

Case Study 2

Karen and Elton Baker



“You don’t know what’s valuable until you’ve let it come back, cared for it for a while”, says Karen Baker. These words from a woman who, with her husband Elton, has been restoring landscapes for the last 20 years because “it’s just what we love to do”. Karen and Elton purchased their Chewton property in 2002 from a farmer who was convinced that “you can either have sheep or trees but not both”. Hence the paddocks were replete with ring-barked stumps. Karen’s initial plan was to plant a plant for every stump they located on the property. Instead, they have planted many, many more and observed a flush of natural regeneration.



Becoming a part of Connecting Country is a natural progression for the Bakers who are experienced landscape restorers. They collect their own seed, raise some of their own plants and use local growers to raise others. Providing for natural regeneration is a large part of their overall philosophy and the evidence of the success can be seen in most parts of the 32 ha property. Karen and Elton are extraordinary observers of natural processes. “Tidiness is an anathema to us. We wander through

the bush, delighting in the discovery of plants never seen before or the growth of those we’ve planted. Our success rate is just about 100%”, Karen says.

The hive of European honey bees hanging in the tangled mass of wind thrown tree roots is of special interest as it reminds the Bakers of a hive of native bees which took up residence in a tree hollow on their previous property in Cottles Bridge. Karen says that “The discovery of the tenacity of the hive to function and grow in the face of such adversity, as the tree being uprooted, was an occasion for celebration”.

Karen and Elton derive immense inspiration from learning about the land on which they are soon to live. This keeps them alive and responsive to the variability in their immediate landscape. This is especially relevant as they have observed the effects of changing of weather patterns. They are working with neighbours to ensure the viability of plant and animal species is maintained through ecological connectivity encompassing bushland, riparian and grassland areas. Becoming a part of Connecting Country means that the Bakers can share their knowledge and experience with others throughout the region.



As Elton says, “Connecting Country is able to provide us with the means to be connected with each other and offer access to a range of information and programs which can assist us to continue with the work we are doing. The biodiversity blueprint enables us to become a part of something bigger. Our focus on local activities contributes towards a broader picture to which, as a community, we all belong.”