



Annual report 2019-20



Restoring landscapes across the Mount Alexander region

President's message

Brendan Sydes


2019-2020 was an extraordinary year with the summer's fires then COVID-19 creating unprecedented challenges. Resilient communities and landscapes are now more important than ever.

Despite the challenges Connecting Country had another successful year and we retain our strong commitment to working with our community to restore landscapes across the Mount Alexander region. On behalf of the Committee of Management, thank you to everyone who contributed to our achievements.

Our dedicated staff are critical to our success. Thank you to Frances and the team for their enthusiasm and commitment, and the flexibility they have demonstrated in adapting to change.

A well-managed organisation with a long-term strategic focus is essential to attract financial support and deliver on-ground results. I thank my fellow Committee of Management members for working together so effectively.



A scenic landscape photograph of a forested hillside. The foreground is filled with dense, green and brownish shrubs. In the background, a valley is shrouded in mist, with rolling hills and more forested areas visible under a soft, overcast sky.

'We thank all our supporters large and small - private donors, trusts and government partners - for investing in our vision. Special thanks to everyone in the Connecting Country community who get involved as landholders, volunteers, attendees and in many other ways.

Resilient communities and landscapes are now more important than ever.'

Brendan Sydes

President – Connecting Country

Director's message

Frances Howe


This year brought real challenges, despite our region avoiding the worst impacts from bushfires and pandemics. Fortunately, we at Connecting Country are a resilient bunch.

We've quickly adapted to working from home, and online meetings and events. We're still active on the ground restoring landscapes and monitoring wildlife where safe to do so.

Many funding opportunities were delayed or cancelled. It's easy to get discouraged by lack of funds and the absence of a national approach to reverse the environmental damage all around us. However, we focus on what we can achieve with the resources we have available.

Generous donations couldn't have been at a more critical time. Your support makes a real practical difference in helping us restore our local ecosystems. Please read on to discover what your amazing support has helped us achieve.





'We focus on what we can achieve with the resources we have. There's still plenty to celebrate, thanks to our active and caring community. With our incredible staff, volunteers and supporters we've achieved much.'

Frances Howe
Director

Finance report

Max Kay

Our comprehensive internal financial systems and checks included monthly review by Connecting Country's committee of management and annual audit by a qualified independent auditor.

We allocated grant funds to running 11 successful projects supported by a range of government and philanthropic organisations.

We recorded an expected financial loss because secured income was not enough to cover expenses. Our committee agreed to access savings to address this gap to maintain core organisational capacity.

Funding opportunities for 2020-21 are affected by COVID-19. We continue to adapt and actively pursue funds to support core capacity and new projects.

Despite these challenges we remain in a sound financial position, backed by a financial reserve.

Financial overview

At 30 June 2020



income
• \$459,485



expenses
• \$521,938



difference
• -\$62,453

assets
• \$549,881

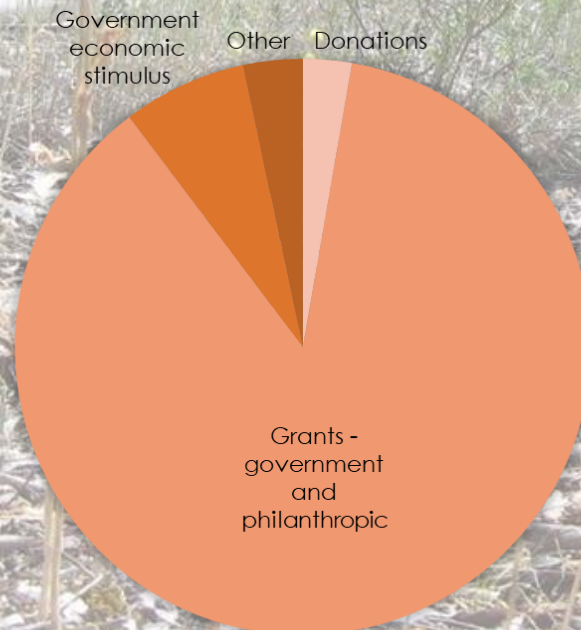


liabilities
• \$346,465

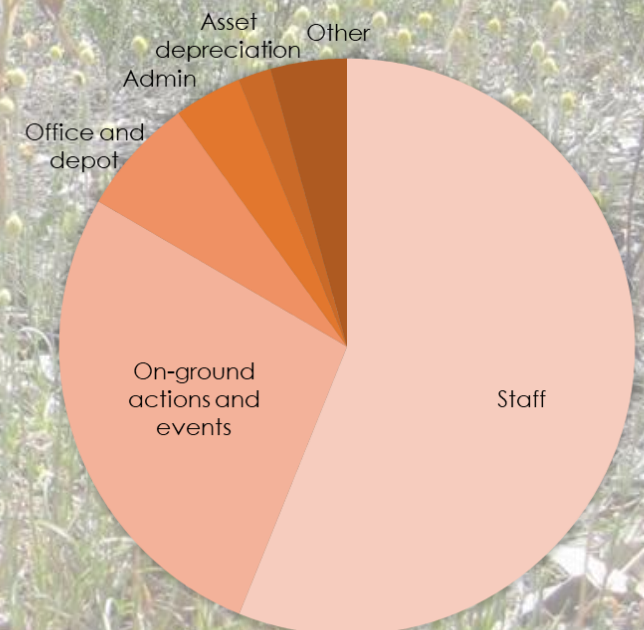


net assets
• \$203,416

Where our money
came from



Where our money
went



What does Connecting Country do?



engage
community



monitor
biodiversity



support
Landcare



restore
landscapes



Why is our work necessary?

Central Victoria's remarkable Box–Ironbark Forests produce abundant nectar and pollen throughout the whole year. They provide habitat critical for many threatened native species including Brush-tailed Phascogale, Eltham Copper Butterfly, Swift Parrot and birds of the Victorian Temperate Woodland Bird Community.

These forests have a long history of disturbance by mining, woodcutting, grazing, and changes in fire and water regimes. Ongoing threats include weeds, pest animals, fragmentation, inappropriate fire regimes, erosion and climate change.

Many remaining woodlands lack complexity and are missing key understorey plants and elements essential for wildlife: food, nesting sites and protection from predators. A high proportion of remnant vegetation exists on private land.

Monitoring biodiversity

Jess Lawton



Photo by Geoff Park

This year, we were excited to move into a new chapter. After months of reviewing, careful consulting and planning, we had a solid foundation to implement our new strategy, with all long-term monitoring sites surveyed by volunteer citizen scientists.

We are grateful to the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, the Federal Government's Communities Environment Program, Bank Australia, Wettenhall Environment Trust, and a generous donation from a local family, which has allowed our monitoring program to continue.

And, of course, a very special thank you to our tenacious and inspiring team of monitoring volunteers. We simply couldn't do this without you.

Monitoring biodiversity

2019-20



26

skilled monitoring
volunteers recruited



94

bird surveys at 38
survey sites



2,090


birds recorded



17,175 fauna records added to Victorian Biodiversity Atlas

2,479 bird records added BirdLife's database



A large, gnarled tree with two people and a dog in a grassy field. The tree's trunk is thick and twisted, with many branches extending upwards. Two people are sitting on the base of the tree. One person is wearing a purple jacket and glasses, and the other is wearing a blue jacket and a black beanie. A dog is standing between them. The background is a grassy field with other trees in the distance.

'Our skilled and tenacious community of volunteers is continuing to grow and strengthen. We now have a strong basis to continue to adapt to new challenges into the future.'

Jess Lawton
Monitoring Coordinator

Engaging community

Ivan Carter

We involve, engage, educate and empower our community through events, videos, and online and print media with targeted communications.

The past 12 months have seen Connecting Country move to a completely new form of online and COVID-19 restricted education events.

For the first six months of the financial year, Connecting Country hosted three face-to-face events including a popular talk by author Tim Low and a fabulous guest presentation from Andrew Skeoch at our AGM 2019.

This contrasted to the past six months, which has seen us conduct three further education events, all online, including the launch of our investor prospectus.



Engaging community

2019-20

2 new brochure publications

6 education events

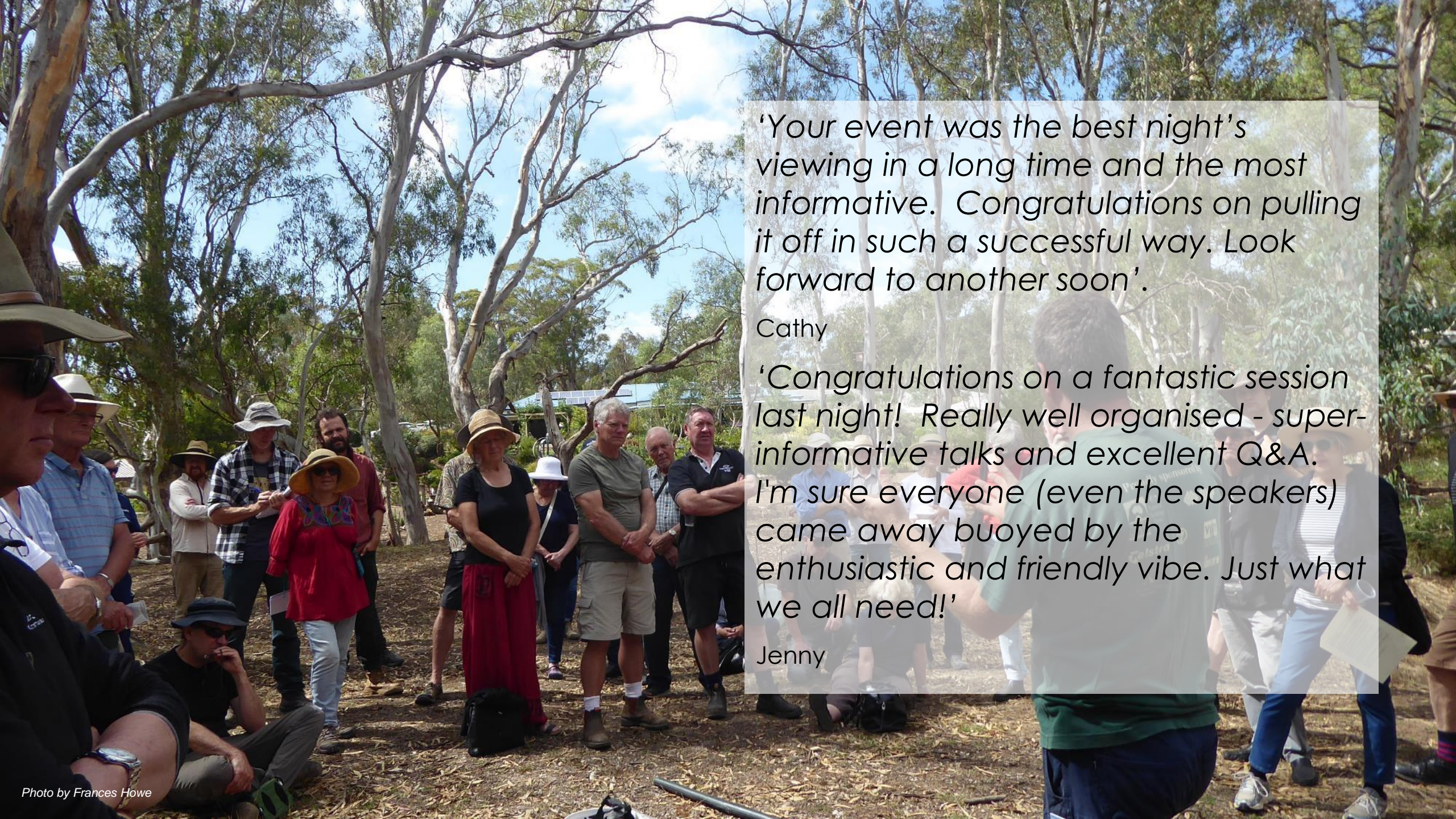
12 radio segments and local newspaper articles

55 photo entries woodland birds calendar competition

140 blog posts to **720** e-news subscribers

1,300 Facebook followers - a 30% increase





'Your event was the best night's viewing in a long time and the most informative. Congratulations on pulling it off in such a successful way. Look forward to another soon'.

Cathy

'Congratulations on a fantastic session last night! Really well organised - super-informative talks and excellent Q&A. I'm sure everyone (even the speakers) came away buoyed by the enthusiastic and friendly vibe. Just what we all need!'

Jenny

Restoring landscapes

Bonnie Humphreys & Jacqui Slingo

We connect people, and provide information and resources to help them take action for nature and restore their land. On-ground actions for 2019-20 focused on pest animal and weed management. We added over 30 ha of land under long-term restoration agreements, with 11 ha permanently protected under covenant.

This year we began work on a practical landscape restoration guide to help address the many enquiries we receive on topics like how to convert dams to habitat or restore native grasslands. We also had many questions about South African Weed Orchid, which is on the move through our region, plus Corkscrews, Galaxia, Onion Grass and Spurges.

During 2019-20 we teamed up with local Landcare groups to support revegetation projects on four public reserves and Landmate to control weeds on public land.

We are seeking funding to support local landholders during 2020-21. If you would like to register for future landscape restoration projects, visit our website to complete an expression of interest form.

Restoring landscapes

2019-20

11 hectares of priority habitat permanently protected

25 property visits to provide landscape restoration advice


32 hectares of habitat restoration on private land

45 hectares of weed control on public land

60 landholder enquiries answered

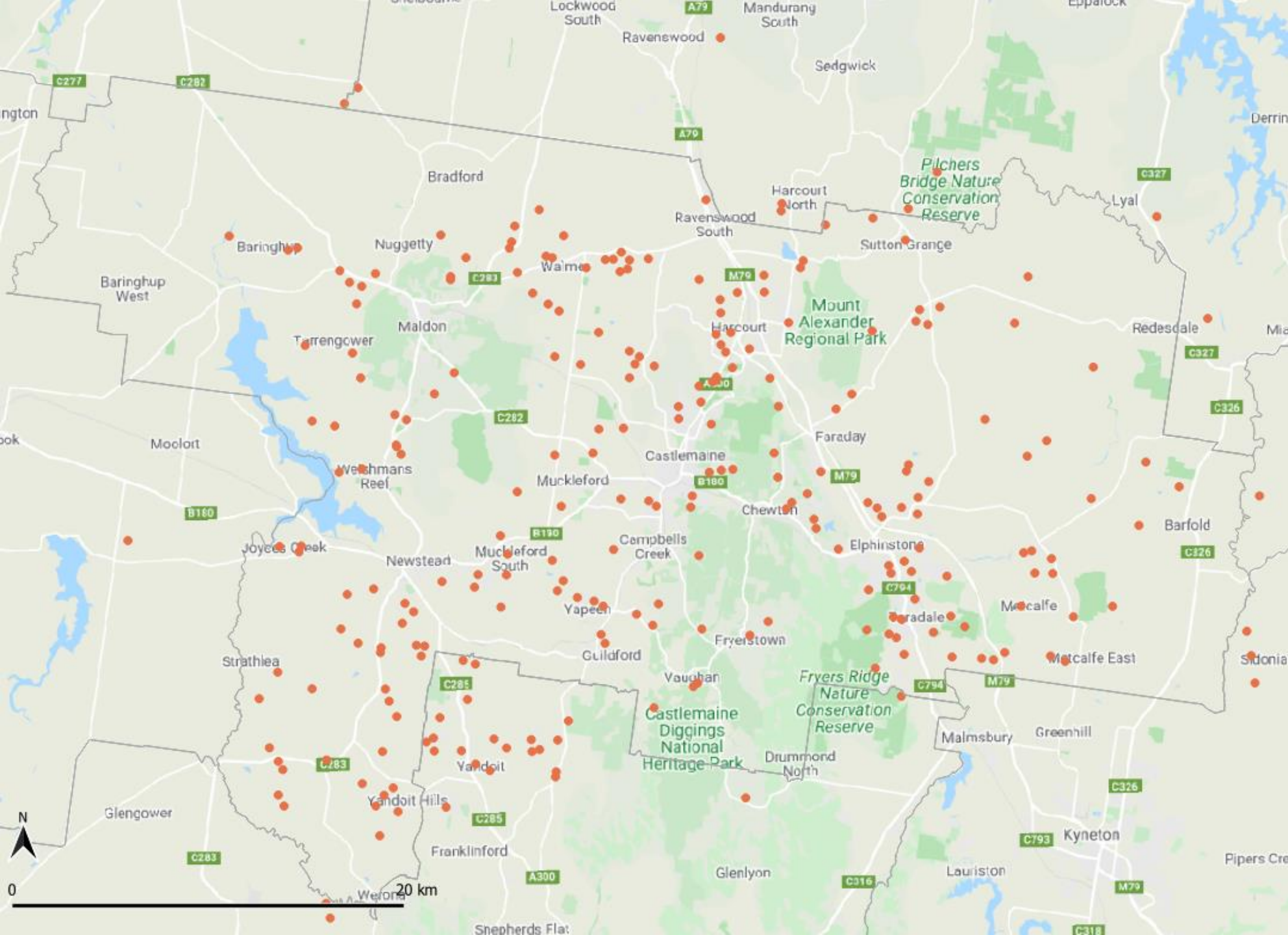
1,500 plants provided to landholders through TreeProject



A photograph of a woodland landscape. In the foreground, there is a bush with many small, light-colored flowers. The ground is covered with dry leaves and twigs. In the background, there are many trees with thin trunks and some green foliage. The sky is visible through the branches.

‘Connecting Country have been fabulous. We think it’s just great how helpful Bonnie was in answering all our questions about identifying weeds, what to do about them and what to plant to help the birds. We’re so happy to have been involved, and the plants are looking good.’

Landholder – Prickly Plants for Wildlife on Small Properties Project



Together we worked to protect and restore around 10,000 hectares of land across the Mount Alexander region.

Supporting Landcare

Jacqui Slingo and Asha Bannon

We provided dedicated Landcare support for our 30 local Landcare and Friends groups in the Mount Alexander region, including helping to secure grant funding for local Landcare action.

Seven Landcare engagement attracted over 220 attendees. This included the popular 'Yarn at Yapenya' gathering that brought together local Jaara people and Landcarers to share stories at Yapenya around a campfire. The Intrepid Landcare retreat hosted young people from across Victoria to network, share experiences and learn from local experienced Landcarers.

Since COVID-19, some groups have been typically resourceful, holding small socially-distanced working bees, hosting online events, planning private landscape restoration corridors and developing an action plan for future work.



Supporting Landcare

2019-20

1 Intrepid Landcare retreat to engage young people

6 Landcare community events

30 local Landcare and Friends groups supported

220 people engaged through Landcare events

60,000 dollars secured for local Landcare actions



'...It was a pleasure to meet other Landcare group members to discuss various issues that arise and workshop strategies to address them...Another inspiring session. We are grateful for the opportunity to attend these sessions and appreciate the support and advocacy of Connecting Country.'

Friends of Kaweka Sanctuary

A huge thank you

Staff and committee of management

Financial supporters and project partners

Monitoring and data entry volunteers

Landholders

Steering groups and advisors

30 local Landcare and Friends groups

Volunteer photographers and graphic designer

Suppliers

Event speakers and other volunteers

Members and donors



Staff and committee

2019-20

Staff:

Frances Howe

Director

Bonnie Humphreys

Landscape Restoration Coordinator

Asha Bannon

Landcare Facilitator Mount Alexander

Jacqui Slingo

Landscape Restoration / Landcare Facilitator

Jess Lawton

Monitoring Coordinator

Ivan Carter

Engagement Coordinator

Committee of management:

Brendan Sydes

President

Saide Gray

Vice President

Marie Jones

Secretary

Max Kay

Treasurer

Christine Brooke

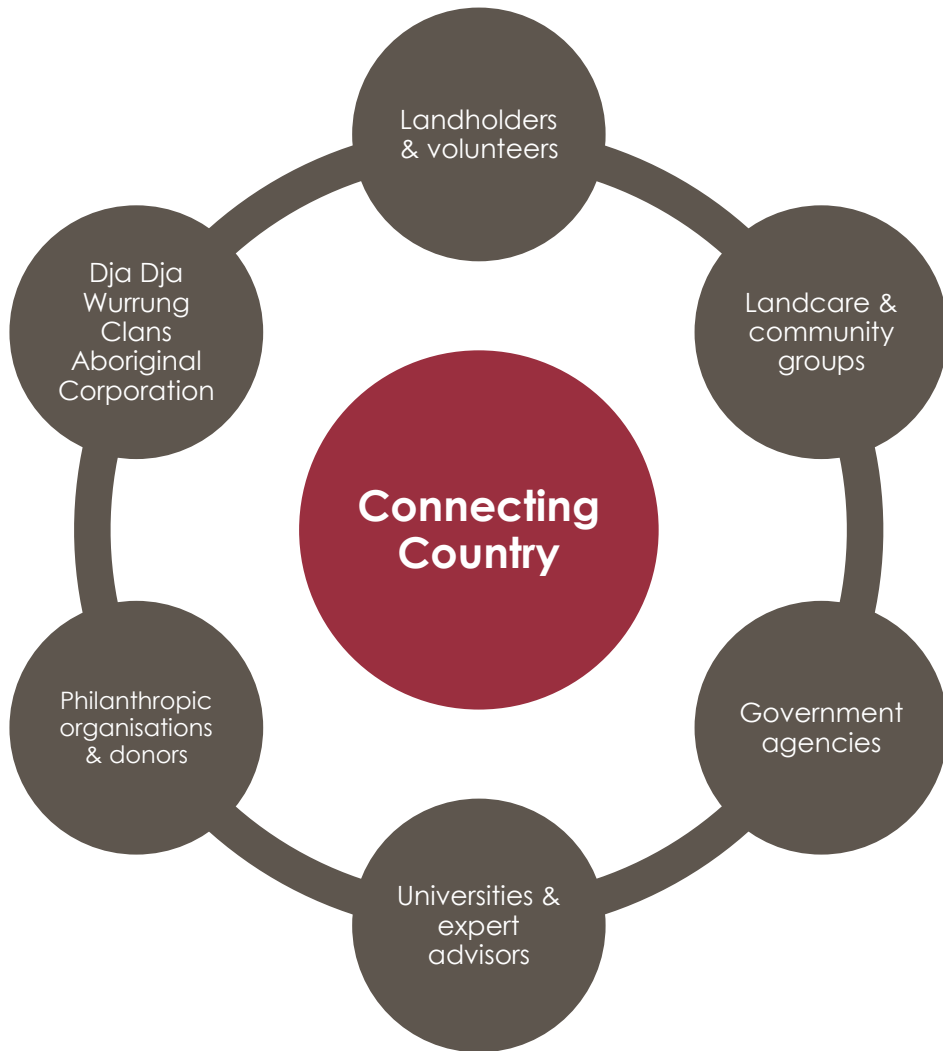
Malcolm Trainor

Karoline Klein

Deborah Wardle

Key partners and financial supporters

2019-20



Helen Macpherson Smith Trust



Tucker
ALBERT & BARBARA
TUCKER FOUNDATION



Dja Dja Wurrung Clans
Aboriginal Corporation



TreeProject



Volunteers

We can't thank our amazing and dedicated volunteers enough for assisting with the delivery of our shared vision for landscape restoration. Since beginning in 2007, we have clocked up over 12,400 volunteer hours.



Projects for 2020-21



Healthy landscapes – a practical guide to landscape restoration for our region, educational field workshops

Future-proof our forests – pioneering the first climate future plots in our region, supported by Ross Trust

Victorian Landcare facilitator program – building support for our 30 active local Landcare groups

Remnant rescue – restoring key woodland bird habitat as part of Biodiversity Response Planning

Prickly plants for community – collaborating with local Landcare groups to restore missing understorey plants

Bird and nest box monitoring – coordinating citizen scientists to collect and share long-term monitoring data



Photo by Jacqui Slingo



Get involved

Learn more, become a member or subscribe to our e-news:

www.connectingcountry.org.au

Get in touch:

info@connectingcountry.org.au

Donate:

connectingcountry.org.au/get-involved/make-a-donation

Follow us:

facebook.com/connectingcountry

Watch our short film:

rememberthewild.org.au/connecting-country

Download our project prospectus:

connectingcountry.org.au/prospectus2020