

A photograph of an emu standing in a grassy field with trees in the background. The emu is facing away from the camera, looking back over its shoulder. The text 'Understory' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Understory

*NSW BCT Newsletter
December 2020*

Welcome to our fifth issue of Understory



Paul Elton
CEO

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2020

2020 has been a year of challenges. With the drought, then bushfires, then COVID-19, landholders have been doing it tough this year. We have been doing everything we can to assist and support our landholders during these difficult times, particularly with ecological advice and grants to support landholders to recover from the impacts of the bushfires on their conservation areas.

Conservation gains across NSW

Through our partnerships with landholders, there have been many gains made in conservation on private land this year, the third year that the BCT has been in operation. I'd like to take a moment to recognise the vital work of all our conservation agreement holders and celebrate the importance of private land conservation in NSW.

Private land conservation statistics

So far, since 2018, **226** landholders have signed or plan to sign a conservation agreement with the BCT, creating conservation areas across **59,300 hectares**.

The BCT is investing more than **\$125 million** to support these agreements. This investment is split 85% for ongoing (in-perpetuity) agreements and 15% for term agreements (minimum of 15-years).

What the statistics mean

As a result, many unique landscapes and threatened ecosystems and habitats containing threatened native plant and animal species, are now protected and are being managed by private landholders for conservation. These new conservation agreements are protecting **117 unique threatened species** and at least **20 unique threatened ecological communities**.

Have your say

Landholders with a conservation agreement will soon have a great opportunity to provide thoughts and feedback on their participation in private land conservation and how the BCT can best support them. The University of NSW will conduct a survey on behalf of the BCT, which will be open for two weeks in December.

We value feedback and look forward to hearing about the experience of our landholders.

Partnering with Landcare NSW

In May 2020 the NSW Minister for Energy and Environment, The Hon Matt Kean MP, announced a new BCT partnership

with Landcare NSW. The BCT is providing up to \$1.34 million over two years to fund a series of local projects and activities which will support conservation on private land.

This joint project enables eligible Landcare groups across NSW to apply for funding for various activities to raise awareness of biodiversity conservation in regional communities, and to work in partnership with the BCT to deliver biodiversity conservation programs. The project will build on the strong history of private land conservation in NSW and the important work of Regional Landcare Coordinators and local Landcare groups.

We have now run several mainly online workshops with local Landcare groups, marking the beginnings of the project. From these workshops, the partnership team will create tailored regional projects for delivery in 2021 focusing on landholder capacity building and biodiversity education in regional communities.

Conservation tenders

The BCT's work in biodiversity conservation continues. In July we updated our website with the outcomes of the recent Central West Rivers conservation tender. One successful applicant, Paraway Pastoral Co., shares their story in this issue. We recently completed the 2019-20 Southern Highlands Koala Habitat conservation tender and hope to announce the results soon.

We have opened three new tenders this year, each with a very different focus; the Northern Inland Floodplains, Snow Gum Woodlands and Grasslands and the Plains-wanderer conservation tenders.

Co-investment partnerships

In April this year, the BCT launched a new delivery mechanism for private land conservation called co-investment partnerships.

The core purpose of this new mechanism is to attract third-party investors to partner with the BCT and landholders to achieve large-scale, high-value private land conservation and complementary socio-economic outcomes. The BCT has received some expressions of interest already. Find out more by visiting our website at:

www.bct.nbsw.gov.au/get-involved/co-investment-partnerships.

Biodiversity credits – open fixed price offers

We've also launched a new way to procure biodiversity credits under our Biodiversity Offsets Program. Biodiversity credit open fixed price offers will be used as a simple and direct way for interested landholders to sell biodiversity credits to the BCT. See the news section in this issue to find out more about this new mechanism.

Find out about broader outcomes under our Biodiversity Offsets Program here:

www.bct.nsw.gov.au/biodiversity-offsets-program-outcomes

Conclusion

I know I can speak on behalf of all of the team here at the BCT, when I say that we look forward to continuing to work with our landholders and our other stakeholders as we move into 2021, to continue to build upon the significant private land outcomes achieved so far.

Front cover: The rare coastal emu at *The Bog*. Image by Jimmy Malecki.

Back cover: Wat Buddha Dhamma conservation area. Image by Harriet Ampt.

BCT news

Conservation tender news

On 29 June 2020 the NSW Environment Minister Matt Kean announced the outcomes of the BCT's recent Central West Rivers conservation tender. Nine successful landholders have been invited to enter private land conservation agreements covering 3,900 hectares. These agreements will protect landscapes ranging from threatened woodlands to nationally significant wetlands.

The landholders will receive annual funding for managing conservation areas on their property and they have agreed to protect these conservation areas for a minimum of 15 years or, in some cases, permanently. The BCT will hold in trust and invest \$10.5 million to support the ongoing annual payments to these landholders.

Minister Kean also announced the opening of three new conservation tenders – the Northern Inland Floodplains, Snow Gum Woodlands and Grasslands, and Plains-wanderer conservation tenders. The expression of interest periods for the first two have now closed.

Expressions of interest (EOI) in the Plains-wanderer conservation tender, which focuses specifically on the conservation of the endangered Plains-wanderer and its associated habitat, opened on Monday 2 November 2020 and EOIs will be accepted up to midnight, 30 November 2020.

BCT seeking biodiversity credits on an ongoing basis

The biodiversity credit open fixed price offer (Open FPO), launching on 7 December 2020, aims to provide a simple and direct way for participants to sell biodiversity credits to the BCT.

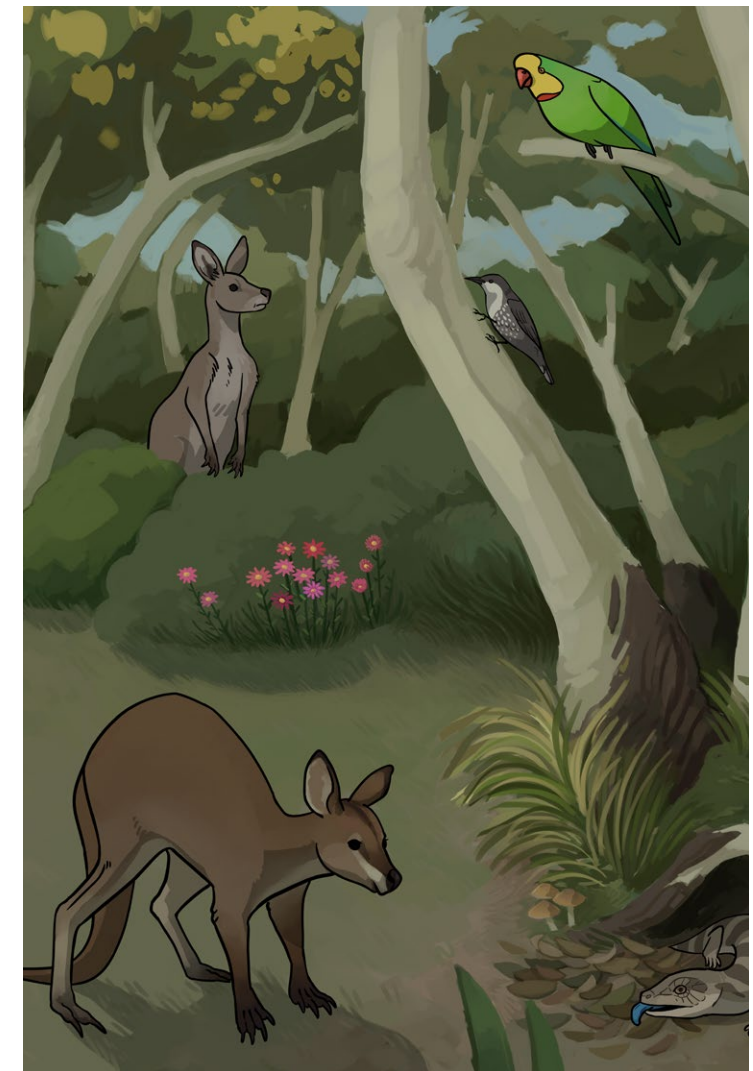
The Open FPO will be available to applicants who own existing credits under the current Biodiversity Offsets Scheme (BAM credits) as well as landholders who are interested in establishing a biodiversity stewardship agreement (BSA). Applicants who own existing credits created under the former BioBanking Scheme (BBAM credits) will need to obtain a statement of reasonable credit equivalence before participating.

The offer will be available on a continuing basis for credits on the BCT's Wanted Credits List. The Wanted Credit List will be made available at commencement of the offer. Applications will be assessed in order of receipt. Participation in this offer will allow landholders to have the BCT as a committed purchaser of the credits before proceeding with a full site assessment.

Adapting with Conservation Champions

Our biodiversity conservation education program aimed at school children, Conservation Champions, has adapted under Covid-safe arrangements to move to online learning. Online teaching resources have been created and are being piloted in targeted schools during Term 4. Moving Conservation Champions online allows the BCT to expand the geographic reach of our Biodiversity Conservation Education Strategy to directly target high priority areas, with up to 1,000 students across all BCT regions being reached this term alone.

The BCT has also collaborated with the Australian Museum to create a Museum in a Box focused on private land conservation. This is being incorporated into Conservation Champions this term, with boxes being piloted in all schools visited.



Above: Still from Conservation Champions online learning resources.

Below: The arid environments diorama from the Museum in a Box project.



A man, Jimmy Malecki, stands in a sun-dappled forest. He is wearing a black t-shirt, khaki pants, and a black cap with sunglasses perched on top. He holds a camera with a large lens in his left hand. The forest floor is covered in dry leaves and green grass, with many thin tree trunks in the background.

YOUR STORIES

On tour with Jimmy Malecki

Image: BCT landholder Jimmy Malecki at his property, The Bog. image and story by Coral Latella.

There is never a dull moment with Jimmy Malecki.

Professional photographer and film maker meets SCUBA instructor, festival thrower and passionate conservationist, Jimmy has an infectious spirit that inspires a love and fascination for nature and drive to protect it.

Matt Carr, BCT Regional Manager for the North Coast, and Coral Latella, BCT Communications and Community Engagement Officer, met with Jimmy one afternoon in September this year to talk about his conservation area, *The Bog*.

Jimmy is originally from the United States where a 'bog' means a swamp. Aptly named, The Bog sits on low level floodplain country approximately 60 kilometres north of Grafton in the Richmond River catchment on the north coast of NSW.

The 39-hectare conservation area includes sections that become covered in water when the water table rises. Jimmy claims the region as 'Australia's largest tidal pool'. This area of land is protected in-perpetuity under a conservation agreement that Jimmy and his partner Richard signed with the Nature Conservation Trust in 2010. This agreement is now managed by the BCT.

The Bog lies within the traditional lands of the Bundjalung people and shares its southern boundary with the Bundjalung State Conservation Area. The property is nestled within 2-3 kilometres of the Doubleuke State

Forest to the east and Bungawalbin Nature Reserve to the west. This position is one of the reasons it is such an important area of land to conserve. Jimmy describes it as 'a corridor – a link – between the protected areas, which is critical for native wildlife in the region'.

The conservation area is formed by two endangered ecological communities listed under the *NSW Threatened Species Act 1995* including Swamp sclerophyll forest on Coastal Floodplains and Freshwater wetlands on Coastal Floodplains.

It is also home to a range of native animals including the threatened brush-tailed phascogale, little lorikeet, squirrel glider, and endangered coastal emu. Potoroos, ringtail possums, bandicoots, and swamp wallabies, in addition to many other bird and frog species have also been recorded within the conservation area over the years.

Jimmy says that he can now tick off an item on his bucket list, "we wanted to protect 100 acres next to a national park, and it happened – thanks to the BCT".

Following Jimmy through The Bog, he stops every 10 to 20 metres to draw your attention to a beautiful old habitat tree with a hollow in its trunk, or a break in the forest where he has spotted a squirrel glider or two (now referred to by Jimmy as Glider Alley).



Jimmy's love for the land is obvious, and when he talks about losing his partner Richard, it is clear this is something the two of them shared. Jimmy shares that he made the decision to bury Richard on the property. He points out the grave site – a serene little clearing among the trees.

Leading the way, his two Stafford terrier dogs running along by his side, Jimmy talks about the history of the conservation area. In the 1920s it was turned into a commercial tea tree plantation – the oil cut and distilled on site.

"It was considered the best quality source of wild tea tree oil in the region", Jimmy says.

The old still and other equipment remain on the property and seem quite out of place among the otherwise undisturbed blanket of trees.

Opposite: Jimmy Malecki with his dog Junior at The Bog. Image by Coral Latella.

Above: The grave site of Richard, Jimmy's partner, at The Bog. Image by Coral Latella.



On 16 November 2019 *The Bog* was engulfed by flames.

Image: The NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) attempting to control the November 2019 bushfire at The Bog. Image by Jimmy Malecki.



The morning of the fire Jimmy was still rigging up the last of the sprinklers around the house. "I was finishing up the job when I heard the fire sirens coming up the road and was told to evacuate," he says.

He went out back to check the wildlife cameras and discovered a spot fire had started in the conservation area of the property earlier in the day. He had had no idea his property was burning. Jimmy stayed as long as he could to protect his home, and when asked about this he

simply said, "if it happened again, I would stay again."

The bushfire tore through most of The Bog. Jimmy notes that one of the only areas the fire didn't damage was Richard's grave site. Thanks to the efforts of Jimmy and the NSW Rural Fire Service, the main house and surrounding buildings were also spared. It's been almost a year since that fire and Jimmy says he's still unpacking his things.

Being an exceptional photographer and film maker, Jimmy managed to document the whole bushfire event. His collection of beautiful yet chilling photographs include the shots he retrieved from two wildlife cameras that had been set up in the conservation area. Amazed the memory cards had survived, Jimmy was able to see what the fire looked like from the inside. Jimmy says that at around midday the temperature rose from 33 to 68 degrees Celsius in a matter of minutes.

Walking through the property almost a year since the fires, the amount of regrowth visible is remarkable.

"We lost a few Old Growth trees, but the more I walk through the site the more I notice the habitat trees and hollows that have survived", Jimmy says.



This image: The Bog conservation area after the November 2019 bushfire. Image by Jimmy Malecki.

Right: BCT's Matt Carr and Jimmy Malecki viewing drone footage of the conservation area at The Bog. Image by Coral Latella.

Opposite: The original tea tree still before (below) and after (above) the November 2019 bushfire at The Bog. Images by Jimmy Malecki and Coral Latella.

Despite keeping an eye out for the rare coastal emu, Jimmy explained there have been fewer sightings since the bushfire. Clearing the emu tracks of debris and weeds to help bring back the local population will be the next management action Jimmy tackles with the help of a BCT conservation partners grant. Jimmy is one of many BCT landholders affected by the 2019-20 bushfires, and as a result was eligible to apply for funding to support the post-fire recovery and management of his conservation area.

In addition to his partnership with the BCT, Jimmy is involved in numerous other projects in collaboration with groups such as the Nature Conservation Council, the Saving our Species program, and Clarence and Richmond Valley Councils.

The work Jimmy and Richard have done to protect such a special piece of land should be celebrated and shared in order to continue to expand the private land conservation network of landholders across the state. Jimmy believes that more people should act as caretakers of such valuable areas.

The Bog conservation area is a hub for research, education, events, collaboration and building a sense of community in the region. When asked about the future of the property Jimmy says, "I think I'll be here for a long time yet. I want this to be the first ever world heritage listed conservation area."

To see more photos of The Bog and stay up to date with the work that Jimmy is doing on the property, check out The Bog Conservation Area on Facebook.



Agriculture is part of the solution



Paraway Pastoral Co, owned and operated by Macquarie Bank's Pastoral Fund, owns 27 pastoral businesses across the sheep-wheat belt, from Queensland, through NSW to the Victorian Border. These properties are larger holdings, with a collective size of 4.4 million hectares, making Paraway one of the largest property owner/operators in Australia. Paraway's properties contain a wide range of landscapes and ecosystems, as well as several threatened species, and Oxley Station is no exception.

Located next to the internationally significant Macquarie Marshes, North-West of Dubbo, Oxley Station covers over 35,000 hectares of flat grazing country, open floodplains and riparian woodlands. The 10,000 head of angus cattle are carefully monitored to optimise the

health of the soils and native grasses, and much of the more biodiverse areas are fenced off from livestock to minimise impact.

This approach to grazing is championed by Paraway's Environment and Sustainability Manager, Paul McDougall, who oversees managing environmental and animal welfare outcomes of all 27 of Paraway's properties.

Paul was originally directed to the BCT through staff from Local Land Services. Paul met with BCT staff to discuss our programs and potential opportunities across their properties.



This image and below: Oxley Station conservation area.

Opposite: Paraway's Paul McDougall and BCT's Stacey Avard at Oxley Station.

Images and story by Harriet Ampt.





Despite being unsuccessful in the Lachlan Rivers conservation tender, Paraway applied for the recently run Central West Rivers conservation tender for two of their properties – Oxley Station and Pier Pier (a mixed-use property also adjacent to the Macquarie Marshes) – totalling approximately 2000 hectares of conservation area.

Paul believes the BCT’s conservation tenders are a great opportunity to progress and improve environmental outcomes while creating an additional source of income for the company.

“We look at doing conservation anyway but partnering with the BCT enables us to get a better result,” Paul said.

“We get paid to manage the native vegetation – and that’s an annual payment – so when we’ve

got seasonal volatility, this gives us some income during challenging seasons.”

Paraway is entering 15-year agreements for both Oxley Station and Pier Pier, the minimum term for the BCT’s funded conservation agreements arising from conservation tenders. Paul explained that because these were the first agreements Paraway would enter with the BCT, they would ‘dip their toes in’ and they liked the potential of rolling the agreements over after those first 15 years are up.

The BCT’s Stacey Avar, who managed the Central West Rivers conservation tender, saw the two properties as having high conservation value due to their proximity to the marshes, as well as the size of the remnant riverine

forest area, which is located in a section of the Macquarie River floodplain that is listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia (DIWA).

Since progressing the tender applications, Oxley Station and Pier Pier have seen good rain after the long drought, and the lands have come to life with native greenery and an abundance of waterbirds over the grazing floodplains.

The 15-year conservation agreements have now been signed, making Paraway Pastoral the first corporate to partner with BCT on such a large scale, and Paul is thrilled.

“It makes you want to get up and go to work when you’re protecting these areas, and you know you’re contributing to agriculture being part of the solution,” he said.

Buddha Dhamma Conservation



Sitting atop the burnt and fallen trunk of a New England blackbutt (*Eucalyptus campanulata*), Ajahn Khemavaro*, the abbot monk from Wat Buddha Dhamma, talks about how as a refugee fleeing the Vietnam War to the United States, he was taught to make the most of his opportunities. At the time, that meant working hard to become successful. This meant reaching professional and financial prosperity – in fact that was the only trajectory he knew – he says it was drummed into his head every day.

Readjusting his bright orange robe, he reveals that after many long years of study and work, he became a stockbroker. For a while, he led a life contradictory to that of a monk, but something was unsettled in him, and the higher he climbed in his career, the more he encountered seemingly successful people who did not seem happy. The concept of success waivered and he wondered what could be missing: he had no contentment.



Images and story by Harriet Ampt.



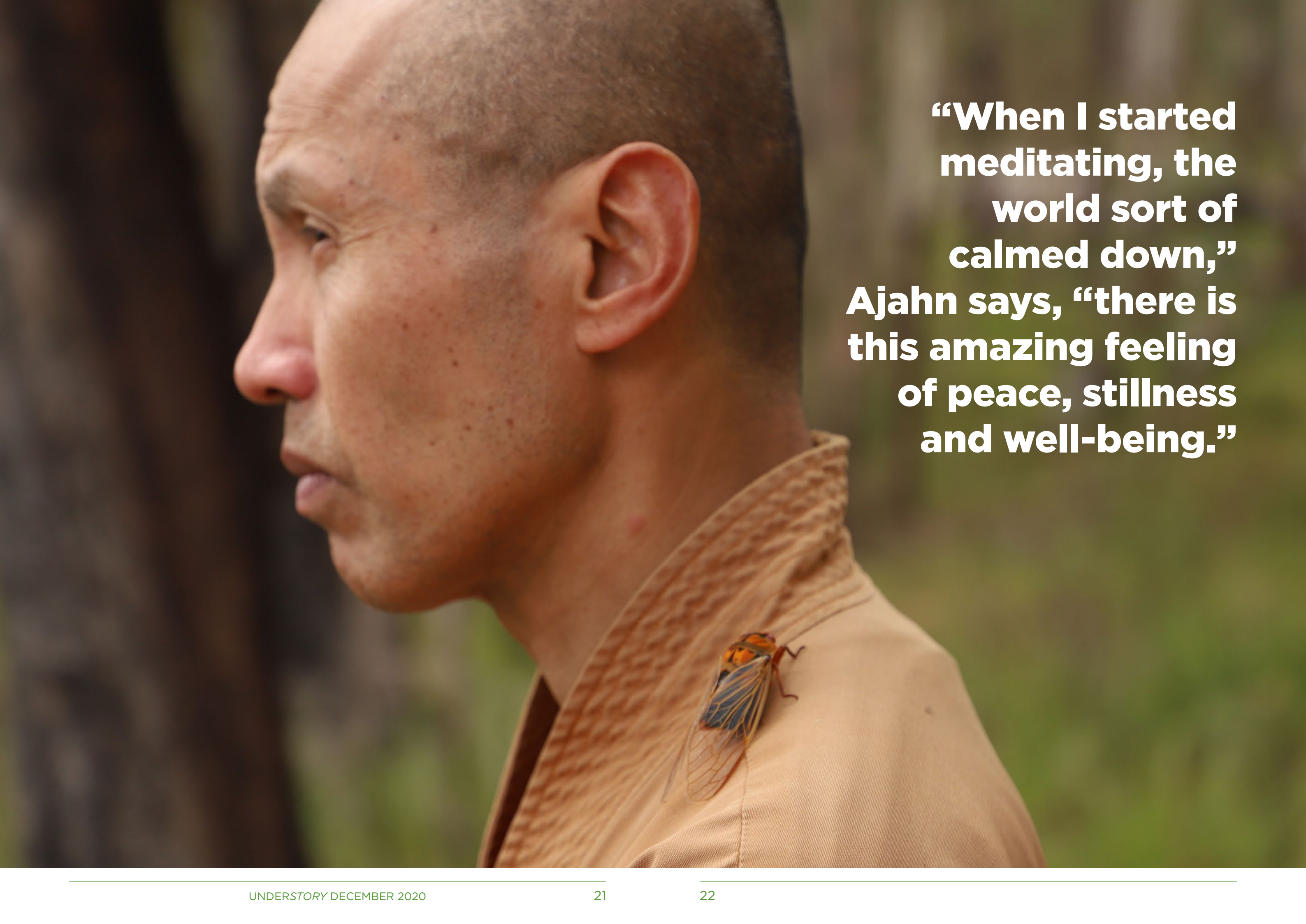
The property that Ajahn is sitting in is a 500-hectare ex-logging property covered in striking wet sclerophyll forest, granite boulders and open heaths; and next to Dorrigo National Park on the North Coast. Advertised as having ‘no improvements’, referring to the lack of infrastructure and limited clearing, for Ajahn it was perfect.

He purchased the property in 2017 to donate to his Monastery Wat Buddha Dhamma, as a place for meditation, where monks could visit periodically for periods of quiet reflection. At Wat Buddha Dhamma, the monks and visitors practice the Thai Forest Tradition and commonly engage in a practice known as tudong, which involves wandering on foot through wilderness seeking solitary retreats in nature.



Ajahn was working in Thailand during the historic stock market crash of the late 1980s and a friend who had been exploring Buddhist monasteries in the region, encouraged Ajahn to keep him company while he had some spare time from work. Witnessing the devastation caused by deforestation over the last 50 years in Vietnam and Thailand was enough motivation for Ajahn to consider formal conservation on this and other properties owned by Wat Buddha Dhamma.

Ajahn also believes that conservation is inherent in Buddhist teachings, as a large focus is on harmlessness – to not harm any beings on earth, regardless of species, size or relative importance. Part of this teaching is the belief that humans are not special or at the top of a food chain, instead we are just another being using the forest, and all beings have the right to exist.



**“When I started
meditating, the
world sort of
calmed down,”
Ajahn says, “there is
this amazing feeling
of peace, stillness
and well-being.”**

He also speaks to the bond he experiences when meditating in nature.

“When you live in the forest, in nature, it constantly reminds you that we’re just being part of the whole ecosystem and we need to live in peace and harmony. When this is out of balance, we also get hurt,” Ajahn says.

“And when you live with a clear mind, you feel a lot more empathy with the animals around you. You see, the birds will come up to you and just hang around. Animals can sense that they we’re not going to hurt them.”

Consistent with this message, during a walk around the property, amongst the deafening

hum of the Australian cicadas, a single cicada lands on Ajahn’s hand and crawls up to perch on his shoulder for a time. For the most part Ajahn ignores it, even when it starts to call for a mate next to his right ear.

Ajahn seems delighted to have the opportunity to learn more about his new lands, bringing another monk Prjana and Buddhist Miles to meet BCT staff with extensive knowledge of the landscape – ecologist Dave and Senior Landholder Support Officer Simone. Together they’re setting up the in-perpetuity conservation agreement that Ajahn will sign, mapping out boundaries, highlighting important vegetation types and even marking those areas to be excluded from the conservation area where

Ajahn plans to build low-impact campsites and meditation platforms for those seeking solitude.

Ajahn didn’t realise that the property was home to a variety of threatened species, including the spotted-tailed quoll and greater glider, housed Old Growth forests and even a Threatened Ecological Community, or TEC (*Montane Peatlands & Swamps of the New England Tableland, NSW North Coast, Sydney Basin, South East Corner, South Eastern Highlands & Australian Alps*). Dave shows him how to find signs of wildlife – scratches on trees, bird calls, and of course the inspection of scats. This was a bonus for Ajahn.

The fact that his property and its biodiversity will now be protected in-perpetuity gives Ajahn

contentment. He can, in a way, look to the future like he always wanted to do, and see that Thai Forest monks will have the opportunity to appreciate and meditate there well after he passes away. He now recognises how much more important that is to him, than reading the stock market.

*Ajahn is the Thai name given to any abbot of a Buddhist monastery. It translates in English as “professor” or “teacher”. For the purpose of this article the word Ajahn is used instead of a first name.



Properties for sale

The BCT revolving fund is always looking for properties with high biodiversity value to purchase. To get in touch, please contact our Property Investments and Partnerships Manager Chris Perceval on 0437 147 611, or you can contact our general enquiries line (info on the back cover).



Blackbutt \$625,000

NORTHERN NSW

15 minutes to Uralla and less than 40 minutes to Armidale

- Conservation/Agriculture
- Mountain escape
- Breathtaking view to the Honeysuckle and Moonbi Ranges



Gooreengi (3 blocks) Price on application

HUNTER COAST

Minutes to Tea Gardens and beach, under 1 hour to Newcastle or Nelson Bay, 2.5 hours drive from Sydney CBD

- Conservation/Lifestyle
- 3 unique blocks to choose from
- Elevated house sites, easy access



Wirreanda \$2,900,000

SOUTHERN NSW

Location: Approx. 30mins to Holbrook, 1 hour to Albury and Wagga Wagga

- Conservation/Grazing
- 4-bedroom country home
- Good water infrastructure, sheds and cattle yards



Picola \$1,300,000

SOUTHERN NSW

Approx. 25km west of West Wyalong on the Mid Western Highway

- Conservation/Agriculture
- Well-watered with farm improvements such as shearing shed, silos and yards
- Two-bedroom home plus two-sleepout homestead



BCT Board Members

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Duncan McGregor, Member
Russell Taylor AM, Member

BCT Executive

Paul Elton, Chief Executive Officer
Carolyn Davies, Director Programs
Alan Goodwin, Director Regional Delivery
Emily McCosker, Director Strategy and Finance (acting)

Thank You

The Biodiversity Conservation Trust gratefully acknowledges all those landholders who have shared their stories for this issue and for past communications.

Thank you to those who are supporting the BCT, and to the many landholders who have told their neighbours, friends and family about us. Together we can work to protect biodiversity on private land in New South Wales.

Did you enjoy this issue of Understory? Please remember to recycle or pass this on to friends and family.

Do you want to receive your copy of Understory via email? If so, drop us a line at info@bct.nsw.gov.au with your name and property details and we will add you to the database.



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