



Bush Heritage's property at Yarrabee forms part of the Gondwana Link biodiversity project. Stuart Cowell

Reconnecting country at a landscape scale

Celebrations on either side of the continent have marked impressive developments for two visionary Australian landscape reconnection projects. Gondwana Link in south-west Western Australia and Kosciusko to Coast in New South Wales are vast collaborative projects that are securing a future for unique and threatened land, water and wildlife.

In late April, groups involved in Gondwana Link, based in the heart of Australia's only global biodiversity hotspot, celebrated the acquisition and launch of three new conservation reserves and the planting of one of the nation's largest and most biodiverse revegetation projects.

Gondwana Link is designed to protect, manage and restore globally important plant and animal populations in an arc of bushland that stretches 1000 km from the wet karri forests of the south-west to the woodlands and mallee on the edge of the Nullarbor.

Greening Australia, Bush Heritage Australia and The

Nature Conservancy are initially focused on reconnecting a 70 km stretch of wildlife habitat between the Stirling Range and Fitzgerald River National Parks.

The launch, an hour and a half north-west of Albany, celebrated the purchase of Peniup and Monjebup reserves. Since the project's inception in 2002, five reserves have been

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acquired. Yarrabee Wesfarmers Reserve was bought last year, while Nowanup and Chereninup Creek came earlier.

Already more than 6000 ha have been protected and some 1250 ha revegetated with native species indigenous to the area. Using a combination of innovative conservation strategies and the best restoration science, the groups are strategically reconnecting and revegetating this

massive network of private and public lands.

Approximately \$5 million has been spent since the project began and the goal is to complete the link within 10 to 15 years.

Bush Heritage is buying and managing the large areas of relatively intact bush, the building blocks and gene bank of Gondwana Link. Greening Australia is bringing its experience to revegetating the cleared areas and linking the building blocks together. These two organisations are raising funds through the Great Southern Arc Campaign by sourcing philanthropic, corporate and government funds.

The Nature Conservancy, meanwhile, has supported the project through funds raised by the David Thomas \$20 million Challenge, as well as scientific expertise. In November last year businessman and philanthropist David Thomas offered to match \$10 million in donations from other philanthropists to support select conservation projects. A total of \$1.5 million in matched funds has been raised so far for Gondwana Link via this mechanism.

The Wilderness Society, Friends of Fitzgerald National Park, the Fitzgerald Biosphere Group and Greenskills are also actively involved in the project.

Gondwana Link is situated in a remarkable and ancient landscape where 50 per cent of the plants and 70 species of animals are found nowhere else on earth. Reconnecting this country will improve its resilience and allow wildlife to move and adapt as temperatures rise with climate change.

Keith Bradby, Director of the Gondwana Link Co-ordination Unit, said, 'We're investing in

new business opportunities like carbon forests and using growing systems that mimic the vegetation that once occurred here.'

'We're protecting bush and replanting cleared land at a scale never achieved before in Australia,' he emphasised.

Chief Executive Officer of Bush Heritage Australia, Doug Humann, said, 'Not only are we protecting our gene banks for the future, but by supporting Gondwana Link individuals have an opportunity to be involved by making a tangible difference to cutting-edge conservation in Australia.'

'This is not just about the plants and animals, we are supporting human communities as well,' said Robert Lambeck, the CEO of Greening Australia in Western Australia. 'Gondwana Link is helping to put communities back into rural landscapes. The indigenous Noongar community are working with us on projects to develop their culture and create job opportunities.'

In late March, Bush Heritage Australia celebrated the acquisition of Scottsdale Reserve, a 1300 ha property south of Canberra. It marked the first major action under the Kosciusko to Coast reconnection project, which will create a wildlife corridor linking the snow gums to the sea. This nestles within the broader vision to create a 2800 km corridor from the Alps in New South Wales to Atherton in Queensland.

The Australian Government supported both projects through the National Reserve System and other programs under the Natural Heritage Trust.

● **Alexandra de Blas,**
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More information:
www.gondwanalink.org
www.bushheritage.org
National Reserve System
Programme:
www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/index.html