



## *Biodiversity on the edge*



Fragments of native bush cling to the outer edges of most of our state capitals. Their future? Precarious. And so is that of the native plants and animals that belong there.

Can we manage these patches of bush to meet the varying demands of the human population increasingly bearing down on them, and yet still retain some biodiversity?

A project in the Adelaide Hills may help provide some answers.

### **Caring for a hotspot**

In 2003 only 13 per cent of the Adelaide Hills still remained under native bush. Most of this was in fragments of less than 10 hectares. Because of the biodiversity value of bush remnants in this region and the level of threat they are under, the Australian Government identified the Mount Lofty Ranges as one of 15 National Biodiversity Hotspots.





Among the small fragments there are only a few large areas of native vegetation left. One of these is at Prospect Hill, where 250 hectares of native bush remain intact. This remnant is made up of six different properties, two of which are permanently protected by a conservation covenant, or Heritage Agreement.

In 2003, the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board received \$105,000 from the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust, which would help protect bush at places like Prospect Hill. An initiative known as the *'Prospect Hill Hotspots Project'* was developed with the help of a Bush Management Adviser.

### **Working together**

Many landowners have moved to the Prospect Hill region because of the natural environment, including the remaining bush remnants. Most appreciate that their patch is just one piece of a larger jigsaw puzzle and that looking after it needs cooperative action.

The Bush Management Adviser, Amelia Hurren, stresses that, "The value of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Landholders working in co-operation with their neighbours can really achieve great results. For example, controlling threats within



large areas of habitat reduces the risk of re-infestation of weeds and pests from unmanaged bush”.

Interested landholders, with support from the Adviser, developed a strategy with clear goals to help manage the key remnant at Prospect Hill to both conserve the bush and achieve their personal aims for their properties.

A flora survey was undertaken and key threats to the remnant identified. A management plan was developed for the remnant as a whole and individual property action plans produced to guide the actions of individual landholders.

The Prospect Hill Hotspot Group also formed partnerships with bodies such as Trees for Life and the Goolwa-Wellington Local Action Plan, and developed links with Australian and State Government officials.

In the first part of 2005, a training workshop and working bees on bushcare were held in conjunction with Trees for Life. During that time the landholders spent many hours caring for their bush. This effort was boosted with project funding for 90 days of paid labour provided by qualified bushcare contractors

Interested landholders have also been helped to achieve long term protection for bush on their land, by entering into conservation covenants.

## Challenges on the edge

Conserving biodiversity in bush remnants on the edge of metropolitan areas brings many challenges – physical and social.

In the Prospect Hill region, the Stringybark, Pink Gum and Cup Gum open forest and woodland ecosystems that have been under so much pressure from clearing, now face other problems.

Highly invasive weeds such as blackberry, gorse and bridal creeper threaten to choke out native understorey shrubs; foxes threaten the wildlife and the mainly cleared agricultural landscape that surrounds the bush creates a range of challenges for the long-term survival of the remnant. For example the rich pasture and multitude of farm dams surrounding the bush remnant encourage unnaturally high kangaroo numbers. This places added pressure on the bush where these native animals take shelter. The region’s Pink Gum woodland and heath vegetation association is identified as vulnerable in South Australia, which heightens the need for active management of the Prospect Hill remnant.

## Living at the edge

Apart from these specific threats, just the way people live on the metropolitan fringe brings its own set of challenges for conserving biodiversity.

The average turnover of lifestyle properties in the Adelaide Hills is seven years. This makes continuous management of an area such as Prospect Hill difficult and neighbouring landholders, as well as advisers and facilitators, need to regularly develop new relationships and bring newcomers on board.

Some landowners live elsewhere and visit their properties on weekends. They often work during the week and as a result are unavailable to attend daytime meetings to discuss community projects or actions. Getting people together for working bees, planning sessions and skill-building workshops therefore needs careful planning. With competing demands on their time and resources, the owners of lifestyle properties can find managing their own property a challenge. But working together with their neighbours and obtaining help from a facilitator or adviser, can help landholders find the level of support needed to maintain their interest and energy levels.

In an environment like the Adelaide Hills, not all landowners operate commercial agricultural enterprises. However, there are still some large commercial properties in the Hills, the owners of which can hold very different values and perspectives to their non-commercial neighbours. Potential conflicts can be resolved more easily when landholders are supported to work together.

Despite these difficulties, the Prospect Hill Hotspots Project is now expanding to include other key landowners in the region. Many now see that the way they manage their patch of bush has an influence on the wider regional picture.

Matt Bruer, who has been involved with the project since its inception, lives on his 35 hectare block, which he manages for wildlife conservation. The project has helped him identify understorey species including native orchids and grasses and how to protect them from invasion by weeds like blackberries, African daisies and bridal creeper. He is propagating native plants

to replace the weeds. Matt says, "Any help at all, or just advice on how to manage some aspects of the property, so it will be a richly inviting place of significance for future generations, is always greatly appreciated and valued."

Sugina and Paul Macdonald who own 41 hectares of bushland within the project area became involved to learn about bushland management and, in particular, to learn how to control the blackberries and gorse on their property. They live and work in Adelaide, but want to restore a bushland ecosystem on their property to attract native wildlife. As soon as they heard of the project they decided, "Yes, we want to be in it".



## Lessons learnt

- Working together to manage large remnants brings far greater biodiversity benefits than each individual managing their patch of bush separately.
- Generating a spirit of co-operation is important to make sure that the hard work of each landholder is complementary to the whole.
- Many people who buy lifestyle blocks with native bush have a keen interest in biodiversity conservation. The challenge is to translate this interest into action, when owners are often faced with significant competing demands on their time.
- Sharing knowledge and working with facilitators or advisers is critical. People may simply not know how important their patch of bush is in the context of the immediate region and in the broader landscape.
- Work to conserve biodiversity, such as undertaking weed control, is on-going. Supporting members to share their skills and build knowledge is vital for maintaining energy and enthusiasm in the long term.
- Working one-on-one with individual property owners to develop plans, which suit both the landowner and benefit the group is important. Flexibility in approach is the key.
- It is important for the group to seek out new residents and encourage them to become engaged.

Biodiversity encompasses the variety of all living things. Conserving biological diversity gives us the best chance of adapting to our rapidly changing world.

This leaflet is one of a series showing how farmers, Indigenous communities, local government and community groups have either initiated special biodiversity projects, or have successfully incorporated biodiversity protection into their work and daily lives.

We hope these success stories provide useful information and inspiration to others in similar situations.

For more information: [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au); or freecall 1800 552 008

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Front: Close up of bush remnant; Roland Breckwoldt. Echidna; Andrew Tatnell. Fantailed Cuckoo; Brian Furby. Bush remnant; Roland Breckwoldt.

P2: Bush remnant bordering cleared land; Roland Breckwoldt. Community field trip; Amelia Hurren.

P3: Bush Management Adviser, Amelia Hurren & SA biodiversity facilitator, Ben Hyde inspecting gorse infestation; Roland Breckwoldt.

Back: Aerial photo of region; Dept Environment & Heritage S.A.

Banner: Bark; Joseph Lafferty. Lichen; Peter Ranyard. Hand; Andrew Tatnell.