

Wedderburn Conservation Management Network

Annual Report of Achievements
November 2024



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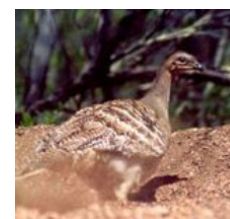
Introduction

This year, the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network (WCMN) has celebrated a productive and inspiring period. Our projects have positively impacted the biodiversity and environmental health of the Box-Ironbark and Mallee ecosystems. From habitat restoration to community engagement, species conservation, and educational initiatives, we have worked tirelessly to protect and enhance our unique landscape. Below is a summary of our achievements over the past year.

Habitat Restoration and Species Conservation

Malleefowl

A Steering committee formed with NMRG, TFN, Bush Heritage, Djandak, Parks Vic, NCCMA, WCMN and private landholders with discussions held and actions in relation to the following table:



Malleefowl Workshop _ April 2024 _ Priory Research Questions & Actions

Priority Area	Research Questions	Actions
Genetic Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What degree of inbreeding is present in the Wedderburn population? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection and analysis of genetic material from the Wedderburn population Translocation of eggs to introduce genetic diversity into the Wedderburn population
Population Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the current size of the Wedderburn population? What proportion of the population are active and routine breeders? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring of existing mounds Lidar and ground-truthing for new/unknown mounds
Habitat Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the current size of likely breeding habitat for the Wedderburn population? What is the current size of likely peripheral/foraging habitat for the Wedderburn population? What portions of existing habitat are at risk of being lost in the future? What opportunities for expanding habitat might be possible in the future? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lidar and ground-truthing for new/unknown mounds (as above) Habitat mapping Identification and mapping of risks and opportunities Purchase/covenanting and restoration of potential habitat
Carrying Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the current population size at optimal or maximum carrying capacity for the current habitat available? What options might be available for increasing carrying capacity? 	
Returning Spirits		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural burning (reducing fire risk and creating buffers for existing habitat) Training of Djarra rangers to monitor for malleefowl Training of Djarra rangers to dig mounds and translocate eggs
Predation & Roadkill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What impact does predation from feral foxes and cats have on the Wedderburn population? What impact does roadkill incidents have on the Wedderburn population? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Predator monitoring and control Collect data on roadkill mortality rates
Comms & Engagement		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell the story of the unique situation of the Wedderburn population

Significant progress has been made with the following:

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Fox Baiting for Malleefowl Protection

From November to March 2023/2024, we ran a preliminary fox baiting program in Wychitella, to reduce predation risks for the Malleefowl (no baits taken). Supported by local landholders and volunteers, equipment and consumables were funded by the WCMN. The 2024/2025 program is starting, with funding from Bush Heritage to expand baiting near known Malleefowl mounds in the NCR and on private property. Additional support from Parks Victoria includes canid injectors, cameras, and ranger assistance. WCMN will continue to supply baits and on-ground support.



Communications and Engagement - Flora and Fauna of the Wychitella The Lidar Mapping Initiative for the Wychitella area,

supported by the NMRG and the WCMN, has successfully secured funding to undertake Lidar mapping across the Wychitella district. This initiative aims to enhance habitat management and conservation planning. Currently, it is in the planning phase, with operations set to commence in December. Our team assisted Djandak in ground truthing to determine the flight path and include privately covenanted properties within the survey area.

Monitoring of mounds.

The membership with the VMRG has been confirmed for this year, and two volunteers attended the annual VMRG monitoring workshop weekend in October, where they learned about monitoring protocols and visited mounds in Wyperfeld.

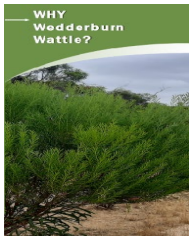
Annual monitoring of the known mounds in Wychitella will be conducted again, organized by Doug Pocock in collaboration with Martin and Naomi. The comprehensive monitoring of all mounds (5-year survey) is scheduled to start in 2025/2026. Additionally, there are plans to send more monitors to the workshop weekend to assist with the process.



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"Storytelling the Landscape - A Journey with the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network through the Wychitella," aims to highlight the Malleefowl and other bird species within our unique habitat in the Wedderburn district. We are actively seeking funding and have received interest from Tourism Loddon Mallee to support the printing of a brochure (see project brief).

Wedderburn Wattles:



In partnership with Lively Volunteers and landholders, over 500 Wedderburn Wattles, a threatened species important to the region's ecosystem, have been planted. This restoration aims to provide necessary habitat for wildlife, including the endangered Malleefowl. The Lively group planted and protected over 150 plants at Hard Hills, with an additional 350 planted on private properties.

Cactus Control - "Cactus Ninjas":

We extend our sincere gratitude to our dedicated Cactus Ninja volunteers, who have played a crucial role in weed control efforts throughout the district and along roadsides. These volunteers have actively engaged with landholders, promoting community involvement and education.

The WCMN has provided chemicals, equipment, including safety gear, for the treatment of cactus infestations. They have achieved significant success using the drill and fill method with Daconate, employing a single basal injection. This technique effectively eliminates the cacti and reduces the likelihood of reinfestation by a treated plant.



Additionally, our volunteers have been educating landholders about proper control methods. For instance, one landholder was initially cutting down cacti and leaving them to decompose, unaware that this would lead to greater resprouting. After receiving guidance, the landholder understood the importance of adopting more effective management techniques.

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Nest Box Program:



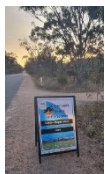
The nest boxes have now become well-integrated into the landscape, revealing encouraging signs of local wildlife. Evidence of Yellow-footed Antechinus, Sugar Gliders, and various woodland bird species has been observed in areas such as Berimal, Woosang, Wychitella, Wedderburn, Mt Korong, and on the periphery of Kooyoora State Park. This year, students and volunteers have actively participated in monitoring the nest boxes.

It was particularly noteworthy to observe a family of Kreft Gliders (sugar gliders) utilizing the boxes in the reforested regions.

2. Community Engagement and Educational Programs

Community Events:

This year, we hosted several community events, including our Annual General Meeting, seed collection days, and Cactus Field Days in collaboration with Seeding Victoria,



Bush Heritage and Djaara. These gatherings strengthened community support and raised awareness of local conservation efforts.

Modern in The Loddon – 23/24 Connect with Nature Program:

The WCMN successfully secured funding of \$14,400.00 to promote our local parks and the projects undertaken by our volunteers.

In October 2023 and April 2024, we organized two highly successful Connect with Nature weekends, both of which were oversubscribed. Participants expressed a desire for more such events and additional volunteering opportunities.

During these weekends, we travelled by bus to Wychitella, stopping at various ecosystems to discuss challenges such as Wheel Cactus infestation and landscape fragmentation. We addressed the hurdles and achievements related to Malleefowl and Wedderburn Wattles and outlined our plans to protect and nurture the Mallee Scrub area. Notably, we climbed Ngarri (Mt Egbert), a significant location for the Djaara people. Annette Robertson captivated the group with her insights on the isolated populations and demonstrated the monitoring protocols for the endangered Malleefowl.





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On Sunday, we visited the spring soaks in Kooyoora, where Paul Foreman provided detailed explanations about the diverse floral species associated with the soaks and their functional mechanisms. Discussions included the grazing pressure in fenced versus unfenced sections and culminated in a visit to the Melville caves.



Our program also featured a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony, storytelling about Bunjil, cultural weaving, and feather craft workshops. Young participants engaged in an exploratory hunt and created seed bombs. We conducted a bus tour to the Soak and Mt Korong Amphitheatre with traditional owners, followed by a BBQ dinner provided by the Wedderburn Lions Club.

Additionally, we facilitated two week-long camps in March for students from Bendigo Tafe and Holmesglen Tafe. Activities included exploring spring soaks, nest boxes, revegetation sites, seed collecting, studying Malleefowl, pitfall trapping, spotlight walks, and making seed bombs. The Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony followed by providing participants networking opportunities within the industry, complemented by an informative talk from Laura of "Cassinia." Extra day events were arranged for groups such as Lively Bendigo (intellectually disabled adults), Bendigo Tafe, and the Girl Guides, demonstrating a strong interest in connecting with nature.

School Partnerships and Youth Education:

Let's Explore

Try to find something in nature that meets the description in each box.

You could write down what it is, photograph it, draw it, or tick the box.

Additional challenges

- Set a timer and see how quickly you can finish it.
- Take your time and study each item you find.

Write down something interesting about each of them. Deposit the same scavenger hunt in different habitats, and see if some items are easier or harder to find in different places.

No duplicates

Something that gets its energy from the sun	An animal that gets its energy from eating plants	An animal that gets its energy from eating other animals	Something that gets its energy from eating dead things	Something that gets its energy from eating poo
Something that will still be here in 10 years	Something that will not be here in 10 years	Something that is decomposing	An animal that is making or building something	Something that floats in the air or in the water
Something younger than you	Something older than the oldest person in your family	A sign a person has cared for this place	A sign a person has not cared for this place	An animal that is busy
Animal poo	Something that has been chewed	Something that is growing on something else that is living	Fungi, lichen or moss	Something that could help a seed travel to a new place*
A place an animal might live	An animal that has an exoskeleton**	A place for wildlife to take a drink	Something that lives in the water	Something that lives among the soil or leaf litter

*Seeds from plants can be spread far and wide in many ways such as being blown around, sticking to the fur of an animal, and floating away. ** An exoskeleton is a fancy word for a skeleton on the outside of an animal's body. Some examples of animals with exoskeletons are yabbies, crabs, insects, and spiders.



In collaboration with local schools, we engaged students through hands-on conservation activities, including seed bomb creation with the Girl Guides, traditional workshops on weaving and feather craft, pitfall trapping with Holmesglen TAFE, revegetation, and plant identification. This "learning by doing" approach enriched students' understanding of native species and ecosystem conservation.

Volunteer Growth:

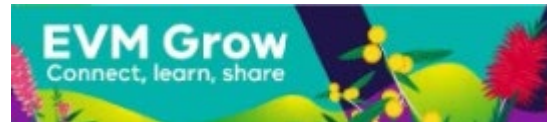
This year saw a significant increase in volunteer participation. New members joined restoration projects, fox baiting initiatives, and event organization, contributing greatly to our mission. Our on-ground activities have also been greatly assisted by our ongoing volunteer, Steve Baker, who has been volunteering on a weekly basis for the last 18 months.



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EVM Grow

Is to support environmental volunteers in the Loddon Mallee through networking, skill development, inspiration from different approaches, and sharing successes and challenges of various groups.



The WCMN is on the steering committee for this event and are excited to announce that this year's EVM Grow will be held on Tuesday, December 3rd., hosted by Buloke and Northern Grampians Landcare Network at the Railway Hub, St Arnaud. EVM Grow offers an opportunity to connect with other environmental volunteer managers, learn from each other, and engage in meaningful discussions. This free event will take place in Melbourne, at five regional hubs, and online.



Biolinks Alliance Symposium

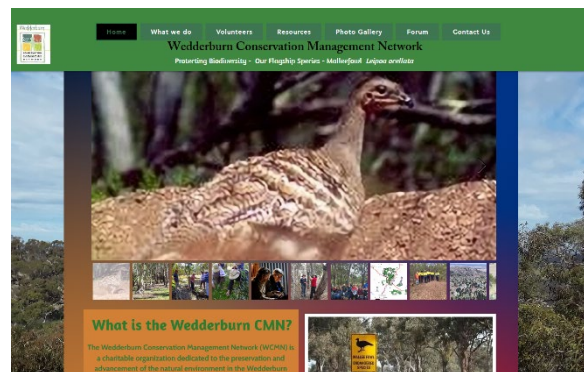
This year, we hosted the Biolinks Alliance Symposium Rewilding Central Victoria Field Day, aimed at restoring ecological function and inspiring participants through ongoing efforts. We provided afternoon tea and spent several hours around Korong Ridge discussing the revegetation's positive impacts, citing Cassinia Environmental and GreenFleet's vital role in the revegetation. We talked about Nest Boxes, Pitfall trapping, weed control, understory plantings, water quality, predator control and seed collecting, and how they help to enable Rewilding, encouraging others to be proactive in ecological restoration.

Website Revamp and Public Awareness

WCMN Website Redesign

<https://www.wedderburncmn.org/>

The WCMN website has been thoroughly revamped to enhance user experience and provide comprehensive information. The updated site now features current resources, project highlights, and conservation tips, ensuring the community remains well-informed about our initiatives and events.





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Educational Resources and Partnerships



Through collaborations with experts, we have enriched our website with resources such as insect guides, weed identification guides, partner website links, and detailed ecosystem information, thereby promoting public education on Central Victoria’s biodiversity. Our partnerships with organizations like Landcare, Bush Heritage, NCCMN, Parks Vic., the

VMRG and other conservation entities have facilitated the creation of impactful and accessible content.

Photo Gallery

The website now boasts a photo gallery showcasing images from esteemed photographers Sharnie Hamilton and Meryl Wiseman, beautifully capturing the region’s flora and fauna.

4. Grants and Funding Successes

Successful Grants

NCCMA Landcare Maintenance Grant: \$500

Biolinks Alliance Field Day: \$500

Bush Heritage Fox Baiting (Wychitella): \$2,000

Pending Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) Status

This year, we applied for DGR status with the Australian Tax Office. Once approved, this status will allow us to offer tax-deductible donations, which will broaden our funding opportunities. A special meeting in September amended our rules, and an application was submitted to appoint the Secretary (Trudy-Ann Nelsson) as the responsible officer for the ATO, and an application was submitted to the ACNC for registration as a Charitable (not for Profit) status. At this stage we are awaiting the outcome but are confident that our application will be granted.



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Connect with Nature" Program

We applied for a \$20,000 grant from Landcare Australia to fund our “Connect with Nature” program, to provide volunteers with skills, tools, and knowledge to contribute to conservation efforts. This grant will support workshops, field days, and citizen science initiatives through the 2024-2025 financial year, several of which had previously been delivered (unfunded) by our volunteers and from WCMN reserves.

Connect with Nature Grant

The good news, we received the \$20,000 grant from Landcare Australia to empower volunteers and community members with conservation skills, fostering environmental stewardship through education, technology, and citizen science. This funding will support ongoing activities and introduce additional field days.

Planned events include:

- Plant ID Workshop
- Cactus Control Workshop
- Seed Bomb and Seed Collection Field Day
- TAFE Camps
- Lively Field Days
- Campfires and Science Weekend

5. Challenges Faced

Despite a successful year, we encountered some challenges. Unseasonal weather affected planting times and limited the effectiveness of some restoration efforts. Additionally, delays in receiving DGR status have impacted our capacity to fully engage in fundraising activities.

Future Directions

Looking ahead, WCMN will continue expanding educational programs, restoring habitats, and developing conservation initiatives focused on protecting threatened species. With a growing network of volunteers and community supporters, we are excited to build on this year’s achievements and further protect our region's biodiversity.



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New Project Proposal: "Storytelling the Landscape - A Journey with the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network"

This project aims to:

Through telling the story of the WCMN's history and activities, showcase the rich biodiversity of the Loddon Region, emphasizing its precious native flora and fauna, and our flagship species, the Malleefowl.

Increase awareness of conservation efforts to protect local ecosystems, particularly within the Box-Ironbark and Mallee ecosystems, and highlight the role of the WCMN, Djarra, Bush Heritage, and other partners.

Promote ecotourism and responsible outdoor activities.

Foster community connection and appreciation for the unique landscapes of Kooyoora, Wychitella, Mt Egbert, Mt Buckrabanyule, and Mt Korong.

Conclusion

The Wedderburn Conservation Management Network has achieved significant milestones thanks to the dedication of our volunteers, community members, and partners. Together, we have strengthened conservation efforts, raised public awareness, and engaged youth in caring for our ecosystems. We are grateful for everyone's contributions and look forward to building on these successes in the coming year. We would also like to acknowledge and thank our committee members for their ongoing support and encouragement throughout the year(s).

Report Compiled By:
Trudy Nelsson