

A close-up photograph of a hedgehog in its natural habitat. The hedgehog is positioned in the center-left of the frame, facing slightly upwards and to the right. Its dark brown fur is covered in sharp, light-colored quills. It is surrounded by tall, green grass and several bright yellow daisy-like flowers. To the right of the hedgehog, a portion of a tree trunk is visible, showing rough, textured bark. The background is a soft-focus field of similar vegetation.

# Annual report 2022-23



*Restoring landscapes across  
the Mount Alexander Region*

# President's message

Brendan Sydes


It has been pleasing to see Connecting Country adapt and thrive over the past 12 months, coming out the back of the covid era with a series of great projects and renewed vigor.

Connecting Country operates best on 'person-to-person' relationships and the organisation has always been about on-ground action, connecting people and landscapes. This past year has been no exception, with a particular focus on connecting landholders and protecting habitat for key threatened species.

As a community organisation, we have the ability to attract both government and philanthropic funding which allows us to be open to try new things and reinvent how we operate as required and we are grateful to all our funding partners.

Thank you to everyone who helped keep things going in 2022-23 – our staff team, my fellow committee members, volunteers, funding partners, and everyone who participated in our activities.

You remain our biggest assets and will ensure we continue our landscape restoration, education, landcare support and scientific monitoring into the next decade and beyond.



It has been a pleasure seeing the community attending our events again in person. Whilst combined efforts of Connecting Country's dedicated staff team, committee and community kept things ticking along online, its certainly more meaningful and enjoyable to be back meeting together, especially out amongst our beautiful landscape.

As we go forward, we must continue to innovate and adapt to the future funding landscape, which presents both opportunity and challenges.'

Brendan Sydes  
President – Connecting Country

# Director's message

Lori Arthur

This year saw a changeover in the Directors role with Frances Howe stepping away in February allowing me to come in. I extend a huge thank you to Frances (and those that have gone before) for establishing such solid processes and for providing a detailed handover which has helped me to settle into the role.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to work with such an amazing grass roots organisation. The dedication of staff and passion of our Committee members make it clear to me why the organisation has been able to navigate the ups and downs of fluctuating financial climates and covid lockdowns in recent years.

This year, we've been successful in securing some valuable grant and philanthropic funds, enabling us to deliver some targeted programs for key threatened species and to continue our long-term monitoring programs and to celebrate and protect the large old tree heroes in our landscape .

Contributions from volunteers, support of members and generous donations from our partners remain critically important to the work that we do. Please read on to discover what your amazing support has helped us achieve this year.





'The Mount Alexander region attracts people that want to connect with, and care for, the local environment.

It's a pleasure to work with a progressive organisation like Connecting Country, that listens to landholder and community needs and seeks out ways to make things happen.

Lori Arthur  
Director

# Financial overview

At 30 June 2023



income

• \$543,502



expenses

• \$541,730



difference

• \$1,772

assets

• 610,201



liabilities

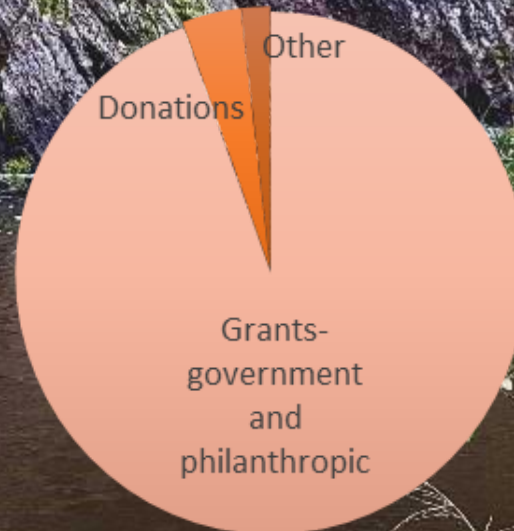
• \$449,526



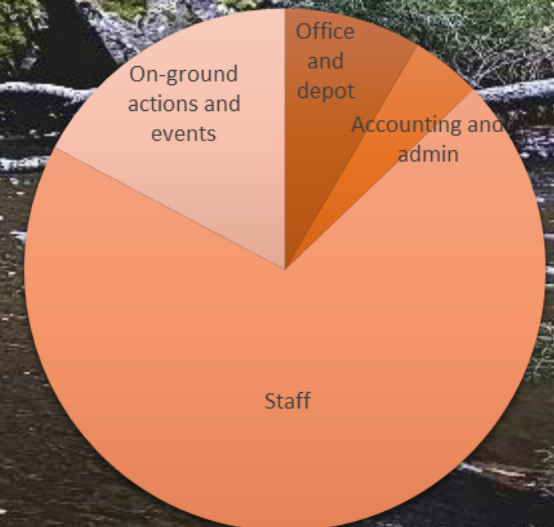
net assets

• \$160,675

Where our money  
came from



Where our money  
went



# Finance report

Max Kay

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

Our income during 2022-23 was adequate to cover expenses and we recorded a small profit of \$1,772. Our financial position remains sound with net assets of \$160,675.

We allocated grant funds through delivery of 14 projects supported by a range of government and philanthropic organisations.

Obtaining funding for our ongoing work remains a challenge, with all funding opportunities keenly pursued. When Connecting Country commenced 15 years ago, the initial large grants for our restoration works came from state and federal governments. However, we have now become more dependent on philanthropic funding. In 2022-23, 60% came from government sources and the remaining 40% from philanthropic and other income. We are greatly appreciative to these donors and grant providers who have enabled us to continue our work.



# What does Connecting Country do?



Connecting Country is a community-based not-for-profit organisation that operates at a landscape scale to increase, enhance and restore biodiversity across the Mount Alexander Shire and surrounds in Central Victoria. We work on four key themes:

engage  
community



monitor  
biodiversity



support  
Landcare



restore  
landscapes





# Why is our work necessary?

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

However, 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, outside the public reserve system, and needs help to thrive.

Our work aims to restore these forests, enhancing and reconnecting fragmented landscapes to support our unique local flora and fauna.

# Key projects in 2022-23



## Bursaria for butterflies

*Protect and improve the quality and quantity of available habitat for Castlemaine's populations of the threatened Eltham Copper Butterfly (Paralucia pyrodiscus lucida).*

- Engaged and supported private landholders adjacent to known populations to commit to long-term protection and restoration of butterfly habitat on their land (53 hectares, 23 landholders)
- Planting of 2000 butterfly habitat plants
- Raised awareness and promoted best practice restoration of butterfly habitat through community engagement activities
- Supported 2 Landcare Groups to enhance habitat on project sites
- Funded by the Australian Government through the Environment Restoration Fund – Threatened Species Strategy Action Plan - Priority Species Grants



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Agriculture**

# Key projects in 2022-23



## Regenerate before it's too late

*Raising awareness and care of the incredibly important large old tree heroes in our landscape.*

- Creation of a tree mapping portal to help community citizen scientists to record and recognize important trees in the landscape
- Development of a video showcasing the invaluable contribution large old trees play in the landscape for habitat, agriculture, amenity and wellbeing.
- Provision of land management advice to landholders and a series of community information sessions/field days – Caring for Large Old Trees event hosted in November 2022
- 3-year project funded by the Ian and Shirley Norman Foundation.
- Will be delivered in partnership with a Habitat for Phascogales Project in 2023-24.

# Key projects in 2022-23



Leafcutter beetle by Lou Citroen

## The Buzz project

### Promoting pollinators of central Victoria

*A project aimed to celebrate and expand community knowledge on the smaller heroes of our local ecosystems, the insect pollinators.*

- Series of community information sessions and field days with local entomologist experts
- Purchase of pollinator attracting plants for Landcare Groups to add value to sites
- Distribution of *Pollinators of Central Victoria* booklets
- Funded by the North Central Catchment Management Authority through the Victorian Landcare Program



**NORTH CENTRAL**

Catchment Management Authority

*Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People*



Mount Alexander  
Region  
**Landcare**

# Key projects in 2022-23



## Future-proof our forests

*A three-year project to develop two pioneering climate future plots for ongoing monitoring to assist climate change adaption for key local species.*

- Climate future plots are areas of revegetated land which incorporate genetically diverse plant material with the view to enhance resilience to anticipated changed climatic conditions.
- We used Bureau of Meteorology's climate predictions for our region to select seed from areas that are anticipated to match our climate into the future.
- Sourced material for two key local species, Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) and Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*) and have established plots in Moonlight Flat and Greenhill (1000 plants)
- Plots will be monitored over time to see how these plants adapt in future climatic conditions.
- Funded by the Ross Trust



# Key projects in 2022-23



## Protect Investment, Improve Capacity (PIIC)

*Delivery partner for North Central Catchment Management Authority (NCCMA) in reviewing previous investment in natural resource management on private land and implementing on-ground actions to enhance future outcomes.*

- 25 site visits with landholders assessing previous works and providing land management extension advice
- Weed control and revegetation on 13 properties to enhance previous revegetation works
- Planting of 2000+ indigenous plants
- Contracts with local bushland contractors including Djandak (commercial arm of Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation)



**NORTH CENTRAL**  
Catchment Management Authority  
*Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People*

# Engaging community

Ivan Carter



Photo by Ivan Carter

How do we educate and enlighten our community with the latest information and best practice management? We host events with the best guest speakers we can find and empower our community to take action on landscape restoration.

The past year has seen Connecting Country delivering face to face events on our beloved Eltham Copper Butterfly, how to care for large old trees and a volunteer thank you event.

We were very fortunate to host a walk through the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens, looking for the endangered Eltham Copper Butterfly, and finding some! What luck and joy!

We must continue to adapt to the times, and engage audiences through various media channels, which we are working on with our caring for large old trees video.



Photo by Ivan Carter



# Engaging community

2022-23

**1** new video produced

**3** education events

**7** radio segments and local newspaper articles

**55** people attended our caring for large old trees event

**85** blog posts to **740** e-news subscribers

**2000** Facebook followers - a 30% increase

A group of people are on a nature walk in a forest. In the foreground, a woman in a blue denim jacket and a wide-brimmed hat is looking towards the right. To her left, a woman in a pink shirt and a dark hat is also looking right. In the background, another woman in a green shirt and a straw hat is smiling. On the right, a person in a white shirt and a dark hat is partially visible. The forest has many thin trees and green foliage.

*'We really enjoyed the talk and walk with Elaine Bayes for the Eltham Copper Butterfly and could not believe our luck that we managed to see a number of the small and fragile butterflies on one morning!'.  
Rose*

# Monitoring biodiversity

Anna Senior and Jess Lawton

After 5 years working at Connecting Country, Jess handed over the Monitoring Coordinator role to Anna in spring 2023.

Our monitoring program continues in full swing! In spring 2022 and autumn 2023, our keen team of volunteers surveyed our 50 long term bird monitoring sites. Some highlights include 3/5 of the feathered five detected; Jacky Winter, Brown Treecreeper and Painted Button-quail. The rarely spotted Rose Robin was also detected on a paddock restoration site in Harcourt in winter 2023. This species record is a first for the Connecting Country bird monitoring project since its inception in 2010.

We have been successful in securing funding for the next round of nest box monitoring from the Ian and Shirley Norman Foundation and DEECA Nature Fund, which will begin in autumn 2024.

We are incredibly grateful to the generous individuals who make our monitoring program possible - our dedicated team of hard working volunteers and landholders who host sites. We couldn't do this without you!



# Monitoring biodiversity

2022-2023

**3 out of 5**

feathered five detected

**1**

Sighting of Rose  
Robin

**4338**

Birds recorded

**166**

bird surveys  
completed

**265 hours**

bird survey  
volunteers  
contributed

**97**

Bird species  
detected

*I enjoy doing bird surveys for Connecting Country! I get to regularly visit a beautiful regenerating woodland and know that my sightings are contributing to a top-notch scientific monitoring program.*

*Tanya Loos,  
Volunteer birdwatcher and  
landholder– Connecting Country*





# Supporting Landcare

Hadley Cole

2023 has been a busy and rewarding year for Landcare across the Mount Alexander region as we have returned to business as usual following the previous 3 years of the effects of COVID-19.

Connecting Country hosted 5 Landcare focused events that engaged over 150 people from the Landcare and wider communities. A pollinator presentation and field trip hosted as part of The Buzz project, were both popular events that have encouraged Landcare volunteers to get involved in monitoring pollinators across Landcare sites in the region.

For the second year since covid restrictions have lifted we returned to hosting the annual Landcare Link-up in person. This event aims to bring groups together to share stories and offer insights into all things Landcare. It is wonderful to see Landcare members come together again and share and learn from one another.

# Supporting Landcare

2022-2023

**30**

Local Landcare  
groups  
supported

**5**

Landcare in-  
person events

**167**

People engaged  
through in-person  
Landcare events

**13000 +**

Landcare member  
volunteer hours  
across the region

**5**

Landcare Groups  
received pollinator  
attracting plants  
for project sites

**11**

Editions of the  
Mount Alexander  
Landcare e-news  
circulated to 300+  
readers





Landcarers shared stories at the 2023 Landcare Link-up in Taradale

"Most informative and enjoyable. A valuable experience!"

"loved hearing about the trees and what land they're suited to. Loved being in the wilderness. Loved meeting neighbours. Thank you"

*2023 Landcare Link-up participants.*

# Restoring landscapes

## Bonnie Humphreys

To say it's been a busy year for landscape restoration, would be an understatement! We have been fortunate to receive a number of grants for on ground works, including the Eltham Copper Butterfly Project, Habitat for Phascogales, Caring for Large Old Trees and North Central CMA PIIC works.

We have also been busy replacing some of our climate future plot species, that didn't survive through the large floods last year. This project will ensure we have data available to help inform future plantings and preparing for our climate change scenarios in the landscape restoration works we implement.

It has been a pleasure to partner with North Central CMA on evaluating their previous on ground works in our region over the past two decades. This has allowed us to be a service provider for the North Central CMA and also plan some on ground works with the landowners that were eager to have further works on their property.

We have also been lucky to continue to support 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.



# Restoring landscapes

2022-23

**64**

Site visits  
conducted

**35**

project restoration  
sites

**5600**

Locally indigenous  
plants in the  
ground

**5**


Conservation  
management  
plans

**98**

Hectares of  
habitat restoration  
on private land

**7**

Landcare groups  
supported with  
on-ground works

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark brown bucket hat, a light grey long-sleeved shirt, and blue jeans, is kneeling in a field of yellow wildflowers. She is holding a blue notebook and a pen, looking down at it. Behind her is a blue wire fence, and in the background, there are trees and more vegetation. The scene is outdoors, likely in a natural or protected area.

*'Bonnie has ensured we have had a successful revegetation and weed removal program across our property. We are so excited to watch the new vegetation grow into habitat and thank the team for their efforts'.*

Mount Franklin landholder



"Many thanks from us here at Nalderun (and from the native pollinators at Me-Mandook Galk!) for the plants. They were planted by our School-based trainees out at the Ancestor Tree property, both in and around the Bush Tucker beds, on one of their TAFE days studying Certificate II in Horticulture. The students had only just finished creating bee-hotels the week before, so we're looking forward to attracting & hosting lots of amazing pollinators out there! "

Tabilk Mooroopook Upper Loddon Aboriginal Landcare Group

# 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



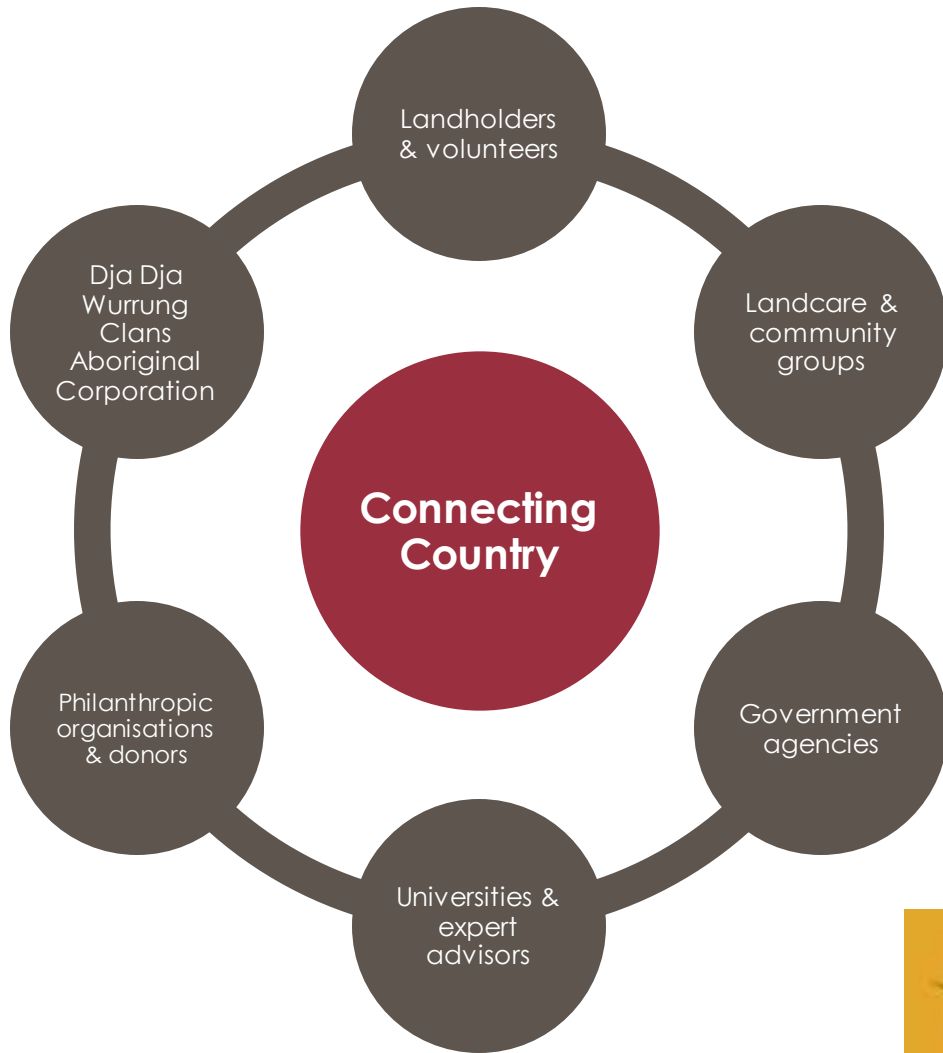
# Volunteers

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 13,000 volunteer hours.



# Key partners and financial supporters

2022-23



Brian D Newman Trust for the Environment



# Staff and committee

2022-23

## Staff:

Frances Howe (res. Feb 2023)

Lori Arthur (comm. Feb 2023)

*Director*

Bonnie Humphreys

*Landscape Restoration Coordinator*

Hadley Cole

*Landcare Facilitator Mount Alexander*

Anna Senior

*Project Support Officer*

Jess Lawton

*Monitoring Coordinator*

Ivan Carter

*Engagement Coordinator*

## Committee of management:

Brendan Sydes

*President*

Vacant

*Vice President*

Marie Jones

*Secretary*

Max Kay

*Treasurer*

Christine Brooke

Malcolm Trainor

Deborah Wardle

Stephen Oxley



# Get involved

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

[www.connectingcountry.org.au](http://www.connectingcountry.org.au)

**Get in touch:**

[info@connectingcountry.org.au](mailto:info@connectingcountry.org.au)

**Donate:**

[connectingcountry.org.au/get-involved/make-a-donation](http://connectingcountry.org.au/get-involved/make-a-donation)

**Follow us:**

[facebook.com/connectingcountry](https://facebook.com/connectingcountry)

**Watch our short film:**

[rememberthewild.org.au/connecting-country](http://rememberthewild.org.au/connecting-country)

**Download our project prospectus:**

[connectingcountry.org.au/prospectus2020](http://connectingcountry.org.au/prospectus2020)

