

LAND FOR WILDLIFE has a new pair of (unofficial) feet on the ground - in the form of World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Woodlands Conservation Officer Richard McLellan. Richard is heading a WWF conservation project centred on the Wheatbelt region aimed at 'working with the community to manage and protect tall eucalypt woodlands'.

The 'Woodland Watch' project aims to enhance the conservation of tall eucalypt woodlands in the western and central Wheatbelt - particularly those on privately-owned land - through the negotiation and implementation of a range of conservation strategies and incentives. These include conservation covenants, local Shire rebates, voluntary management agreements and, of course, *Land for Wildlife*.

Eucalypt woodland conservation is nationally recognised as being of high priority, and nowhere more so than in Western Australia's agricultural region, where tall woodland communities have been extensively cleared. Good-quality woodlands with a dominant overstorey of *Eucalyptus salmonophloia* (Salmon Gum), *E. longicornis* (Red Morrel), *E. salubris* (Gimlet) and *E. loxophleba* ssp. *loxophleba* (York Gum) are few and far between. What is more, these four woodlands are grossly under-represented in existing conservation reserves, only 3% of the original woodland vegetation communities remain. Maintaining this small amount and, where possible, extending the area, is a key goal behind Woodland Watch.

In the early phase of the project, examples of the four 'target' woodland communities on private and non State-agency land are being identified. This is done through a desk-top survey of spatial information (remote sensing and GIS data); researching published literature and available vegetation databases; and through consultation with the community. The latter has largely involved meetings with field-based conservation professionals, but feedback has also been sought

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WWF FOCUSING ON WHEATBELT WOODLANDS



Richard studying the rare *Acacia merrickiae* in a salmon gum woodland at Kellerberrin.

directly from landholders through appeals made in local newspapers.

The dual outcomes of these consultations have been the collection of information about woodland locations and, at the same time, increasing public support for their identification and conservation.

With the permission of landholders, the sites identified through the processes outlined above are being visited to assess their condition, botanical composition and conservation significance. The next phase of the project involves carrying out botanical surveys, collaboratively with staff from the Western Australian Herbarium and, wherever possible, with volunteers from regional herbaria. The field surveys will provide important data on the floristic composition of the 'target' woodlands as well as their vegetation associations and distribution.

The feedback from these surveys is expected to have a significant impact on landholders' level of awareness of the complexity of their

'patches of bush'. It is hoped that this raised awareness will also flow-on to the wider community through the publication of important and relevant findings of the project.

A follow-up meeting is arranged with the landholder to discuss their further participation in the project. They will be provided with 'best practice' management information - from a wide variety of sources - as well as information on agencies and programs which are able to provide advice and assistance for future management of their woodland. The *Land for Wildlife* program is prominent among these. The goal of this phase of the project is to secure the woodlands into some form of long-term conservation planning and management.

In addition to the *Land for Wildlife*, other options which may be presented to landholders include:

- ▶ Conservation covenants;
- ▶ Conservation Agreement with WWF;
- ▶ Rate rebates;
- ▶ Land acquisition for conservation reserves;
- ▶ Australian Bush Heritage Fund;
- ▶ Bush Brokers;
- ▶ Bush Bank; and, if relevant,
- ▶ Threatened Species (and Ecological Communities) Network.

Landholders will be encouraged to develop long-term management plans and perhaps adopt one of these conservation incentive and management schemes. This would either help protect their woodland or to obtain a financial return through selling the land while, at the same time, securing its future conservation.

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