

SOS –Bungendore Region Travelling Stock Routes



Scarlet Robin (*Petroica boodang*) using planted enclosure at Brooks Hill Travelling Stock Reserve (photo by Jed Pearson).

In the Bungendore region, as with most of eastern Australia, grassy woodlands and their inhabitants are under threat. Fragmentation of habitat from land clearing and urbanisation, human intervention in woodland vegetational structural layers, introduced pests and weeds, and removal of habitat has put pressure on woodland ecosystems, particularly small woodland birds.

This seven year Saving Our Species Bungendore Region Travelling Stock Routes project is now nearing completion. Updating project measures and database reporting will be the focus of the remaining 18 months. The project aims to restore threatened grassy woodland ecological communities for woodland birds in the Bungendore Region in six chosen Travelling Stock Reserves (TSRs). Now largely vacant, TSRs are historic reserves drovers once used to move stock between towns. As such, many have become hotspots for biodiversity and a harbour for patches of remnant woodland as well as weeds and pests.

With much of the on-ground work completed earlier in the project, such as building ‘stepping-stone’ enclosures and planting otherwise under represented mid-story vegetation, the focus of 2023, the final funded year, was to solidify a legacy that would carry the project beyond its official completion.

Keeping the local community engaged was a principal area of focus. Volunteers including students from the Canberra Institute of Technology, members of the Small Farms Network and members of Carwoola Landcare, were all engaged to help with the project. Conservation Ecosystem Management CIT students helped us remove over 350kg of rubbish and planted 100 native grasses to improve

groundcover diversity in our target TSRs. The Small Farms Network and Carwoola Landcare partnered with us to present on woodland bird and grassy woodland habitat preservation and restoration workshops to their members and small landholders in the region. We leveraged the network's reach to expand the call for wildlife conservation activities, resulting in 14 new Land for Wildlife assessments done on small farms in Bungendore and surrounds. To combat the turnover rate of small landholders within the region and ensure longevity of preservation, we also created a booklet illustrating the methods of habitat restoration accessible in print and online for future landholders.

The *Wondrous Box-Gum Grassy Woodlands* colouring-in book, created in 2022 in alignment with the Australian curriculum, was further aligned with the NSW curriculum, carrying on from last year's successful education campaign. We identified additional opportunities to work alongside the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment's SoS Conservation Co-Funding Scheme Landscape -Species conservation - *Aprasia parapulchella* habitat in the Googong-Burra Region project to develop a primary-aged children's book series and curriculum aligned teaching package called *Luna the Stay-At-Home Cat*. The *Luna the Stay-At-Home Cat* series is aimed at educating the community on cat containment in the Bungendore region and has been made available to schools in Bungendore and the surrounding areas.

Weed control was another focus in 2023. Four TSRs were treated for a variety of noxious weeds, including Serrated tussock, St John's wort, Blackberry and Patterson's curse. Funding was put toward developing an integrated pest management plan including the use of chemical and non-chemical control methods to reduce the amount of herbicide used in environmentally sensitive areas. Over 100ha were treated using a mix of chemical application, steam weeding and manual removal and disposal.

As part of our final monitoring phase, local ecologists were recruited to conduct monitoring in TSRs. Experts in botany and ornithology conducted our final Rapid Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM) surveys on flora biodiversity and bird surveys in September with exciting results: Scarlet Robins were identified at two of the target TSR's, including a breeding pair using one of the projects planted 'stepping-stone' enclosures. Additional ad hoc surveys were then conducted in June, recording both Scarlet Robins and a Speckled Warbler. The long history of the project's dataset is of such significance, a local ecologist is undertaking data analysis toward a potential research paper. The paper, on the significance of reserves that contain natural grassland or grassland-woodland mosaic to native woodland bird species, is due to be released later in 2024 and will strengthen the project's legacy into the future.

The activities completed within the final year of funding, particularly the ongoing advocacy and creation of education materials, will contribute to the longevity of conservation of endangered woodland ecological communities for years to come.