

## THE AUSTRALIAN OWLET-NIGHTJAR, A FEATHERED GEM OF THE GRASSY EUCALYPT WOODLANDS

Author: Trevor Pescott,  
*Geelong Field Naturalists Club*

The eucalypt woodlands are home to a wonderful range of birds, from tiny pardalotes to eagles. One is the owl-nightjar. It is nocturnal, spending its days asleep inside a hollow tree or dry stump. It is the smallest of our nocturnal birds, about the size of a blackbird, but smaller-bodied and with a longer tail.

It is grey-plumaged, the feathers finely cross-barred, and it has distinctive facial markings that are remarkably like those of a sugar glider, a similar-sized possum that also uses tree-hollows as its sleeping-quarters.



One unusual feature of the bird is that, unlike the sugar glider, its eyes do not shine when in a spotlight. The owl-nightjar has a soft but far-reaching call best described as a grating, high-pitched 'churr-churr' that may be heard occasionally during the day, particularly when the bird is at the entrance of its hollow in hot weather.

In very cold weather the owl-nightjar occasionally does something that only a handful of Australian birds do – it becomes torpid, with its heart-beat and breathing dropping to low levels. It may stay like this for several days.

In the very hot weather it will often do the opposite. It will come to the entrance of its hollow and bask in the sunshine, and it is then that you may hear its distinctive call.

In spring it nests in a hollow which it lines with fresh gum leaves, and lays up to five pure white eggs.

Insects are its main food, and the owl-nightjar is an active, agile hunter taking flying beetles and moths with ease. Unlike bats that hunt by echo-location, it relies entirely on sight so it will usually begin foraging while there is still lingering twilight to make hunting easier.



# STARS OF THE VVP

Author: Jo Day, *Senior Conservation Officer, Trust for Nature*

## LAND MANAGER - MAX KERR

Max Kerr has been intensively managing a patch of volcanic plains grassland on his farm property near Wallinduc for over a decade. What started as an appreciation of a “different grassy spot” on the property, grew into many years of ecological inquisition and conservation management.



TRUST FOR NATURE STAFF EXPLORING ONE OF THE 200+ SPINY RICE-FLOWER PLANTS WITHIN MAX'S GRASSLAND

After discovering that the area was in fact, the highly significant Plains Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plains, and that many threatened species were present including Spiny Rice-flower (*Pimelea spinescens subsp. spinescens*), Small Milkwort (*Comesperma polygaloides*), Yam Daisy (*Microseris scapigera*), Striped Legless Lizard (*Delma impa*) and Fat-tailed Dunnart (*Sminthopsis crassicaudata*), Max went looking for an opportunity to further protect and manage the site.

After securing a 10 year offset management agreement and protecting the site with a Trust for Nature covenant, Max has worked tirelessly to significantly reduce the cover of highly invasive weeds, and planted additional grassland species including numerous on the rare or threatened list.

Max's “can do” attitude towards grassland conservation has also seen great success with grazing regimes and the use of fire. Where others have placed such practices in the “too hard basket”, Max gets it done. Max will be the first to tell you that he is no expert, but in fact, by virtue of his years observing and working with the nuances of this grassland ecosystem, he is.



MAX IN HIS GRASSLAND



MAX KERR RECENTLY PRESENTING TO OTHER INTERESTED GRASSLAND MANAGERS AT MT ELEPHANT INTERPRETATION CENTRE



# CULTURAL BURNS ON WADAWURRUNG COUNTRY



“ IT WAS AN EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE TO GET BACK ON COUNTRY AND TO HELP HEAL COUNTRY IN THE WAYS OF OUR ANCESTORS. ”

ABOVE: CHASE AGHAN, PROJECT OFFICER - FOREST FIRE AND PARKS, WADAWURRUNG TRADITIONAL OWNERS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Cultural burning has been used as a tool to help manage and heal sick Country for tens of thousands of years by Wadawurrung. It was an extremely important practice throughout the Victorian Volcanic Plains (VVP). European settlement quickly put a halt to traditional burning, which contributed to the deterioration of the Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands of the VVP.

Throughout recent years, Wadawurrung Traditional Owners have reclaimed this traditional knowledge and have fought to use the practice of Cultural Burning to help restore and heal sick Country. Through funding supplied by the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, we were able to use our knowledge and prescribe traditional, cool burns, at the Western Plantation of the You Yangs Regional Park, and then at Bakers Lane Reserve in Teesdale.

The traditional method of Cultural Burning has a lot of benefits for the ecosystem being burnt. It helps promote the growth of underlying native species and contributes to reducing invasive weed species. Being slow in nature, Cool Burns trickle throughout the landscape, allowing for animals and insects to escape the fire.

Both Cultural Burns were highly successful, and as a Traditional Owner, it was an emotional experience to get back on Country and to help heal Country in the ways of our Ancestors.

Author: Matthew Chatterton,  
*Wadawurrung Family Member*





# GRASSY EUCALYPT WOODLANDS STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Author: Jess Lill, *Senior Project Officer, Corangamite CMA*

Do you have patches of native tussock grasses, scattered with wildflowers, or majestic old Eucalypt trees, many of which are hundreds of years old?

These eucalypt woodlands and native grasslands are valuable assets across the farming landscape. They provide shade and shelter to livestock, improve soil structure and quality, retain soil moisture in the landscape, and increase the abundance and diversity of beneficial insects including pollinators and species for integrated pest management.

These eucalypt woodlands and native grasslands also provide critical habitat for some of Australia's most vulnerable animals including Fat-tailed Dunnarts, Striped Legless Lizards, Golden Sun Moths, Growling Grass Frogs and Swift Parrots.

They are home to amazing wildflowers and native grassy tussocks living underneath the canopy. Patches of purple Chocolate Lilies, white Milkmaids, yellow Everlasting Daisies, spiky Blue Devils and fluffy Featherheads can be found during spring and early summer.



The Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands Stewardship Program supports land managers to protect critically endangered Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands and Natural Temperate Grasslands on the Victorian Volcanic Plain that remain on private land. This project is supported by Corangamite CMA, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program. The Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands Stewardship Program supports private land managers to:

- Identify the plants and animals that live within the Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands and Natural Temperate Grasslands on their property.
- Learn how to further protect and enhance these critically endangered communities through site visits, field days and workshops.

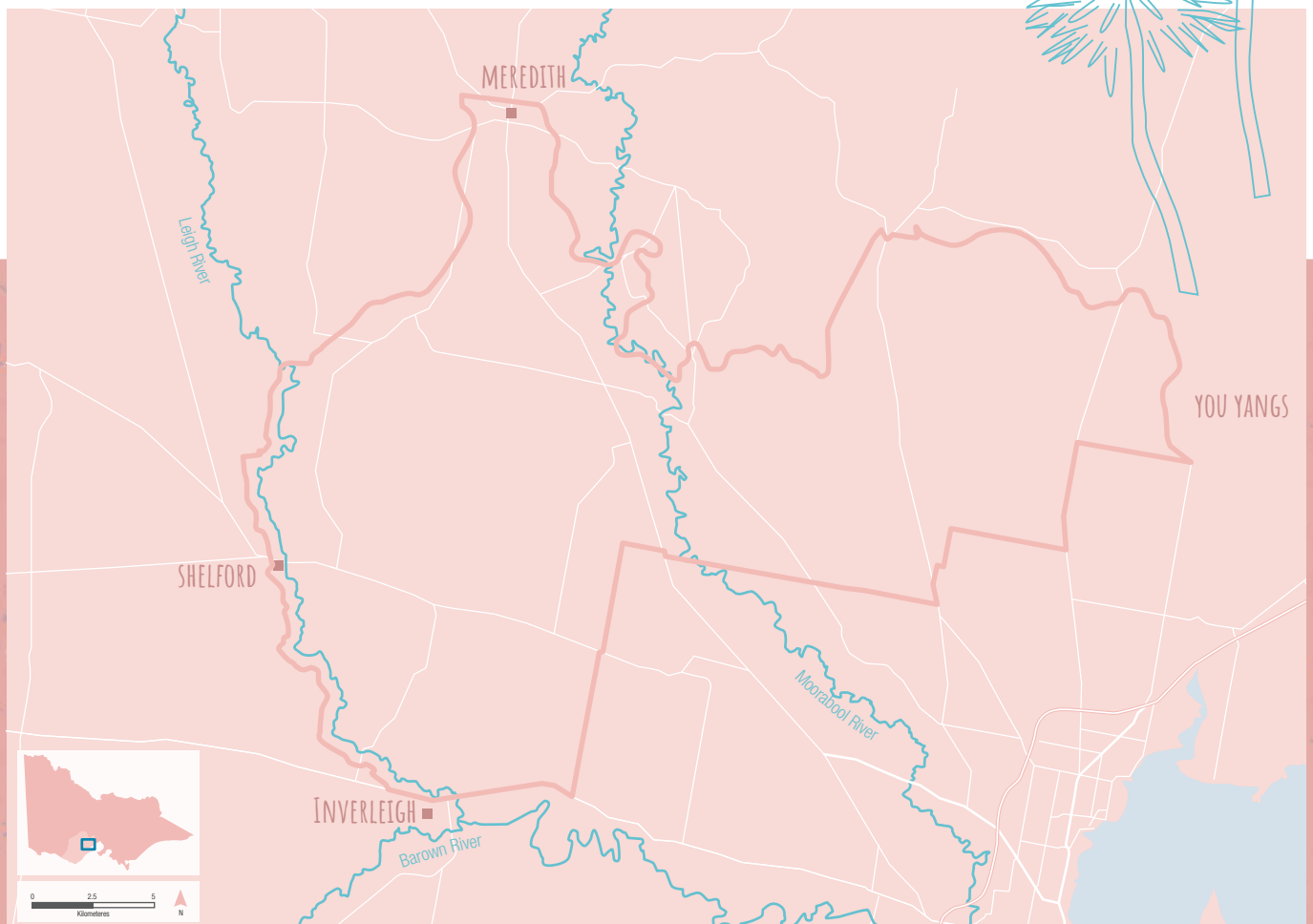
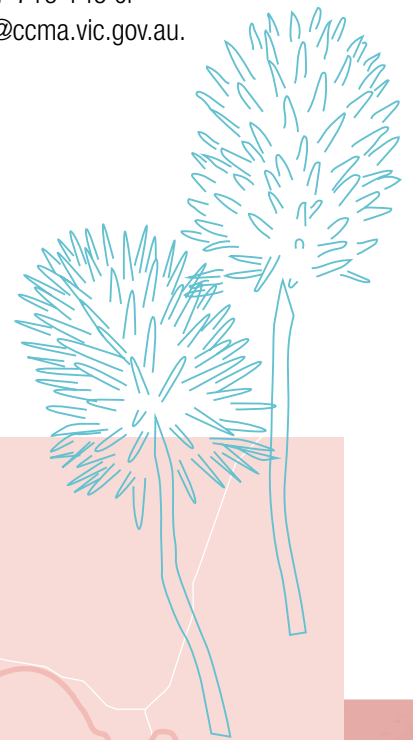
- Protect the Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands and Natural Temperate Grasslands on their property with financial support for a range of conservation management actions including fencing to enable management of stock and seasonal grazing, ecological burning, and pest plant and animal control.
- Be supported by a network of experienced and knowledgeable organisations and land managers including farmers who are also protecting their remnant patches.

The Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands Stewardship Program target region encompasses the area east from Shelford to the western flank of the You Yangs, to Inverleigh in the south and Meredith on the north.

Sites outside of the target area on the Victorian Volcanic Plains will also be considered. If you are keen to find out more and have remnant patches of Grassy Eucalypt Woodland on the Victorian Volcanic Plains, we would love to hear from you. Expressions of Interest are still open.

## SHARE YOUR OPINION

Please contact Jess Lill, Corangamite CMA Senior Project Officer, on 0477 719 149 or [jess.lill@ccma.vic.gov.au](mailto:jess.lill@ccma.vic.gov.au).



# THEY MUST BE BONKERS! GRASSLANDS OR ART-LANDS?

Author: Stephen Murphy  
*Sustainable Biorich Landscapes*  
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If you heard a rumour about someone who painted over a priceless Sidney Nolan artwork what would you think? Maybe you'd wonder if they'd gone bonkers. Of course something like that would never happen.

No doubt Nolan would have skilfully worked his magic on a canvass for a week or two. Carefully crafting a story through his images of very harsh almost apocalyptic Australian landscapes.

In my view planting a shelterbelt or a few hectares of forestry trees over a priceless remnant grassland is just as bonkers, but sadly this does happen very often.

A grassland is crafted by nature over tens of thousands of years and each grassland is a unique 'canvas'. The many species of small flowering plants combine in a balance of colour and texture that only a master artist could conceive.

The intricate ecosystem that is woven into the fabric of each plant community is truly remarkable. A walk through a grassland on a dewy morning will reveal thousands of small sparkling lacelike spider webs adorning the small plants. Each web a masterpiece in itself and each web built only to last one night. There begins the web of life. The larger insects, skinks and small birds feasting on both the spiders and their catch.

These grasslands and grassy woodlands that once covered about one third of Victoria are now almost gone. These priceless and unique works of art have been 'painted' over with new ideas and dreams that promised profit and progress.

As extremely rare surviving works of art, what value is a native grassland today?

Stop for a minute and think about what we have lost. Unlike a Sidney Nolan painting that's been painted over, a grassland can't be restored to its original beauty. Any grassland we plant will only be a simple artless copy of the fully evolved original.

Maybe you have a priceless work of art in your back paddock - what a magnificent asset!

A current Corangamite CMA project aiming to fund their protection and maintenance has struggled to find enough grassland and grassy woodland sites in healthy condition.

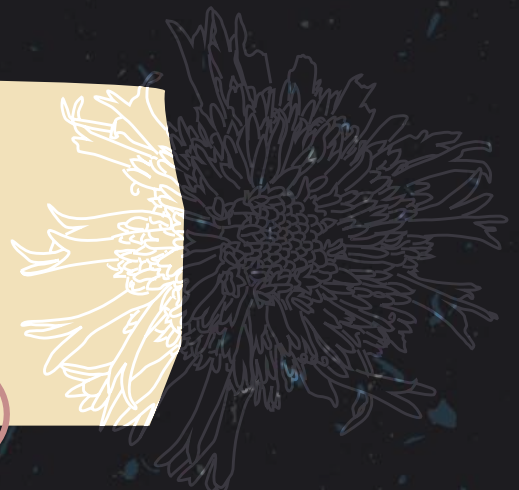
This program which is called 'Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands Stewardship Program' is offering to pay land-owners to look after and improve their remnant grasslands and grassy woodlands. It offers great support and cultural burning undertaken by the Wadawurrung People, the Traditional Owners.

Looking after what is left of these irreplaceable natural assets has to become a top priority for our generation. Otherwise the next generation will only know them as myths and legends, like Ned Kelly in one of Sydney Nolan's famous paintings.



SIDNEY NOLAN 'NED KELLY (DEATH OF CONSTABLE SCANLON)' 1973

CONTACT JESS LILL AT THE CCMA  
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# THE LINEAR RESERVES PROJECT

Author: Ammie Jackson, *Natural Environment Program Officer, DELWP*

Much of the Natural Temperate Grasslands that occur on crown land are confined to small, isolated remnants on roadsides, rail reserves, cemeteries, and town commons. These highly valuable sites are exposed to numerous threatening processes and their linear nature makes them extremely susceptible to weed invasion.

Commencing in 2014, the Linear Reserves Project aims to enhance the condition and resilience of native grasslands and associated species on linear reserves through weed control and ecological burning. With support from the Glenelg Hopkins and Corangamite Catchment Management Authorities and the Australian Government's National Landcare Program, DELWP leads the project and engages with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Traditional Owners.

Planned burning is a critical component of the grassland management and this would not be possible without the significant contributions to fuel reduction burning carried out by CFA volunteers.

Native grasslands greatly benefit from regular burning (every 2-3 years) as it reduces grass and weed cover, opens up inter-tussock space and creates conditions suitable for native wildflowers to grow and set seed. Burning reduces weed species not adapted to fire and makes follow up weed control more effective.

Over 100 linear reserve sites have been treated for weed control by specialist contractors with extensive grassland experience targeting pasture grasses and other high threat weeds. By collaborating with partner agencies and accessing additional funding through State Government grants, we have been able to carry out multiple follow up treatments on sites.

The project will continue with education and on-ground activities, including supporting the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation to conduct cultural burning on ecologically and culturally important sites.

For more information about the Linear Reserves Project contact Ammie Jackson – [ammie.jackson@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:ammie.jackson@delwp.vic.gov.au)



This project is supported by Corangamite CMA, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program



Environment, Land, Water and Planning

