



Annual report 2021-22

Restoring landscapes across the Mount Alexander region



President's message

Brendan Sydes

Welcome to our 2022 annual report. On behalf of the Committee of Management and staff team at Connecting Country, I'm pleased to report that the past year has been another successful one for Connecting Country.

I'd like to acknowledge the work of everyone who made the year a success: our dedicated staff team led by Frances Howe, my fellow committee members, those who help as advisors, our volunteers, financial supporters, and the many people in our local community and beyond who support and engage in our activities.

This year marks 15 years since a visionary group got together to form Connecting Country. Supported by the Wettenhall Environment Trust, a vision for an organisation that would connect landscapes and people was discussed and then brought to life. Although the details have changed, the overall vision remains as relevant and important today as it was then.

'The Connecting Country project started back in 2007 based on the shared idea that "the social and built community of the future is co-dependent on the survival of a diverse and resilient natural landscape".

This simple proposition, outlined in our initial blueprint, has informed and inspired our work connecting people and connecting landscapes for 15 years.

We should all be proud of the organisation we have built and sustained over this time'

Brendan Sydes
President – Connecting Country



Director's message

Frances Howe

We've delivered a brilliant set of projects this year, thanks to the enthusiasm of our hardworking staff, who skillfully juggled project deadlines with viruses, family, other jobs and even a PhD thesis! Everyone stepped in to help, with support from a tribe of volunteers.

Funding remains limited and we continue to manage a patchwork of funding to deliver on our vision. Reports on the terrible state of our biodiversity and climate change impacts are no surprise to anyone paying attention. However, there are local signs of hope.

Connecting Country now has two plots of genetically diverse plants of local species to help build resilience to a changing climate. Jess's PhD indicated the Mount Alexander region is actually a stronghold for the threatened Brush-tailed Phascogale!

On-ground restoration and community events are returning, revitalised after COVID-related impacts. This year we clocked up more volunteer hours than ever, reflecting the value our community places on our work.



'I'm incredibly grateful for the chance to be part of Connecting Country. I get to collaborate with a great team on meaningful projects and am constantly learning.

Thank you to all the wonderful people who make our achievements possible. We're now in a good position to embrace some extraordinary new opportunities.'

Frances Howe
Director – Connecting Country



Finance report

Max Kay

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

During 2021-22 we allocated funds to running 12 successful projects. We kindly acknowledge funding support from the Victorian Government, Parks Victoria, the Ross Trust, Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, Brian D Newman Foundation, WIRES and Wettenhall Environment Trust.

As available income did not meet expenses, we allocated some of our savings to maintaining our core staff team and organisational capacity. This resulted in a budgeted loss for the year. Income for 2021-22 was \$56,560 above budget and expenses \$48,703 above budget, with a net loss of \$41,235 (\$7,857 better than budgeted).

Funding conditions for 2022-23 remain tight. We are actively pursuing funds to support our organisation and invest in new projects. Despite the challenges we remain viable and backed by a financial reserve.

Financial overview

At 30 June 2022



income

• \$414,712



expenses

• \$455,947



difference

• -\$41,235

assets

• \$601,799



liabilities

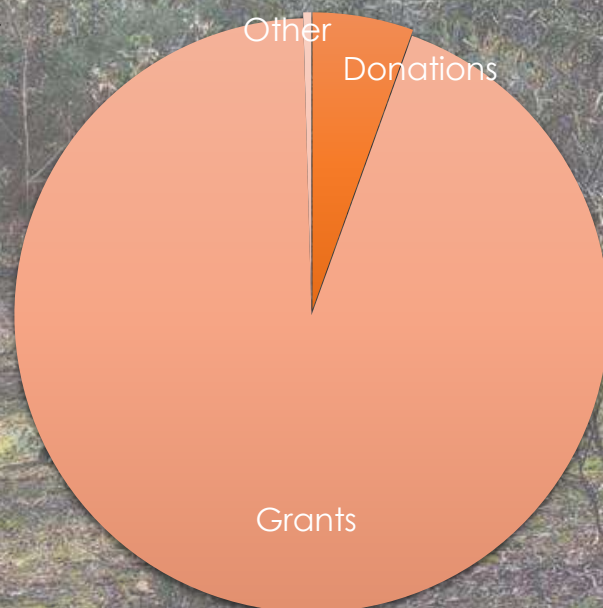
• \$442,896



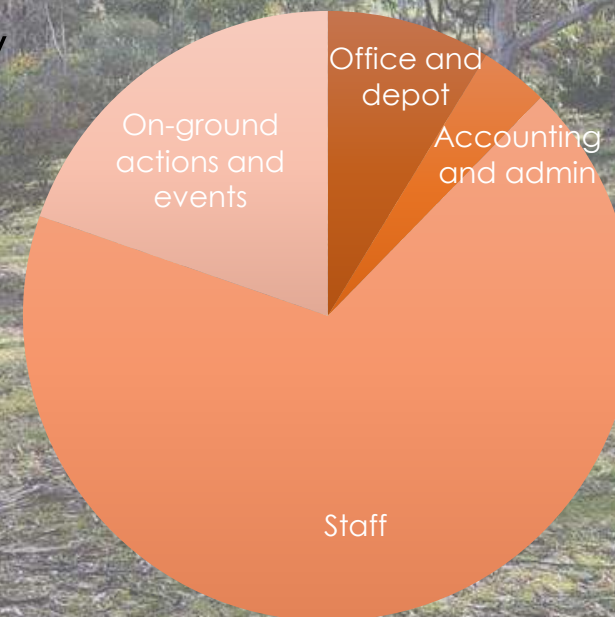
net assets

• \$158,903

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.

Restoring landscapes

Bonnie Humphreys

Well, 2021-22 has been as busy as ever! We continue to work with the local community to improve our local environment. This season saw Connecting Country support the planting of over 3,000 indigenous plants. We continued to deliver plants through Tree Project, and work with local Landcare groups supporting revegetation through our Landcare Recovery project. This year saw the conclusion of our 3.5-year Remnant Rescue project funded by the Victorian Government.

I am happy to report that our two climate future plots are finally planted, with over 1,000 Silver Banksia and Sweet Bursaria plants in the ground. We are now eagerly awaiting our first season of flowering and seeding!

We continue to partner with North Central CMA, Djarra and Parks Victoria to conduct vegetation surveys, share information and help deliver projects.



Restoring landscapes

2021-22

40

landholder site
visits conducted

48

vegetation surveys
completed

1,050

plants provided to
landholders
through
TreeProject

2

climate future
plots planted

6

Landcare groups
supported with
specialist
botanical advice

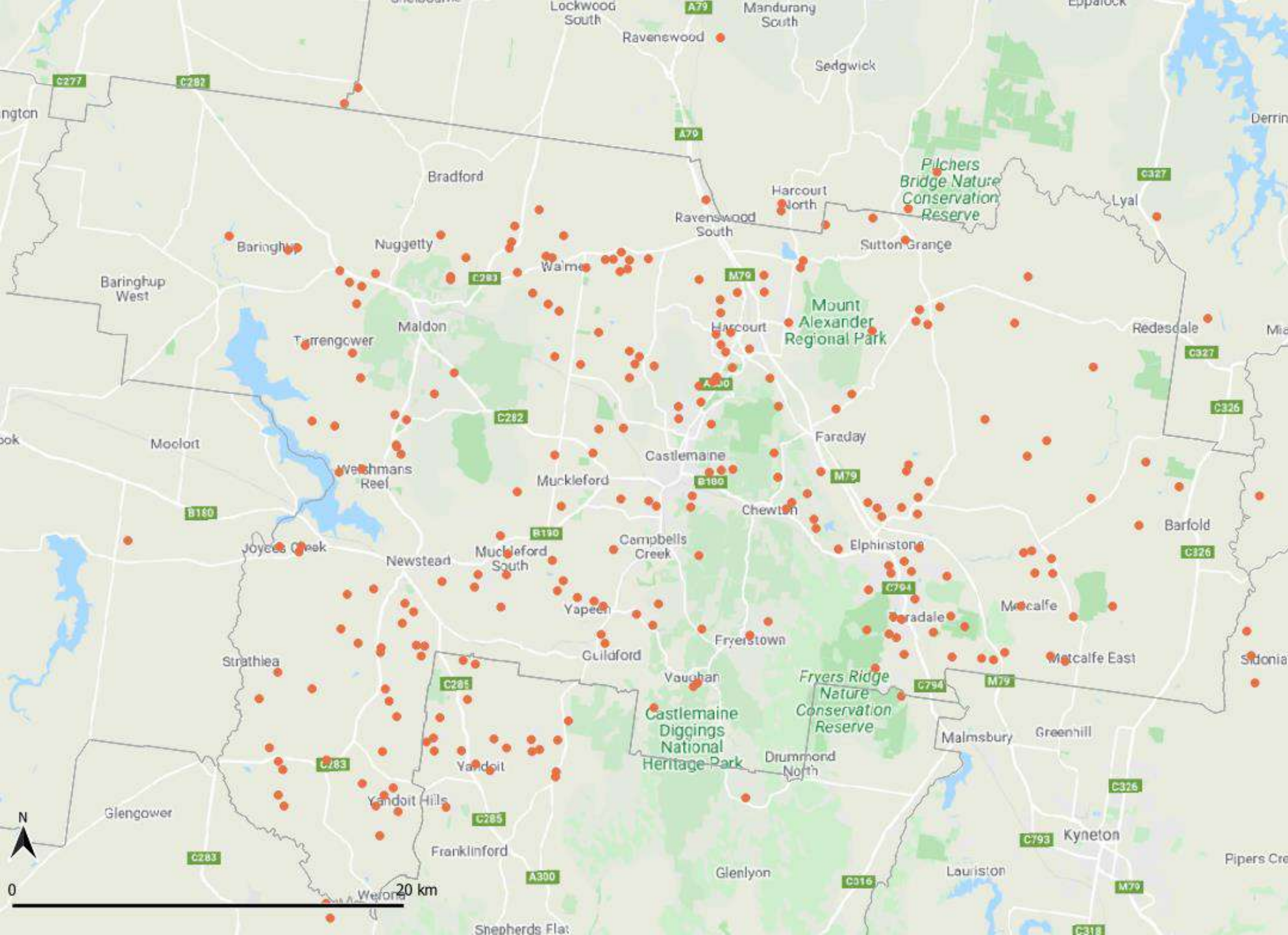
1,000

genetically diverse
plants in two
climate future
plots

This year we enjoyed helping with numerous enquiries from the general community, focusing on revegetation, plant identification and weed control. If you would like support to restore your property, please visit our website to complete an expression of interest form.'

Bonnie
Landscape Restoration Coordinator -
Connecting Country





Since beginning in 2007 we have completed 60 on-ground landscape restoration projects involving more than 250 land holders.

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

Monitoring biodiversity

Jess Lawton

Our wildlife monitoring program continues in full swing! In 2021-22, our intrepid team of volunteers surveyed our 50 long-term bird monitoring sites, despite ongoing challenges with lockdowns in 2021.

In autumn 2022, volunteers surveyed 301 nest boxes, and detected 15 phascogales, and at least 230 sugar gliders, across the region. Our nest box program has now been operational for ten years – as such, many nest boxes have begun to degrade. A key highlight of the monitoring program this year was the opportunity to replace broken nest boxes with brand new ones, providing new homes for our precious wildlife.

We are incredibly grateful to the generous individuals who make our monitoring program possible - our dedicated team of hardworking volunteers, landholders who host monitoring sites, and the community members who provided funding for our 60 brand new nest boxes. We couldn't do this without you!



Monitoring biodiversity

2021-2022

301

nest boxes
checked

540

volunteer hours
contributed by
nest box
volunteers

15

phascogales
detected

130

bird surveys
completed

176

volunteer hours
contributed by
bird survey
volunteers

4,742

birds recorded

'...I reckon I am the winner with being part of Connecting Country's bird survey program. Our relationship with Bill [landholder] continues to flourish and we all enjoy the exchange of information. It's terrific to observe the changes on his three very different transects.

Around 20 years ago, Bill planted a paddock on a hilltop above the many grazed paddocks, with endemic trees... Consequently, over the past five years that we have been recording information, this treed block now boasts around 16 bird species each time we visit, instead of 5-7. Who would have thought?'

Sue
Bird survey volunteer



Engaging community

Ivan Carter

What a blast the last 12 months have been - so many highlights and outstanding engagement activities! We partnered with Djaara and Birdlife Castlemaine District to deliver two events over spring and summer about the woodland birds of Kalimna Park (Castlemaine) and Wildflower Drive (Bendigo). The events were booked out and featured cultural learning experiences, as well the opportunity to explore our woodland birds.

Both events were broadcast live online, allowing us to reach a wider community from near and far away. This is a relatively new and exciting development for us, and an update to our recording equipment sets us up well for future events.

We also delivered a brand new brochure and guided walk for our 'Birdwalk for beginners' project. This inspiring bird walk along Forest Creek (Castlemaine) highlights the amazing work volunteers do along the creek.



Engaging community

2021-22

1

'Birdwalk for beginners' guided walk launched

4

education events delivered

9

radio segments and local newspaper articles published

50

participants attended our Djaara events

26,550

Facebook engagements made

65

attended 'Climate change adaptations for revegetation' event

'It was such an enjoyable experience discovering a new walk for our family, with such a great guided birdwalk brochure. The birds were leading us all the way!'

David
'Birdwalk for beginners' participant



Supporting Landcare

Hadley Cole

During 2021-22 we provided dedicated Landcare support for 30 diverse local Landcare and Friends groups across the Mount Alexander region, including helping them access resources, funding, networking and capacity-building opportunities. We held two successful Landcare Link-up events, providing space and opportunity for Landcare groups to network and discuss challenges, successes and solutions in their work.

We provided specialist restoration advice to four Landcare groups as part of our 'Rapid response Landcare recovery' project. We developed and published 24 blog posts on the Connecting Country website promoting the work of Landcare and friends groups of the region.

We estimate that over 1,000 volunteers contributed 10,000+ hours of on-ground and administrative work to Landcare projects across the Mount Alexander region.





Supporting Landcare

2020-2021

30

local Landcare
and Friends groups
supported

2

Landcare Link-up
events delivered

24

Landcare-related
blog posts
published

6

Landcare groups
supported with
revegetation
projects


35

people engaged
through in-person
Landcare events

11

editions of Mount
Alexander region
Landcare e-news
circulated





'We focussed our planting on a strip along Spring Creek with the aim of joining up the existing large trees with understory species... Overall, it was a successful and fun day, and it was great to see our community learning about, caring for and connecting with the land on which we live.

Sutton Grange Landcare Group
sincerely thanks Bonnie
[Connecting Country] for
organising the plants.'

Sutton Grange Landcare Group
Participants in our 'Landcare recovery' project

A huge thank you

Staff and committee of management

Financial supporters and project partners

Wildlife monitoring and data entry volunteers

Climate future plot volunteers

Landholders

Steering groups and specialist advisors

30 local Landcare and Friends groups

Volunteer photographers and graphic designer

Suppliers

Event speakers and helpers

Members and donors



Staff and committee

2021-22

Staff:

Frances Howe

Director

Bonnie Humphreys

Landscape Restoration Coordinator

Asha Bannon

Hadley Cole

Landcare Facilitator Mount Alexander

Jess Lawton

Monitoring Coordinator

Ivan Carter

Engagement Coordinator

Jacqui Slingo

Organisation Support

Committee of management:

Brendan Sydes

President

Saide Gray

Vice President (leave of absence)

Marie Jones

Secretary

Max Kay

Treasurer

Christine Brooke

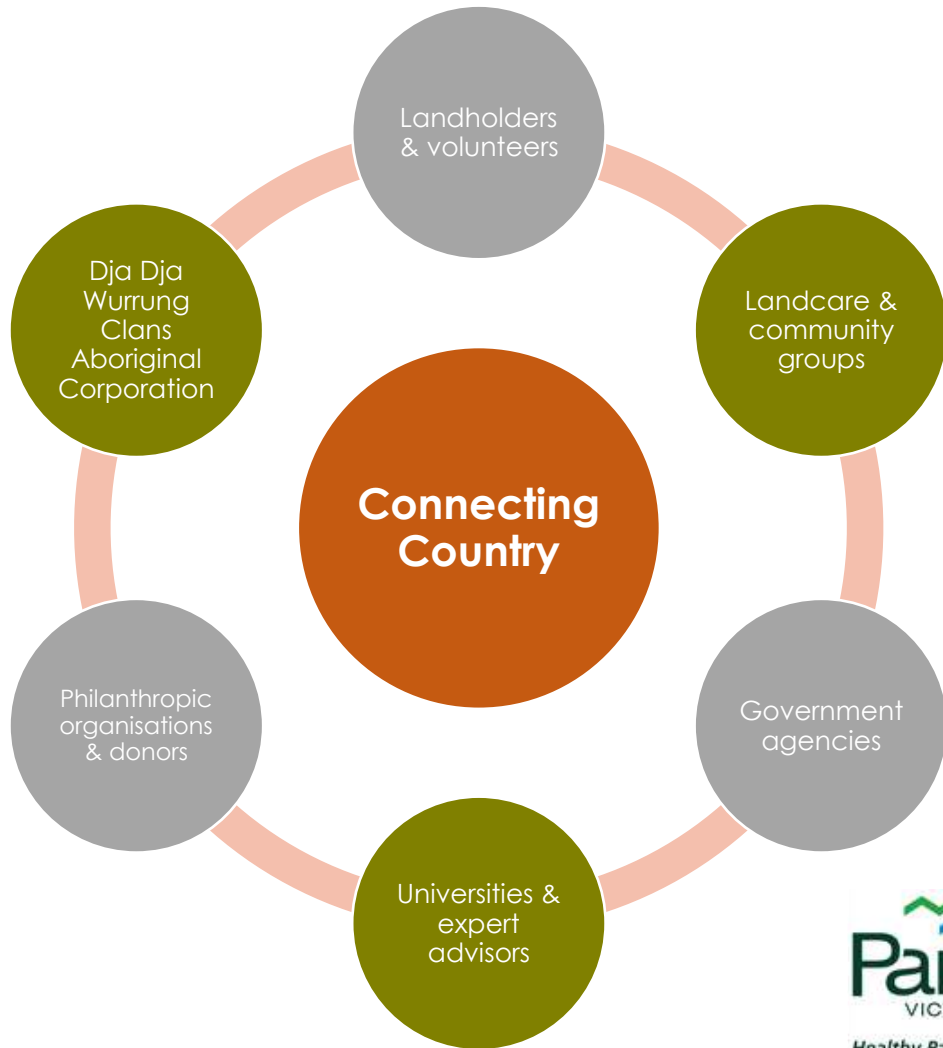
Deborah Wardle

Karoline Klein

Malcolm Trainor

Key partners and financial supporters

2021-22



Ian & Shirley Norman
FOUNDATION



Helen Macpherson Smith Trust



ALBERT & BARBARA
TUCKER FOUNDATION



NORTH CENTRAL
Catchment Management Authority
Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People



Victorian
Landcare
Program



Australian Government
Department of Industry,
Innovation and Science

Brian D Newman Foundation
for the Environment



Wettenhall
ENVIRONMENT TRUST



Dja Dja Wurrung Clans
Aboriginal Corporation



'Thank you for submitting the Connecting Country progress report – great to hear how you, Bonnie and the team have been progressing the work, including the volunteers. Well done with the flexibility in the face of the challenges.'

Rebecca – The Ross Trust
Supporters of 'Future-proof our Forests' project



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 13,800 volunteer hours.



Well done! Connecting Country does an amazing job connecting people with local landscape. (And anyone that's seen the inside of a phascogale nest box won't easily forget it!)

You guys run a really tight ship. I'd recommend volunteering with Connecting Country to anyone.'

John
Connecting Country volunteer



Projects for 2022-23

Future-proof our forests – finalise development and begin monitoring of two pioneering climate future plots, supported by Ross Trust

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

Regenerate before it's too late – engage community to protect and regenerate our large old trees, supported by I&S Norman Foundation

Bursaria for butterflies – protect and restore habitat for the Castlemaine populations of the threatened Eltham Copper Butterfly

Landcare stickybeak tour – promote the amazing achievements of our local Landcare groups to the wider community

Other partnerships – collaborate with North Central CMA, Djaara and Kilter Rural and others to help deliver and monitor their projects





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

