

Impact Report 2024



**TRUST FOR
NATURE**



Message from our CEO

For many years, both nature and science have been telling us that the next decade will be critical in mitigating the impacts of climate change. Here in Victoria, our communities have already felt the devastation that unprecedented climate change can cause. Out of control fires and inundating floods have ravaged towns and beloved landscapes. But, here in Victoria, we are also privy to one of the best solutions we have: nature. We know that the more we protect nature, the more it protects us. Trust for Nature has been doing this for over fifty years, and now we find ourselves at the next chapter, where we know we have to do more and we have to do it now.

I grew up with my feet in the dirt, my heart in salt water, and learning from my parents just how amazing our natural world is. Now, I often say I have my dream job, because every day I witness the superpowers that will help us look after it. We have the ability to protect land forever and we have a whole community of people striving to make that happen.

As I write this, I've spent the morning on Dja Dja Wurrung Country in central Victoria with a landholder who has been on his farm for thirty years. This man, while not a conservationist by trade, knows that ecosystems only survive when diversity is held together and has been making practical differences to protect it on his land. As we toured his property, he pointed out different mosses and tree types and shrubs with a glint of love in his eye. It's a glint that I see every day in landholders from all walks of life. They know their properties better than anyone else and it brings them great pride to take care of them. It is this love that will help us overcome some of the sobering challenges ahead.

The 2021 Australian State of the Environment Report was unequivocal. The overall health of the environment is deteriorating, driven largely by climate change, habitat loss, invasive species, pollution and resource extraction.

Globally and locally we have ambitious and necessary targets of protecting 30% of land and waters by 2030. These targets can sometimes feel abstract, but at Trust for Nature we know we can bring the practical to the abstract. 62% of Victoria is private land. That's 62% of the state where we can expand the area of habitat protected through private conservation.

For Trust for Nature, it has been a productive and invigorating few years since our last impact report. As you read the following pages, you will see conservation in action. We now have 1,600+ covenants and over 30 reserves, protecting more than 114,000+ hectares in Victoria. This is habitat for vital – and threatened – native species such as the Plains-wanderer and Leadbeater's Possum.

Our staff have been on the ground restoring land that has been cleared for human use. And everywhere I look there is collaboration. I'm particularly proud of our partnerships with First Peoples. We have been alongside them, at the helm of significant land transfers and ranger programs that are empowering young Indigenous leaders.

Personally, this has been an important journey, and for the organisation, it is an area where we are continuing to learn and do better. We are learning to listen to First Peoples to deepen our understanding of the intrinsic and invaluable role they have as custodians of this land. We are learning to walk alongside Traditional Owners, so that we can stride together into the future. As part of these efforts, I'm thrilled to report Ash Bartley joining our executive as First Peoples Partnership Manager, a role that will guide and advise on our relationships with First Peoples.

And this is where we find ourselves, blessed with the calibre of people we have walking towards a future in which Victoria's nature is valued, protected and thriving.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to our staff, donors and partners. Thank you for making all of this possible.

Corinne Proske
Trust for Nature
Chief Executive Officer



Since 2020, we have:



Signed 132 conservation covenants



Protected 7,500 ha forever



Sold 11 properties through our Revolving Fund



Protected 640 ha through our Revolving Fund



Protected 1,432 ha through offset covenants



Developed 383 management plans



Engaged 2,505 landholders



Visited 546 properties



Map of properties protected through conservation covenants and Trust for Nature.

- Conservation covenants
- Trust for Nature properties/reserves

Protecting habitat across Victoria forever

Protecting habitat is the key to safeguarding not only wildlife and plants, but the health of our natural environment more broadly. Through protecting and improving the quality of forests, grasslands, wetlands and woodlands, we're contributing to the health of waterways and air, and addressing the causes and impacts of climate change.

While Victoria has an excellent network of public reserves and national parks, these are not enough to secure the future of our wildlife and plants, particularly threatened species that depend on habitat found on private land. With over two-thirds of the state privately owned, safeguarding habitat on private land makes a vital contribution to the overall protected area network.

At Trust for Nature we're guided by our Statewide Conservation Plan, our scientific strategy which identifies the areas of habitat on private land that are the highest priority for permanent protection.

Since 2020, we've been able to secure over 7,500 ha of habitat, permanently protected through conservation covenants agreed with private landholders. More than half of the habitat we secured is at risk of extinction.

Two of these priority habitats are grassy woodlands and native grasslands, which are threatened habitats themselves and home to species at critical risk of extinction such as the Diamond Firetail and Plains-wanderer. Since 2020, we've been able to protect another 2,148 ha of woodlands and 421 ha of grasslands.

In the past financial year, 2,400 ha of habitat were protected under 51 conservation covenants, and we thank the landholders who volunteered to safeguard their properties, as well as supporters and partners who enabled this protection. We were able to improve the future for 34 species of threatened animals such as the Fat-tailed Dunnart and South-east Red-tailed Black-cockatoo through protecting and managing habitat, and controlling feral predators and weeds. We were able to secure unprotected populations of two nationally threatened plants, the Red Swainson-pea and Matted Flax Lily.

Habitat continues to be destroyed or degraded in Victoria at an alarming rate. Our analysis shows that nearly all of the habitat we protected over the past year has a medium-to-high risk of being lost over the next 50 years if it weren't safeguarded. But, supported by the passion and dedication of landholders, every patch of habitat we can permanently protect now makes an enduring contribution to conservation.

Dr Doug Robinson, Chief Conservation Scientist

Protecting the critically endangered Plains-wanderer

Location: North West Area

Once widespread from Victoria to Queensland, the unique, ground-dwelling Plains-wanderer is now critically endangered with only 250-1,000 estimated to survive in the wild. Years of land clearing have decimated more than 90% of its natural habitat and restricted it to small strongholds of arid grasslands in southeastern Australia. Over 80% of the remaining native grassland in northern Victoria occurs on private land. Through covenants and reserves, Trust for Nature has so far been able to secure 2,000 ha of Plains-wanderer habitat, on top of enabling protection of 3,000 ha that is now part of the public reserve system. With a massive injection of support from a pool of donors we will add 500 ha of additional covenants in 2023-24. Working closely alongside Traditional Owners and landholders we are actively managing and protecting this important habitat for the Plains-wanderer.



“Ours is one of the best privately-owned parcels of land for this bird in the world. It’s a little bit of paradise for them, and I get a really nice feeling knowing that I’m protecting them. Protecting the land hasn’t changed the way I farm, so protecting additional land with conservation covenants is a no-brainer.”

Andy McGillivray, farmer and covenantor protecting Plains-wanderer habitat

A brighter future for birds of the bush

Location: North East Area

The flash of a green-plumed Swift Parrot or the yellow tail of a Regent Honeyeater were once common sights in Victorian forests, however, significant habitat loss has rendered both endangered. Their populations have shrunk to an estimated 1,500-2,000 and 300-400 respectively. Fortunately, landholders in the northeast of the state want to give them a brighter future. After five years of work, 250 ha of habitat has been protected forever. Another 750 ha has been managed to improve habitat with 64 landholders planting 44,000 bird-friendly trees and shrubs as part of the Bush for Birds project, a partnership between Trust for Nature and the North East Catchment Management Authority supported by the Australian Government.



Image: Chris Tzaros

Black Summer Bushfire 2019–20 recovery

Location: South East Area

The Black Summer Bushfires of 2019-20 devastated local communities and the environment. Over 1.5 million ha of land burnt in Victoria and over 40 Trust for Nature conservation covenants were affected by the fires. In the aftermath, despite being challenged by the pandemic, we engaged impacted landholders in conservation by undertaking actions such as weed control, fencing, feral animal control, nest-box installation, and revegetation. Trust for Nature supported landholders by delivering webinars on the impacts of fire, regeneration, and priority management actions. In addition, landholders were supported to apply for grants, which led to 488 ha of high-quality remnant vegetation being protected by conservation covenants. The relief of protecting these refugia is evident and in some cases, fragile species such as the Long-nosed Potoroo have been recorded in areas where they weren't previously known to occur.



Faunal emblems for forest protection

Location: South Central Area

Victoria's faunal emblem, the Leadbeater's Possum is critically endangered. It is restricted to small remnant areas of old-growth ash forests in Victoria's central highlands, with some researchers predicting habitat loss could lead to its extinction within decades. Enter: the Moora Moora cooperative, an intentional community on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Country. After the possum was found on their 180 ha property for the first time in 2020, its 30 households came together to protect the possum and its high-quality habitat with a conservation covenant. The property also provides more protected habitat for threatened species such as the Lace Monitor and Powerful Owl. Elsewhere around Melbourne, Trust for Nature secured another 41 ha of habitat for the critically endangered Helmeted Honeyeater, our other faunal emblem, which has now been included in the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve.

Leveraging support to generate land legacy

Location: Statewide

People are the backbone of Trust for Nature and one who has been part of our community since the 1980s is Janet Limb. On top of Janet and her husband George being early adopters of conservation covenants, Janet has generously supported the organisation for 20 years through the Limb Family Foundation, which most recently donated \$1 million via the Leaving a Land Legacy Project. This four-year initiative recognises that landholders with properties within our priority landscapes are critical to helping ecosystems and species survive in the context of climate change. With the incredible support of the Leaving a Land Legacy project, Trust for Nature has been able to leverage our in-depth knowledge of priority locations, to work with landholders to actively protect over 2,490 ha across 40 properties. We thank Janet and the Limb Family Foundation for their generosity and dedication to conservation.

“The outstanding success of this project demonstrates an enormous demand for Trust for Nature’s services and the key to its success has been the thorough engagement that the Leaving a Land Legacy project has supported. It has enabled Trust or Nature staff to listen to people’s stories of protection, and to understand the importance of legacy and what it means to them.”

Adam Blake, Area Manager, South West

Collaborating to care for Country

At the heart of our work lies a commitment to meaningful engagement and respect for Indigenous knowledge and perspectives when caring for Country.

Our approach has been guided by principles of cultural sensitivity, reciprocity, and mutual respect. By actively involving First Peoples stakeholders in decision-making processes, we want to ensure that our initiatives are aligned with Indigenous priorities and aspirations.

We celebrate this through the approved amendments to the Conservation Covenant deed, acknowledging and facilitating Traditional Owners' cultural practices on private conservation land. The updates recognise Traditional Owners as custodians of Victoria's land, encouraging engagement in land management and access pathways. These changes aim to foster collaboration and self-determination while ensuring conservation values are upheld. This is a small but important step to enabling opportunities for First Peoples through our work.

As we reflect on our achievements, we recognise the ongoing journey towards reconciliation and the importance of continued dialogue and partnership with First Peoples. We remain committed to upholding the rights and aspirations of Indigenous peoples and look forward to furthering our collaborative efforts in the years to come.

Thank you to all our partners for their invaluable contributions, and to our supporters and stakeholders for their continued commitment to Indigenous engagement and empowerment. Through collaborative efforts, we will continue to foster meaningful relationships built on trust, transparency, and shared goals.

Ash Bartley, First Peoples Partnership Manager



Ned's Corner to be returned to original custodians

Ned's Corner in the far north-west of Victoria is Ngintait Country. Since 2002, we have been working to transform the 30,000 ha former grazing station from degraded land to a haven for native habitat and threatened species. We have treated 29,000 rabbit warrens, planted more than 20,000 trees and shrubs, implemented ongoing feral fox, rabbit and weed control, established some 5,000 hectares of a herbivore and predator enclosure, and worked with the First People of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation to protect cultural heritage. Through our work together, we had the chance to listen, and learn what our role could be and it became clear to us that we had an opportunity to facilitate reconciliation and self-determination – we could hand the land back. Since then we have been working with the First People of the Millewa-Mallee's Safe Haven Rangers to manage the property, and today Ned's Corner is set to be the largest conservation reserve returned to Traditional Owners in Victoria – demonstrating what best-practice conservation can look like when people come together to restore and protect the land.



Empowering young Indigenous leaders

The Warreen Beek Rangers program was borne out of recognition that First Peoples have invaluable knowledge of caring for Country and that young Indigenous leaders are imperative for protecting and preserving natural and cultural heritage on their lands. The program provides accredited training and employment pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and has become a testament to community-driven conservation. Over seven years, over 40 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have received training and accreditation, strengthening cultural continuity through the intergenerational transfer of Indigenous knowledge and language. This next generation of conservation leaders worked with Elders and ecologists – often on Country – to learn skills such as cultural burning, midden protection, plant identification, and threatened species management. Two graduates were directly employed by Trust for Nature, and the Indigenous-ranger footprint expanded, with female-led initiatives driving the program's success.

The Warreen Beek Rangers program is delivered through a partnership between Trust for Nature, the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Trust for Nature and Holmesglen Institute and supported by the Port Phillip Bay Fund



Images: Annette Ruzicka



A historical land transfer at Phillip Island

Eight ha is being returned to Bunurong hands at Rhyll, Millowl (or Phillip Island as it is commonly known) in the first land handback to Bunurong Traditional Owners in 180 years. This site at Rhyll Inlet, which is one of the most significant sites for migratory birds in Australia and a globally significant wetland under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, is rich in cultural significance for Bunurong people and best cared for with their leadership. Trust for Nature made an agreement with the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation for an initial 12 months' access to the land. They have been successfully managing and caring for Country since. The property was donated to Trust for Nature in 2020 and is protected with a conservation covenant.



Stronger cultural recognition in covenant deeds

In our ongoing journey towards reconciliation, land justice and stronger recognition of First Peoples, we updated our deed for conservation covenants to be more explicit about Traditional Owners' custodianship of Country. After several years of consultation, the new deed provides more opportunities for cultural practices on covenanted properties, such as cultural burning, where there is mutual consent by landholders and Traditional Owners. It acknowledges Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, recognises their unique ability to care for Country and aims to promote new pathways for collaboration, access to land and cultural practices, where there is shared capacity and will to do so.



Local action for global impact

Trust for Nature is leading the way on delivering local conservation action with global benefits, working with partners to achieve landscape-scale change.

Nature markets are developing rapidly. The impetus is coming from multiple directions, including the international Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) framework finalised in 2023 for businesses to assess, report and act on nature impact. The Australian Government has announced its development of a Nature Repair Market to drive private investment in voluntary nature markets, and promising a 2024 Nature Positive Summit in Sydney hosted by the federal Minister for the Environment.

Already Trust for Nature is receiving interest from industry to understand how it can practically reduce impact on nature through the use of nature markets, both regulated and voluntary, including new partnerships to deliver green building credits. BushBank, our partnership with Cassinia Environmental and the Victorian Government, is demonstrating how co-investment can deliver impact at scale.

Trust for Nature is well placed to build on the momentum of these substantial shifts in the nature markets landscape thanks to decades of experience in biodiversity and related markets, beginning in 1989 with our innovative Revolving Fund, which purchases, protects and resells unique and important conservation properties, driving a continuous cycle of investment. Since 2020, the fund has facilitated protection of 640 ha of habitat forever. Further, Trust for Nature's extensive experience in the regulated offsets market, both state and national, has assisted in the delivery of habitat protection, restoration and management.

In the coming years we expect a substantial increase in private investment in nature markets, particularly to reduce the impact on nature from their activities, including through the implementation of the TNFD. In parallel, we are seeing increasing interest from all sectors for developing and delivering solutions that bring together government, philanthropy and private industry to co-invest in nature repair. Local improvements can be made at individual sites, but conservation at landscape-scale will only be possible through such partnerships.

Trust for Nature is positioned at this intersection, and ready to work with partners to deliver a step-change in nature conservation.

Dr Mat Hardy, Nature Markets Manager, Trust for Nature

Breaking ground with BushBank

Land sustains life for plants, animals and people. But in Victoria, more than half of native vegetation has been cleared and many hands are needed to bring it back. In partnership with Cassinia Environmental and DEECA, we're restoring and protecting more than 20,000 ha across the state under the Victorian Government's \$77 million BushBank program. Restoration has already commenced on 650 ha of land, including our first pilot BushBank Revolving Fund site at Stuart Mill. We assisted the purchase of the 155 ha property, which will be protected with a conservation covenant, restored and on-sold. Now, new properties are in progress and, ultimately, millions of native trees and shrubs will be planted.



Image: Ben Williams



Providing refuges for wildlife in a warming climate

Climate change poses the greatest long-term threat to our precious biodiversity. Shifting rainfall patterns, sea level rise, increasing temperatures, and extreme events like fires and floods are a grave threat to ecosystems and wildlife. Our Statewide Conservation Plan identifies the areas of habitat that are most important to protect to help nature adapt to these changes, with a target of protecting these climate refuges of 5,000 ha by 2030. We have already protected 2,100 ha, including rainforests, riverine and coastal habitat that will give wildlife the best chance. Following the Black Summer Bushfires of 2019-20, our South East Area team, supported by the Australian Government, protected 450 ha of habitat on private land through conservation covenants and worked to control introduced species across 3,700 ha. The team also assisted the nationwide Fire and Weeds Monitoring Evaluation and Research (MER) project by collecting on-ground data about how ecosystems respond to fire in burnt and unburnt plots.



Paul Dettman's restorative way

Restoring the land by planting trees and improving the health of ecosystems removes carbon from the atmosphere and stores it in plants and soils. It is a way to mitigate climate change and increase ecosystems' capacity to respond to climate change, and Trust for Nature's unique capability to protect habitat in perpetuity ensures that those improvements are embedded and protected forever. Just one example: Paul Dettman's business Cassinia Environmental has protected and restored over 15,000 hectares across Victoria, absorbing an estimated 1.5 million tonnes or more of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Paul has now protected 40 properties with Trust for Nature covenants, making that land, and the CO₂ it stores, permanently protected.

Saltmarsh for rising seas

At Corner Inlet and Nooramunga, migratory shorebirds such as the critically endangered Orange-bellied Parrot, fish and invertebrates frolic in saltmarsh among salt-tolerant succulents, sedges and grasses. This lively coastal ecosystem is not just habitat, it is also a nature-based solution for climate change, which will become increasingly important as sea levels rise. It prevents coastal erosion and sequesters large amounts of carbon dioxide. However, it is threatened in Australia, found on land inundated by tides. Trust for Nature protects 220 hectares of saltmarsh at Corner Inlet and Nooramunga and in 2020-2023 worked with landholders, Traditional Owners and partner organisations to maintain and improve its habitat through livestock exclusion and weed control, enabling the saltmarsh to store carbon rather than release it.

Trust for Nature's work in Corner Inlet and Nooramunga is supported by the Revolving Fund, a generous donor, partner organisations and landholders.



“We’re giving coastal ecosystems the chance to move inland as sea levels rise. By protecting a range of high-quality habitat within and buffering the Saltmarsh ecosystem, we can allow plants and wildlife to adapt.”

**John Hick, Senior Project Officer,
Trust for Nature**



Biodiversity offsets to keep nature in balance

When land has to be cleared to make way for infrastructure, we step in to secure biodiversity offsets under the Victorian and Commonwealth regulated biodiversity offset market. To date, we have secured over 3,800 ha of land through on-title offset agreements. These offset agreements must meet our covenanting criteria, which we then register on title under the Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972. We then support landholders to implement their offset management plans and then maintain their site in perpetuity, with a dedicated stewardship team that helps landholders to protect and enhance the biodiversity that is unique to their plots. We also facilitate the registration of biodiversity offset credits and monitor compliance.

For more than 50 years Trust for Nature has been working with landholders to protect important habitat on private land forever. Together with conservation covenants (more than 1,600) and reserves, we have protected more than 114,000 ha across Victoria. We couldn't do this without the support of the public and philanthropic organisations. To help support our work go to trustfornature.org.au/donate







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www.trustfornature.org.au

Image: Ben Williams