or 'limno' – lakes/bodies of freshwater, -etes – 'one who is') and for its single leek-like or onion-like leaf.

Some people believe the best way to support nature is to let it take care of itself. But orchids don't always respond to that approach: they flourish when disturbed. Rubicon's previous owners, Phil Collier and Robin Garnett, actively managed the land with fire and other disturbance and set up a detailed flora monitoring system. The information they gathered over a decade provides a solid foundation for the TLC to make informed management choices. And it helps us plan ecological burns – when and how often to burn, and when not to burn, such as when species are declining or shrubs are too small to withstand fire.

Recent monitoring by the TLC identified that the marsh leek-orchid and the plum sun-orchid (*Thelymitra mucida*) were disappearing as sedge thatch increased. Previous

monitoring has shown that both species of orchids respond well to fire, which opens up the wet heathland and provides additional space for the orchids to flourish.

We know these threatened species respond well to early autumn burns when the orchids are dormant below ground, just before their leaf emerges. The ideal situation is when there has been rainfall to dampen down the soil, followed by drying weather to remove moisture out of the vegetation. It is a balancing act: not so dry and hot that it burns down into the soils, but not so wet that fire won't carry! We also had to check the long-term forecast and ensure there wasn't a strong El Nino weather pattern in the coming spring, as the orchids would likely be negatively affected by the lack of water.

In March this year, the weather gods were surprisingly kind, offering a large fall of rain (20 mm) to the parched system to dampen the earth, then drying winds and a single dry day with the right weather conditions to burn in. The TLC fire team (gratefully assisted by a Bush Heritage Australia staff member) was able to successfully burn the two wet heathlands that are home to these orchids.

We're now planning the 2021 spring monitoring for the marsh leek-orchid so we can continue to learn how species respond to our management actions. We will also cage orchids to protect them from

grazing by native herbivores and rabbits. This sounds simple, but first we have to find all the orchids: rumour has it the metal detector may be called on to track down the metallic discs the individual orchids were labelled with. TLC is also investigating banking marsh leek-orchid seed with the Tasmanian Seed Conservation Centre for potential use in future conservation projects.

Of course, Rubicon is not just home to orchids, and our planning and management must take account of other species' diverse needs. Threatened plants such as the wrinkled dollybush (*Cassinia rugata*), swamp wallaby grass (*Amphibromus neesii*) and star clubsedge (*Isolepis stellata*) are also found on the property, and have benefited from this intensive management. We hope our ongoing monitoring will show they continue to flourish at Rubicon.

Thank you to Rubicon's volunteer caretaker Alison Roach for helping the TLC team prepare for this burn.

Cath Dickson
Conservation Management
and Planning Coordinator

EXPLORE

Rubicon Sanctuary is home to some of Australia's rarest orchids. Find out more at tasland.org.au/reserves/rubicon-sanctuary



WHAT'S ON

Kelvedon Hills. Photo: Andy Townsend

NATURAL GUARDIANS INFORMATION PACKAGE

Late June

This year we will once again be running our Natural Guardians sessions online, with a multi-media package – including a beautiful new short film about the bequest that made Prosser River Reserve possible – arriving in your inbox late June.

VOLUNTEER WEEDING

Watch this space!

As we head into Spring we'll have our regular Egg Islands Reserve weeding program, followed by weeding parties to tackle Spanish heath at Tinderbox Hills Reserve and some small patches of gorse that are crowding out threatened plants at Prosser River Reserve. If you're a registered volunteer, keep an eye on your inbox for these opportunities.

ALCA CONFERENCE

21-22 October

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance conference, PLC2021, will be hosted by Biodiversity Conservation Trust NSW in Sydney on 21-22 October 2021. For more information and to subscribe for updates, visit alca.org.au/events





SAVE THE DATE: TLC'S 20TH BIRTHDAY

29 October

On 29 October, we'll be meeting at Spring Bay Mill, Triabunna, to launch a book dedicated to Tasmanians' relationship with nature, *Breathing Space*, and to celebrate 20 years of the TLC. Watch your inbox for more information.

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James Hattam**

