

Nature conservation – practical applications

By SHARI MACDONALD

CABOOLTURE Shire Council is working in partnership with landowners to promote nature conservation on private lands. Council's voluntary nature conservation programs include Land for Wildlife and Voluntary Conservation agreements.

The council's Land for Wildlife program currently has 155 registered properties covering a total area of 993 hectares across the shire. Those involved in this program often choose to go a step further and register a Voluntary Conservation Agreement (VCA).

A VCA is a legally binding conservation agreement. This involves registering a statutory covenant onto the title of a property. It provides for ongoing 'in perpetuity' protection and improvement to the land's envi-

ronmental values, even when there is a change of owners.

Registered landowners receive a rates rebate and other environmental incentives and management assistance as part of a comprehensive management plan with Council.

To be eligible for a VCA landowners must demonstrate that the property supports significant vegetation, rare and threatened species, significant wildlife habitat, and contributes towards conservation on a broader environmental context (i.e. forms part of a vegetation corridor).

The council's VCA program is going strongly and now includes nine fully registered properties, covering a total area of 150 hectares. The program protects a variety of vegetation communities including rainforest, tall open eucalypt forest, melaleuca wetlands, casuarina

woodland, salt marsh and mangrove shrubland.

Properties with conservation covenants are not only managed for nature conservation purposes. It is feasible to incorporate residential use, agricultural practices, tourism and any other use that does not negatively impact upon the environmental values of the covenant area.

Caboolture Shire Council has just signed up two VCA properties, which provide an interesting contrast regarding land management practices. The Rocksberg case study highlights innovative ways to combine agricultural practices and conservation, while the Bellthorpe case study demonstrates residential living combined with nature conservation.

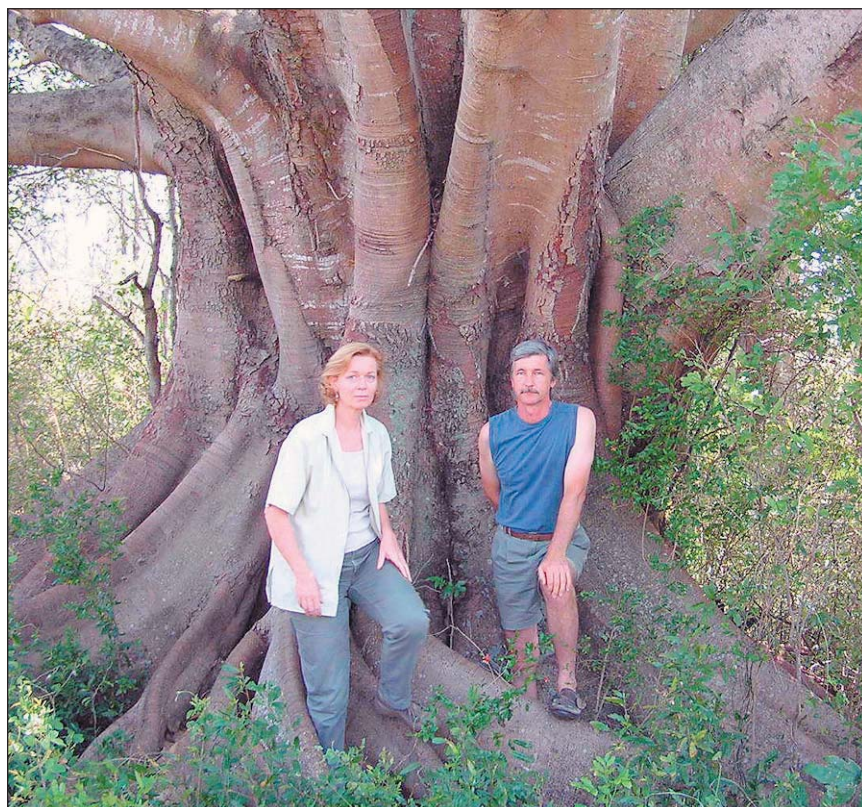
Rocksberg – Balancing agriculture and conservation

The vast forests of Brazil and the rolling hills of Rocksberg might seem a world away. However, they have one important thing in common – a need to preserve the natural environment.

A partnership between the council and Dr Rainer Haase and Dr Ulrike Nolte, landholders who both worked as ecologists at a Brazilian university before coming to Australia, has resulted in more than 10 hectares of land in Rocksberg being permanently protected under a voluntary conservation agreement.

Previous land uses on the property included banana plantations and cattle grazing. Parts of the property, particularly the upper slopes, have previously been cleared and now support natural regrowth.

Vegetation on the property is mapped as tall open forest generally with Grey Ironbark and Grey Gum. The property provides habitat for a number of rare and vulnerable species including the green-thighed frog, whirring tree frog, glossy black cockatoo, koala, culturally significant echidna and migratory rainbow bee-eater.



Dr Rainer Haase and Dr Ulrike Nolte on their Rocksberg VCA property.



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The vegetation on the property connects with the stream-side vegetation fringing the Caboolture River, one of the shire's drinking water catchments. The enhancement of the VCA area will maintain the integrity of both the stream-side area and the vegetated buffer connecting with the river. Surrounding properties to the south-east provide good vegetation linkages, demonstrating a high level of habitat connectivity and wildlife corridors at a local scale. In total, the connecting vegetation covers approximately 140ha across Rocksberg.

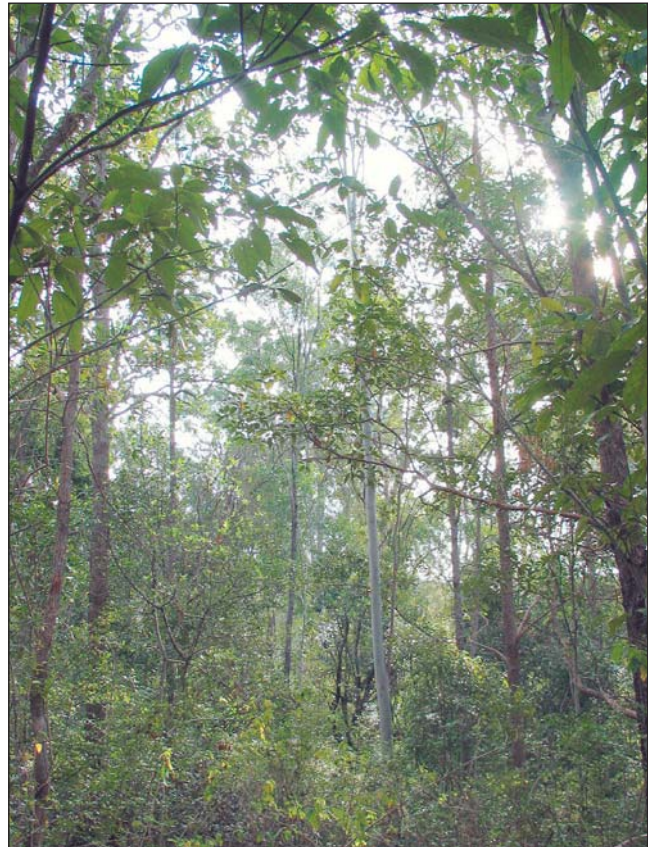
Currently the main land uses include small-scale coffee and papaw plantations, a residential dwelling and conservation area. Plantations on the property are managed as organic crops, certified with Australian Certified Organics. Herbicides are not used on the property. Both Rainer and Ulrike have found that organic farming and conservation are complementary uses, as the principals of organic farming encourage the protection of biodiversity and enhancement of soil quality.

Lantana, ochona and guava are the main weed species present on the VCA property. Weed management is done mechanically and although this requires hard work, the results have been quite positive. There is, however, still a long way to go. Revegetation works are concentrated in gully areas with additional supplementary planting in open forest areas to assist with weed control.

Rainer and Ulrike plan to expand their agricultural practices as well as continuing weed management and revegetation works in order to enhance the quality of native vegetation and encourage native fauna.

ABOVE: Shari Macdonald, Nerida Smith, Siobhan Bland, councillor Chippendale on Nerida Smith's property at Bellthorpe.

RIGHT: Sclerophyll forest at Rocksberg.



Photographs courtesy of Caboolture Shire Council

Bellthorpe – backyard nature sanctuary

Moving from regional Queensland to 'the big smoke' did not mean losing touch with nature for Nerida Smith, especially now that she owns her own slice of paradise in Bellthorpe.

A voluntary conservation agreement (VCA) between Caboolture Shire Council and Ms Smith has resulted in 13 hectares of land in Bellthorpe being permanently protected.

Previous land uses on the property were restricted to residential purposes. However, much of the surrounding land has been cleared for grazing and dairy farming.


Surrounding properties provide effective vegetation linkages, providing habitat connectivity and wildlife corridors at a local scale. At a broader landscape level this linkage forms part of an extensive tract of vegetation of state conservation significance covering 14,698ha – the Mooloolah Bioregional Corridor, an east-west bioregional corridor connecting the hinterland ranges to coastal lowlands.

The closed and ecotonal forests of this area have the potential to support a variety of rare and endan-

gered fauna, including the cascade treefrog, marbled frogmouth and the grey goshawk as well as important frugivorous bird species, such as brown cuckoo-dove and fruit-doves, which disperse seeds through the forest.

Lantana and mysore thorn are the main weeds on the property, however, infestations are small. Properties to the north have been substantially cleared, with some weed infestation present in disturbed areas.

Revegetation works are limited to additional plantings between cleared areas (including residential dwelling) and the VCA area, where appropriate, and supplementary plantings within open forest areas and on rainforest fringes to assist with weed control.

Ms Smith continues to encourage surrounding property owners to adopt nature conservation land management techniques. Her future plans for the property involve continued fauna monitoring in order to get to know 'the locals' better. 

Contact: For more information contact the council's customer service centre, phone: (07) 5420 0100 or visit the council's website at www.caboolture.qld.gov.au.