

## MEMBERS PAGE

### KITTO 50,000: NATURE 5,000,000!

*Avril Baxter and Grantham Kitto*

Johnson and Grantham Kitto spent many weekends and holidays on the family farm *Euretta* south of Kojonup. Their grandmother, now 104 years old, reminisces about the quality of the bushland and native animals around *Euretta* especially in the sheoak forest and around the creekline on the property. However when Johnson and Grantham took over running the property in 1998 things had changed for the worse.

*Euretta* is near the rim of the Blackwood and Gordon River catchments. Clearing of vegetation for agriculture has meant that not all of the incoming rainfall is utilized by the annual crops and pastures and is infiltrating down through the soil to become groundwater. Rock bars cross the creek, dividing the groundwater system up into small basins which are filling up with water. An additional problem is that as the groundwater rises it re-dissolves salts that are stored in the soil profile and when the groundwater gets to within 1-2 metres of the surface, surface tension draws the water up through gaps in the soil particles, just like a sponge

sitting on a wet draining board. As the water evaporates it leaves salt crystals on the surface which in winter wash downstream. This rise in the watertable has resulted in trees dying near the creekline and saline water flowing out of the property.

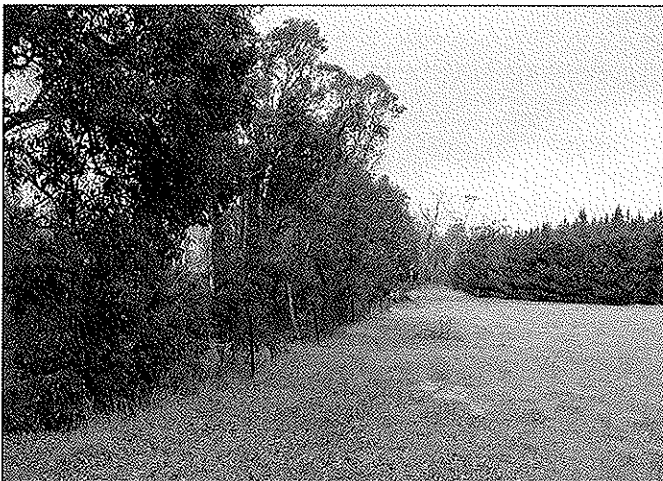
Thanks to their uncle Brian Warburton preserving large areas of native vegetation, the creekline bush is connected to sheoak forest on granite outcrops and eucalypt woodlands on laterite breakaways. This connectivity brought the bushland to the attention of the Blackwood Basin Group, when in 1999 they ranked remnant vegetation within the Catchment. Through a desktop analysis, bushland was ranked according to its size, its area to boundary ratio, the proportion of that type of vegetation remaining in the conservation estate, the proportion of the remnant exposed to increasing salinity, the distance to nearest nature reserve or national park and the number of remnants forming a link. As this patch of bush ranked highly, the Kittos were approached to verify its quality and to see if they needed any help with its

management. Funds were available for fencing, seeds and seedlings.

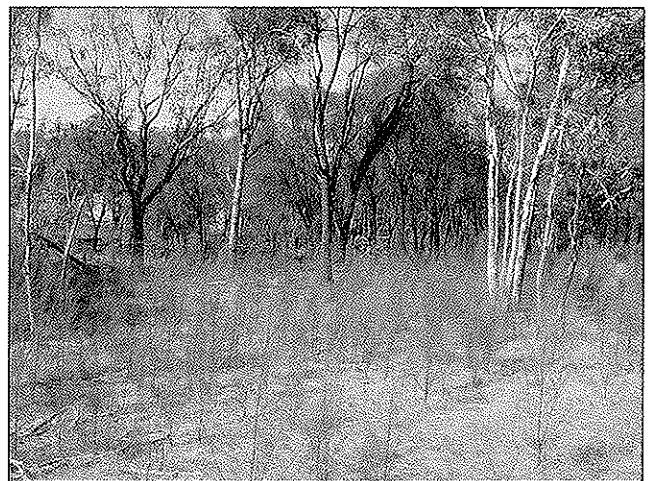
Johnson and Grantham jumped at the opportunity and looked further to see how best they could reverse the downward trend in their creekline in a short space of time.

The other program they chose was the Share Farming Scheme with the Forest Products Commission (FPC). Through this partnership with the FPC, radiata pine and biodiversity plantings were established in 2000. Under the agreement, the farmer fences to exclude stock from the plantation area and maintains the firebreaks, and the FPC establishes and manages the plantation to achieve commercial returns for the farmer and FPC. In 2000, incentives for farmers included planting 10% of the commercial area to biodiversity plantings or spending the equivalent money on fencing to protect remnant vegetation, plus a participation payment of \$200/ha and a 30% cropshare.

As the areas chosen for planting pines were sandy slopes at the top of the catchment on either side of the creekline, the Kittos saw that these



*At the top of the catchment, young pine trees butt on to natural regeneration within the fenced off creekline.*



*A field of regenerating sheoaks.*



## **Kittos'**

two programs could merge and give them the quick result they were chasing.

Within a couple of years, 52.2 hectares of pines were planted on the sandy soils, 5 hectares of biodiversity plantings provided "infill" between bushland areas, salt tolerant plants were planted around scalds and the whole 150 hectares fenced from stock.

It was a lot of work, but with funding assistance from the Blackwood Basin Group and successful plantings undertaken by the Forest Products Commission, a significant area was covered, which the brothers admit they could never have done in such a short time by themselves.

And it paid off! The pines are growing successfully and have been used to protect stock in extreme weather conditions. The amount of recharge into the groundwater

has slowed dramatically and there has been a tremendous amount of regeneration in all vegetation associations along the creekline.

With revegetation and regeneration proving so successful Johnson and Grantham have measured an improvement in the quality of water in the creek and some previously salty dams within the treated area. As Grantham remarks "It is amazing how quickly natural regeneration has taken place along the creekline after the fences were put up, nature has been more successful than we would have been had we hand planted seedlings in these areas".

Johnson is now planning the next project - the protection of fauna still present in these bushlands and encouraging other native animals back into the area. Look out foxes, cats, and rabbits!

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*Avril Baxter is LFWO at Narrogin*