



Connecting Country
PO Box 437, Castlemaine, VIC 3450
03 5472 1594
www.connectingcountry.org.au
Room 15, The Hub, Corner Barker and Templeton Streets, Castlemaine.

Connecting Country 2009-2010 Final Report

For an organisation only just laying its founding roots, Connecting Country is very proud of its achievements in 2009-2010. Thanks to funding received through the North Central CMA from the Federal and State Government, we can report that our 09/10 outputs for the project have been completed. This reports celebrates some of these achievements.

Vegetation Enhancement

2000 hectares of Yellow Box Woodlands and Phascogale habitat have been protected and enhanced through our on-ground work and nest box programs. Connecting Country invested in the Department of Sustainability and Environment 2010 Bush Tender Program which resulted in vegetation protection and management plans across nine sites covering 761 ha. We also funded 13 Community Projects involving seven Landcare groups, 34 landholders and some 213 ha. Habitat for the Brush-Tail Phascogale has been enhanced with the installation of nest boxes covering an area in excess of 800ha.

These projects saw remnant vegetation protected through fencing and the removal of grazing. These habitat patches are now being enhanced through strategic revegetation and a pest plant and animal control program.



Over 2000ha of remnant priority yellow vegetation protected, managed and/or monitored across the Mount Alexander Region including the removal of grazing. Sites shown above are in Nuggetty (left) and Guildford (right)

Community Engagement

Our eight member Committee of Management worked tirelessly to get the project underway. These inspiring volunteers represented the Landcare and farming community throughout the region. Our quarterly Reference Group meetings were well attended involving the broader Landcare and environment community.

Connecting Country thanks all of the volunteers involved with the project. However, we would especially like to recognise the efforts of Doug Ralph as the first president of Connecting Country Inc.

Project Development

In August 2009, a successful future projects workshop was held to identify core habitat blocks (remnant Yellow Box woodlands) to target and initiate project development. To follow on, we held six information/education evenings throughout the shire with local Landcare groups to further develop project ideas. In total some 230 community members were involved in this project development stage.



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Woodland Restoration Course

In 09/10 we developed and ran the Connecting Country Woodland Restoration Course. This course included 6 full day workshops aimed to help landholders protect and enhance their remnant woodlands and increase the productivity of their land. The workshops were very well attended with 40 participants at each Sunday session.



Above left: Elaine Bayes walks Woodland Restoration Course participants through a waterway assessment tool that they can utilise on their own properties.

Above right: Frances Cincotta, from Newstead Natives, shares her wisdom on growing and planting indigenous plants.

In addition, we held three public talk events featuring woodland birds, bats and cultural landscapes. These delightful evenings proved very popular with up to 180 attendees at each talk.



Above left: A 180 strong crowd turns up in Newstead to hear Andrew Bennett and Chris Tzaros share their wisdom on Woodland Birds as part of Connecting Country's speaker series.

Above right: This evening was also the launch of the Connecting Country Photo Story Booklet developed by Deanna Neville (centre).

Landcare Support

Connecting Country worked with and supported the 30 Landcare and Friends groups across in the Mount Alexander Region. This included assisting with project development and funding applications. We also developed three Local Area Plans for Newstead, Nuggetty and Harcourt Valley Landcare. The Connecting Country Photo Story Booklet was produced with Deanna Neville to engage the Mount Alexander community in the project and celebrate our connection to country.

Education Program

Educational events were held with Sutton Grange and Elphinstone Primary School through Connecting Country's nest box program. Connecting Country also trained young people in GPS use, site assessment and nest box installation as part of the national Green Corps Jobs program. Students from the Conservation and Land Management Course at BRIT Tafe learnt valuable practical skills through assisting us with the education and monitoring program. Connecting Country presented at the Royal Society of Victoria symposium in Bendigo and made a presentation at the Sustainable Living Festival in Melbourne.



Above left: Ian Higgins walks community members through the Connecting Country Community Project site on Campbell's Creek highlighting the natural regeneration occurring with the eradication of pest plant and animals.

Above right: Students from Elphinstone Primary School learn about protecting our endangered species and assist Connecting Country with the building and installation of the Phascogale nest boxes

Website

Connecting Country's website was maintained with current news and events for the Mount Alexander Community. The interactive mapper continues to provide a forum for community members to record sightings of local flora and fauna. Regular eNews was sent to the Landcare community and Connecting Country members.

Monitoring Change

Connecting Country's long-term monitoring strategy was produced in partnership with Dr Andrew Bennett from Deakin University and it includes the monitoring of

- 400 nest boxes,
- vegetation quality (including sites where ground works have occurred), and
- woodland birds surveys.

In 09/10, 400 nest boxes were built and 339 erected across 113 sites throughout the shire with widespread community support. Baseline audits of vegetation quality and woodland birds were undertaken at 100 sites. This monitoring covers an area in excess of 800ha.



Young people learn how to take GPS coordinates, undertake site assessments and install nestboxes as part of their Green Jobs Corps Program and Connecting Country

Partnership Projects

Connecting Country is well networked and worked in partnership with the following projects in 09/10:

- Mount Alexander Shire Council Environment Strategy development
- DSE Goldfields Threatened Species Project
- North Central CMA Box-Gum Grassy Woodlands Project
- Victoria Naturally Alliance Community Engagement Project: Connecting Country is one of three pilot projects across Victoria
- VNPA Small Parks project: identify small areas of public land for higher conservation and reservation status



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- VNPA Community Monitoring project