

A photograph of an elderly man with white hair, wearing a light-colored sweater and trousers, standing in a shallow, rocky stream. He is looking upwards and to the left. The stream is surrounded by lush green vegetation and trees, with sunlight filtering through the canopy. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

# Understory

*NSW BCT Newsletter*  
May 2021

Biodiversity  
Conservation  
Trust



## FRONT COVER

Colin Fitzsimons on his land at Bow Wow Gorge, a property near Mount Vincent with an in-perpetuity conservation agreement. Image by Colin Elphick.

## BELOW

A powerful owl on a Sydney Hunter conservation area. Image by Joel Stibbard.



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**W**elcome to the sixth issue of Understory, the BCT's newsletter for our private land conservation agreement holders.

This issue focuses on the resources and support activities the BCT offers to landholders. I hope you enjoy reading the stories from landholders: a post-rain update on a property on the North Coast, a story about a successful property in the Southern Highlands Koala Habitat conservation tender, and a multi-generational story of a biodiversity stewardship site in Western Sydney.

I want to emphasise to all our landholders that we are here to support you. If you're seeking practical advice please explore our many online resources, and make sure you reach out for help if you need it.

## Private land conservation outcomes

I'm pleased to be able to provide you with new outcomes for conservation in this issue of Understory. In each issue we have been able to show increases in conservation outcomes, demonstrating continued interest by landholders to participate in private land conservation.

Since 2018, 257 landholders have signed or plan to sign a conservation agreement with the BCT, creating conservation areas across 97,800 hectares.

The BCT is investing more than \$127.5 million to support these agreements. This investment is split 86% for in-perpetuity agreements and 14% for term agreements (minimum 15-years).

This investment is protecting 148 threatened species and 28 threatened ecological communities under BCT agreements.

Landholders with partnership conservation agreements are eligible to apply for conservation partners grants. To date, the BCT has approved grants worth \$4 million to 246 landholders over 59,400 hectares.

The BCT has therefore invested in 157,200 hectares of conservation areas to date.

## New BCT Board members

In December 2020, NSW Environment Minister Matt Kean announced the appointment of three new members to the board of the BCT.

The new appointees are former NSW Treasury Secretary Mr John Pierce AO, former minister Prof Hon Niall Blair, and Southern New England Landcare CEO Ms Kären Zirkler. These new members join continuing board members Ms Virginia Malley (who is acting Chair), Dr David Freudenberger, Mr Duncan McGregor and Mr Russell Taylor.

The Minister thanked outgoing inaugural Chair, the Hon Robert Hill AC, and outgoing members Dr Neil Byron, Ms Renata Brooks and the Hon. Gary Nairn AO for their service and advocacy for biodiversity throughout NSW.

The new board members bring a wealth of experience to the board to compliment the expertise and knowledge of the existing board members and to continue the important work of protecting and conserving important biodiversity on private land.

You can view all BCT Board member biographies in [the 'about us' section on the BCT website](#).

## Join us at the Australian Land Conservation Alliance's PLC21 conference

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) is holding its annual private land conservation (PLC) conference in Sydney in October. The BCT is a major sponsor and will play a modest role as host.

We're offering up to 20 BCT-subsidised tickets to the ALCA PLC21 conference on a first in, first served basis, for any landholder with a partnership conservation agreement with the BCT! Participating landholders would need to fund their own accommodation and travel for the conference.

This event is an excellent opportunity for the PLC community to come together to discuss ideas, hear from experts, and strengthen networks to support private land conservation in Australia.

After a difficult 2020 (resulting in the postponing of the conference), the theme for PLC21 is Recover, Restore, Redouble: recovering from recent challenges, restoring land, water, culture and community, and with enabling platforms redouble the efforts.

The main part of the conference will be held on Sydney's Darling Island on 21 - 22 October 2021. Delegates will have the option to participate face-to-face or access the conference online, and there will also be field trips and workshops in regional locations before the two-day event.

For more information, visit [the ALCA website](#).

Please get in touch via [info@bct.nsw.gov.au](mailto:info@bct.nsw.gov.au) or 1300 992 688 if you are interested in taking up the BCT's offer of a subsidised ticket.

## BCT landholder survey

In December 2020 BCT landholders and program participants were given an opportunity to provide feedback on their participation in private land conservation and how the BCT can best support them through an online survey.

The survey was co-developed with the University of NSW and the first time the BCT has sought feedback about its programs, processes and service.

The survey was completed with a reasonably good response rate and the results will be used in planning for the years ahead and directly influence BCT programs and services.

We will share a summary of the results in our next edition of Understory.

## Natural disaster support

The BCT is providing PLC landholders with support for recent natural disasters.

For our landholders who are eligible for a conservation partners grant and who need help with the impacts of flooding within their conservation area, we offer targeted grant funding to assist with works like repairing tracks and riparian erosion.

State-wide, 290 of the 2000 properties in the BCT private land conservation network were affected by the 2019/20 bushfires. The BCT has provided more than \$500,000 in grants to landholders with conservation areas impacted by the fires.

Landholders receiving grants can use payments to assist with fencing, erosion control, pest and weed control, and/or track maintenance. The BCT has collaborated with and facilitated landholder access to other support too, such as LLS fencing, LLS pest control and NPWS and RFS track works.

Please view [our frequently asked questions about natural disasters on our website](#).



*P. Elton*

Paul Elton,  
Chief Executive Officer

# BCT News



## Southern Highlands Koala Habitat conservation tender outcomes

The BCT is pleased to share the outcomes of the BCT's Southern Highlands Koala Habitat conservation tender announced by Minister Kean late last year.

Five successful bidders were invited to enter private land conservation agreements that will protect 1,094 hectares of koala habitat. The area covered by these agreements includes locally significant, preferred koala feed trees.

By securing koala habitat on private land, the agreements improve connectivity and facilitate movement between national parks.

The successful landholders will receive annual funding for managing conservation areas on their property. These landholders have agreed to protect these conservation areas in-perpetuity.

The BCT has invested \$11.8 million to support the ongoing annual payments to these landholders.

[Visit the BCT website to view the latest outcomes.](#)

## Update on current conservation tenders

The BCT opened three new tenders in July 2020, each with a different focus: the Northern Inland Floodplains, Snow Gum Woodlands and Grasslands, and the Plains-wanderer conservation tenders.

These tenders are at various stages, with outcomes expected to be announced in the second half of 2021.

## Biodiversity credit open fixed price offer

In December 2020 the BCT launched the biodiversity credit open fixed price offer (Open FPO), a new mechanism under our Biodiversity Offsets Program.

The Open FPO is available on a continuing basis for credits on the BCT's Wanted Credits List and provides a simple and direct way for participants to sell biodiversity credits to the BCT.

The Open FPO is available to landholders who own existing credits created under the former BioBanking Scheme (BBAM credits), landholders who own existing credits under the current Biodiversity Offsets Scheme (BAM credits), or landholders who are interested in establishing a biodiversity stewardship agreement (BSA) to generate and sell BAM credits.

Since its launch, the BCT has received a strong response to the offer and is anticipating continued interest throughout the year. [Click here for more information about the new mechanism.](#)

## Conference sponsorship opportunity

The annual private land conservation conference organised by the Australian Land Conservation Alliance is going ahead in Sydney this year! The BCT will sponsor up to 20 BCT landholders to attend PLC21 – don't miss out on this great opportunity! Contact us to find out how to express your interest.

## Connecting private land conservation with Landcare

In May 2020 NSW Environment Minister, Matt Kean announced a new BCT partnership project with Landcare NSW. The project is to raise awareness and support private land conservation efforts across the state.

Through the partnership the BCT will support Landcare across NSW to build a more supported, connected private land conservation community. We have now run several 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.

Landcare is keen to connect with all BCT private landholders, particularly those who can demonstrate best practice land management, with different land use and agreement types.

If you are interested in learning more from Landcare and local experts about biodiversity conservation and in connecting with other private landholders, register here:

<https://form.jotform.com/211011572202839>

## Conservation partners grants

Do you know about our grant funding opportunities? Any agreement holder who is not receiving annual management payments is eligible for our conservation partners grants. For more information and to apply, visit

[www.bct.nsw.gov.au/cards/apply-conservation-partners-grant](http://www.bct.nsw.gov.au/cards/apply-conservation-partners-grant)

## EMM Field Days

In the last two weeks of April, BCT ecologists and field staff ran a series of field days for BAM (Biodiversity Assessment Method) accredited assessors across the state.

The purpose of these field days was to introduce assessors to the BCT's newly developed Ecological Monitoring Module (EMM) and Operational Manual. As of March 2021, assessors will incorporate the BCT's new monitoring requirements into their management plans when developing applications for a BCT biodiversity stewardship agreement (BSA).



Launched in 2019, the state-wide module is designed to monitor change in response to conservation management across PLC agreement sites and the broader private land conservation network.

The BCT ran six EMM field days covering Queanbeyan, Sydney, Newcastle, and Coffs Harbour; providing training to over 160 assessors. These events provided a platform for BCT staff, ecologists and representatives from other government agencies to come together to talk about monitoring best practice on BSA sites.

As the EMM continues, the BCT will build a comprehensive baseline of data for many of the ecosystems and species protected through PLC agreements.



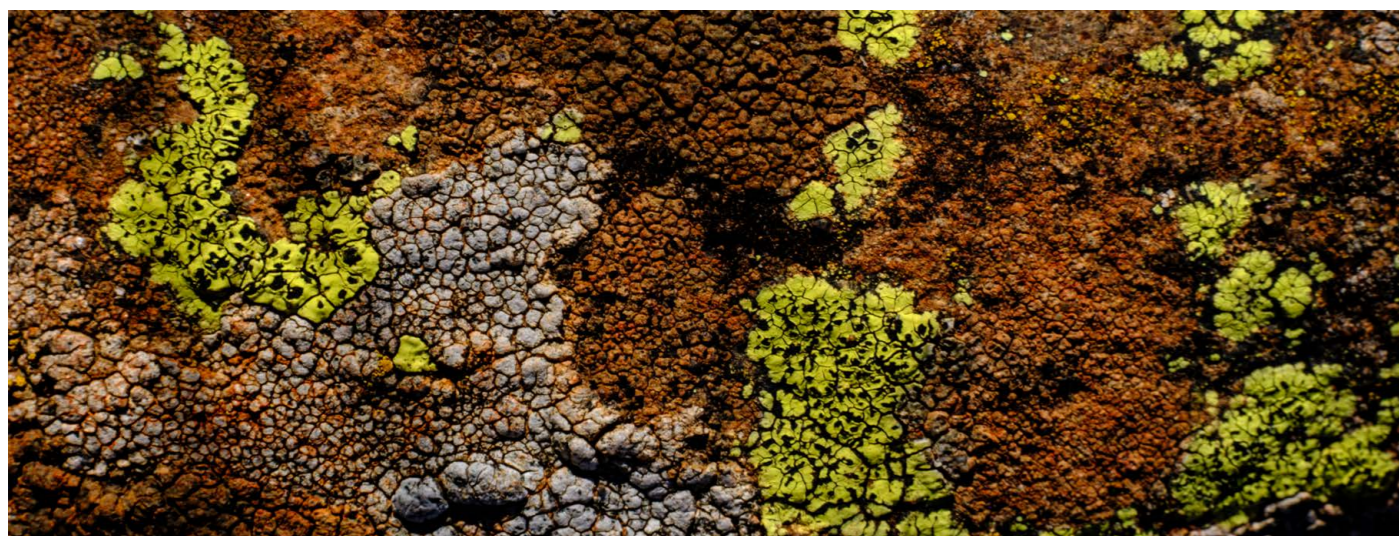
## Soil crusts workshop in the Monaro

In December last year the BCT ran a soil crusts workshop and field day in the Monaro for agreement holders with native grasslands. Donna Hazell, BCT's Senior Ecologist in the region, spoke about grazing in grassland agreement areas and what flowering species to look for this season. The group discussed how they are dealing with their weeds post-drought and inspected a landholder's native grasslands.

Biological soil crusts are organisms that carpet the soil (like mosses, lichens, and cyanobacteria), and although they might not look like much, they play a plethora of important functional roles in grassland ecosystems.

Dr David Eldridge from the University of NSW, the guest speaker and soil crusts expert, spoke about the secret life of biological soil crusts, how incredibly resilient they are and how rapidly they can take advantage of water when it becomes available.

The landholders who attended the workshop and field day were very positive, saying that it was equally beneficial to learn practical information, and to be re-energised and network with local, like-minded landholders. The BCT is interested in running similar events more frequently for landholders across the state. If there is a subject that interests you, please get in touch with us.



## Bushfire recovery works on Mid Coast properties

After the Black Summer bushfires in 2019 and 2020 many conservation agreements in the Mid Coast region of NSW were severely damaged, houses burnt down and, tragically, lives were lost. In March 2020 the BCT launched a Bushfire Recovery Project, a coordinated response to fire-impacted conservation agreements. Through this project the BCT is identifying and coordinating weed, pest and erosion control activities required to address post-fire threats to biodiversity.

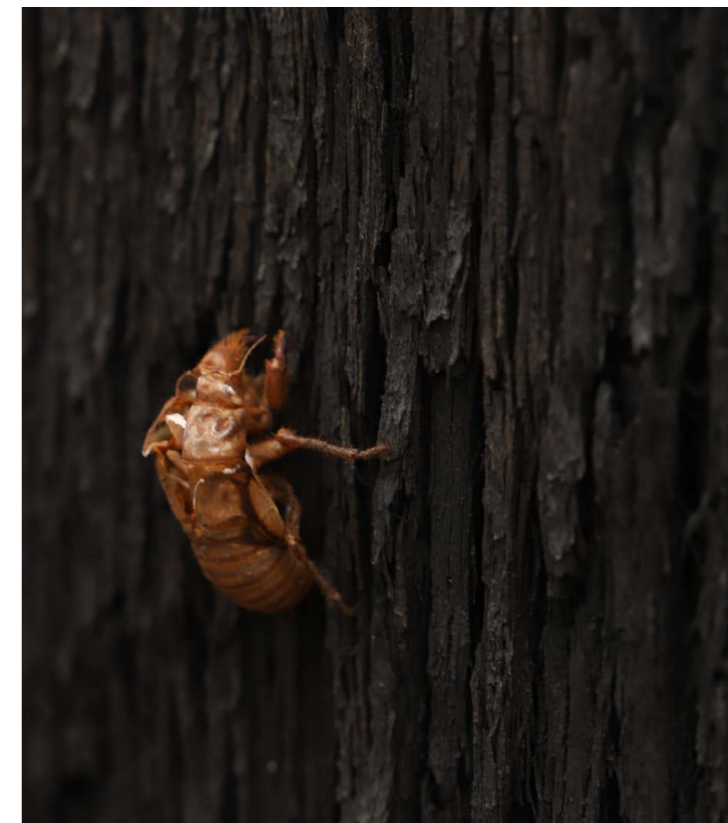
Those most in need in the Mid Coast region were selected for the Bushfire Recovery Project. Under this project, BCT coordinates support from contractors and manages the grant funding and works.



In the planning stage a bush regenerator was contracted to develop bushfire recovery plans for those and other fire affected agreements.

Erosion control was the focus in the first part of the project, enabling access to some of the agreement sites where tracks were damaged and were eroding into the agreement areas. The Soil Conservation Service were contracted to undertake the works. Erosion control works have been completed on the selected properties and the focus now is on rebuilding fences and feral animal control. Bush regeneration is the last step because it's beneficial to watch how the biodiversity naturally regenerates, especially after recent heavy rains and floods before this process is started.

This project has been a great opportunity to support management activities and landholders, who have been through difficult times with bushfires and floods in the past year. On some agreement sites, especially the large ones, we have been able to accomplish much more than we could under a normal grant.



# New BCT publications and resources



## BSA landholder guide

We are excited to announce the publication of the BCT's landholder guide for biodiversity stewardship agreements (BSAs). This is an essential document for BSA landholders, especially those starting the journey. We encourage anyone involved in the BSA process to have a look at either the online or printable version. We hope it will be a useful addition to our landholder resources.

Find the guide at [www.bct.nsw.gov.au/bsa-landholder-guide](http://www.bct.nsw.gov.au/bsa-landholder-guide) or contact us to request a printed version.

## Management videos

Have you checked [our Youtube channel](#) lately? Along with our other great resources and stories, we have started uploading our conservation management video series. Take a look at the videos which explore conservation management activities such as revegetation, recovering from a fire event, wildlife-friendly fencing, and artificial hollows. These videos accompany our existing management guidelines for landholders and are a great starting point for active management. They are also available on our website in [the resources section](#).

## Managing for Conservation Restoring Native Vegetation



# Your stories



ABOVE  
Bill and Elizabeth showing BCT staff around Craigend. Images in this story by Colin Elphick.

## Craigend: the fifth-generation property stays in the family

**“Selling biodiversity credits has given us the freedom to look after the land in the way we’ve always hoped to.”**

Bill and Elizabeth Inglis own and live at Craigend, a dairy farm in Western Sydney. When they stepped back from some of their farm work and began to lease out their paddocks and infrastructure to other farmers, they started looking for more active ways to improve their land. Bill had anxiously watched thick infestations of lantana and other weeds thrive while he worked in the paddocks, without the time or means to address them.



What’s more, without the reliable income from working cattle, they were concerned about the longevity of their land and the potential need to sell Craigend all together. A sale would have meant the tragic break of a fifth-generation line on Bill’s side – Craigend was granted to his great-great-great grandfather in 1832 and the Inglis family has managed the land ever since.

In 2017, they signed a biobanking agreement with the then Office of Environment and Heritage and haven’t looked back. In fact, they’re earning more money from the land as a stewardship site than they had from grazing and dairy. The sale of biodiversity credits through this agreement has not only prevented the need to sell, but has also allowed them to manage the land and bush the way they’ve always wanted to. The vast stands of remnant native bushland at Craigend have been carefully protected from clearing for nearly 200 years alongside the productive dairy farm, and for the first time they are now protected in-perpetuity.

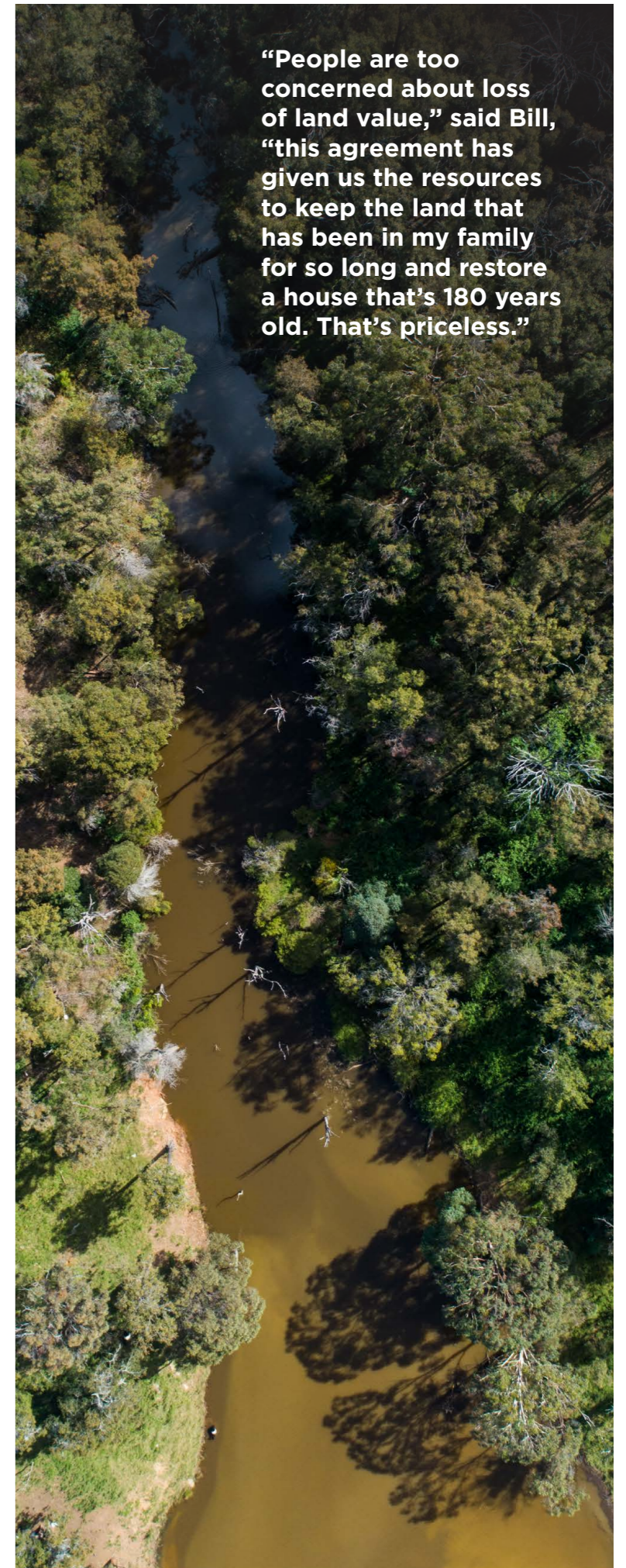
Bill, having spent so much time in the bush growing up on the property and watching his children do the same, couldn’t be more thrilled to solidify his family’s legacy.

The management payments that Bill and Elizabeth receive have also helped their son, whose work was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as they could pay him to undertake the management actions for their stewardship site. They’re not worried about succession planning, as their children are determined to keep the property and continue to manage it for conservation.

Bill and Elizabeth are now in the process of expanding their stewardship site to generate more credits. They are also active in their community and strongly recommend the stewardship process to their neighbours, along with their positive experience working with the BCT, who they say have been supportive and enthusiastic about their work and fully take on the process.

OPPOSITE  
Bill and Elizabeth Inglis.

RIGHT  
An aerial view of Craigend.



**“People are too concerned about loss of land value,” said Bill, “this agreement has given us the resources to keep the land that has been in my family for so long and restore a house that’s 180 years old. That’s priceless.”**

# The Bog's bog gets rain



You may remember a feature story in our last issue of Understory about The Bog, a conservation property owned by BCT landholder Jimmy Malecki on the North Coast of NSW.

When the BCT visited Jimmy in September 2020, he mainly spoke about his experience during the incredible bushfires that swept across the state the year before. Most of the conservation area was burnt, and Jimmy and the Rural Fire Service only just managed to save the main house and surrounding buildings. The vegetation was clearly recovering well, but Jimmy kept mentioning how different the site looks after a large rain event.

Fast forward to today, just 16 months after the fires, and the difference in The Bog is unbelievable. As a result of the exceptionally large amount of rain that fell right across the country in mid-March this year, The Bog is now filled to the brim. As was the case with many low-lying regions in NSW, the Richmond River catchment near Coraki and Bungawalbin flooded, affecting hundreds of properties in the surrounding areas – including The Bog. The drone images taken by Jimmy while he was stuck at home waiting for the roads to re-open paint the full picture – the vivid sheen of green visible over The Bog's wetland areas an amazing sight to see. Both the name of the property – The Bog – and Jimmy's description of it as 'Australia's largest tidal pool' ring true.

For more information about The Bog and to stay up to date with the work that Jimmy is doing on the property, check out The Bog Conservation Area on Facebook.

ABOVE  
One of *The Bog's* many full wetlands. Image by Jimmy Malecki.

# A koala habitat success story in the Southern Highlands

It's not just the Southern Highlands' important koala population that is thrilled about the recent signed conservation agreement for a unique property near Mittagong. The BCT, and the five families of land owners are also thrilled, for their history and their future. With sweeping views across private valleys, rivers, creeks, stands of ribbon gums, and even its own escarpment, the property is truly a site to behold, and a handful of visits will really only scrape the surface of its biodiverse secrets.

In 1978, five families banded together to purchase a 100-hectare bush property near Mittagong. Now, over 40 years later, three generations of landholders are protecting and enjoying its biodiversity.

The company, formed by the five families when they purchased the land, meets regularly to discuss its management. In 2020, the hot topic of these meetings was the BCT's Southern Highlands Koala Habitat conservation tender.

RIGHT  
Landholders and BCT staff look at a map of the property. Image by Harriet Ampt.



BELOW  
Landholders walk below the property's escarpment. Image by Harriet Ampt.



They agreed to apply, despite some concern about the limited koala sightings.

The BCT's Tuesday Heather, a Senior Conservation Officer who assisted landholders through the tender process, says that rare sightings are not necessarily a bad thing.



“You won’t find one in every tree, regardless of the how significant the tree species is in this area,” Tuesday said.

“You’re looking at around one koala per one hundred hectares. But the prime habitat is here if they do need it as the Southern Highlands population recovers and expands. It’s also really important to maintain that connectivity so they can move within the landscape.”

Habitat loss, through urban development and vegetation clearing, as well as the need to connect small populations, was a significant driver for running a conservation tender in the Southern Highlands.



The intention was to create a network of conservation areas on private lands which would be protected in-perpetuity and provide safe havens for koalas to shelter, forage and move between.

Needless to say, this was one of the successful properties in the Southern Highlands Koala Habitat conservation tender. This means that habitat for koalas—and threatened species such as the yellow-bellied glider, spotted-tailed quoll, scarlet robin and glossy black-cockatoo—is protected forever by a conservation agreement registered on the title of the land. This agreement comes with ongoing annual management payments, which will be used to fix fencing, control weeds, and address a wild pig problem, as well as other management activities.

One of the youngest residents of the property is Nell, the 15-year-old granddaughter of one of the original owners. Nell grew up visiting on weekends and taking her friends on adventures in the bush. Nell is proud of the decision to create a permanent conservation area on the property, especially with growing concern amongst her peers about loss of habitat, climate change and other environmental issues which they’ll have to face as they get older. She’s also thrilled that, if she eventually has children, she knows this breathtaking land will always be there for them to enjoy.

OPPOSITE, TOP  
BCT's Tuesday Heather at the property. Image by Colin Elphick.

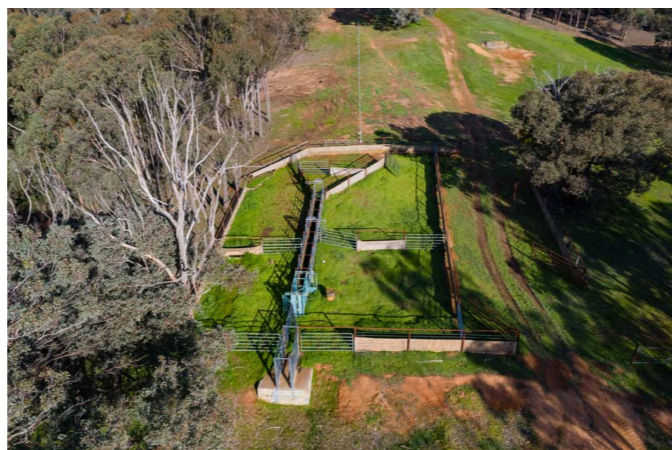
OPPOSITE, BOTTOM  
An aerial view of the property. Image by Colin Elphick.

BELOW  
Nell at the property. Image by Colin Elphick.



# 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 contact our general enquiries line (info on the back cover).



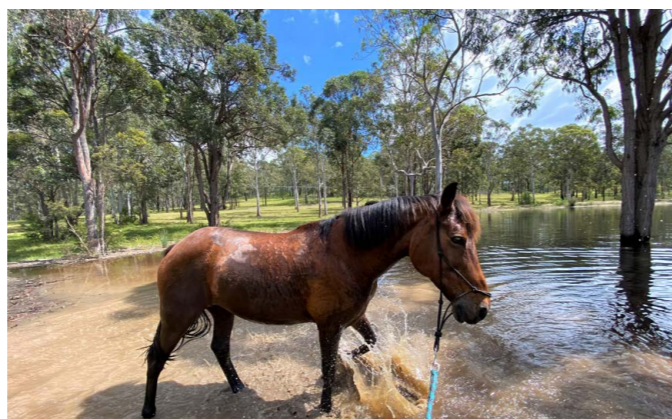
## Wirreanda

*Price on application*

SOUTHERN NSW

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

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



## Gooreengi

**(3 blocks)**

*Price on application*

HUNTER COAST

Minutes to Tea Gardens and the 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

## 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 have supported the BCT through its start up, 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.

Image by Colin Elphick

## BCT Board Members

Virginia Malley, Acting Chairperson / Deputy Chairperson  
 Prof. the Hon. Niall Blair, Member  
 Dr David Freudenberg, Member  
 Duncan McGregor, Member  
 John Pierce AO, Member  
 Russell Taylor AM, Member  
 Karen Zirkler, Member

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Paul Elton, Chief Executive Officer  
 Carolyn Davies, Director Programs  
 Alan Goodwin, Director Regional Delivery  
 Emily McCosker, Director Strategy and Governance

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# ***Understory***

May 2021

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