



# Growing Tarcutta

Bush Heritage's purchase of a parcel of land adjacent to its Tarcutta Hills Reserve will extend the protection of habitat for Swift Parrots and other woodland species.

STORY BY BRON WILLIS

If you were to step foot in the woodlands on Bush Heritage's newest land purchase in south-west New South Wales, you would see why the old Mugga Ironbarks there inspire Healthy Landscapes Manager Brenda Duffy to imagine how this landscape once looked.

Their gnarly trunks are weathered and worn from years of enduring the changing environment around them.

These old trees of the Australian bush stand on a 288 hectare parcel of land on Wiradjuri country that will, in late 2020, be incorporated into Bush Heritage's existing 432 hectare Tarcutta Hills Reserve.

The new block features a rare, large and healthy example of a critically endangered ecological community called 'White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodlands and Grasslands', which provides habitat for woodland birds such as Swift Parrots, Diamond Firetails and several species of robin.

When Brenda first visited Tarcutta Hills in 2018, she found it hard to imagine a piece of bushland hidden amongst the parched farmland rolling by outside her car windows. Almost 90 per cent of Australia's temperate woodlands have been cleared since

European settlement, leading to the decline of dozens of woodland bird species, but Tarcutta Hills and its new extension have survived relatively unscathed.

"I was amazed to see how intact the woodlands on Tarcutta are," says Brenda. "It's a very rich, healthy part of the landscape, in very good condition with a diverse understorey."

The reserve is a haven for many seasonal migratory birds seeking stepping stones of habitat as they move across the landscape. Brenda loves to hear their chorus when she stops to take a break during her visits to the reserve.

"There are so many lovely spots to just sit and listen," she says. "You slowly attune your ear to the chatter of woodland birds. You listen for those sounds and try to distinguish the birdcalls amidst the other sounds of the forest."

The need to protect more woodland habitat in the Tarcutta region was something that Senior Ecologist Dr Matt Appleby and the Bush Heritage team had long identified as a conservation priority.

"For years we had been asking the question, 'how can we increase the protection of habitat around Tarcutta Hills?'" says Matt.





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“Thanks to our good relationships with the local community, this new property was brought to our attention and we acted straight away.”

While the extension to Tarcutta Hills is in good condition, there is a small area of cleared land in its north-east corner that will be revegetated to help woodland birds move more safely through the landscape.

“Imagine a Flame Robin trying to forage in another piece of habitat. It needs that consistent vegetation cover to keep it safe from eagles, Currawongs and Butcher Birds that might predate on it as it flits from one place to the next,” says Matt.

Sometimes even just one tree can provide a stepping-stone between two wooded areas separated by cleared land. This is where the revegetation, planned to occur after the land purchase is settled later this year, will help.

“We’ll be planting species that provide roosts and food for the critically endangered Swift Parrot and other woodland birds,” says Matt.

If you look further afield, the farmland pays tribute to what could have happened here.

“Around Tarcutta, much of the land is cleared, so it’s great to see this extension of the reserve protected forever for so many threatened species,” says Matt.

*Bush Heritage acknowledges the generosity of Brian and Diana Snape, who, together with other supporters, made the purchase of this critical addition to Tarcutta Hills possible. Revegetation on this new addition is supported by the New South Wales Government's Saving our Species Co-Investment Grants Program.* ●

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Senior ecologist Dr Matt Appleby on Tarcutta Hills Reserve, Wiradjuri country, NSW. Photo by Annette Ruzicka