



# Landcare UpHunter

Winter 2014

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## Farming for the Future

James Armstrong's family have been farming sheep and cattle for over a century, including in the Cassilis area since 1948. Over the decades the family have adapted to changing farming methods for their core business, for their land, animals, waterways and native species.

In 2010, in co-operation with the now Local Land Services (LLS), they trialled using smaller paddocks for sheep and cattle moving their animals more frequently and increasing the time paddocks are rested. Four paddocks were converted to sixteen smaller paddocks and increasing land to stock density has paid off for these Cassilis based producers.

"This was the first stage of a program to run our farm more sustainably, focusing on the environment and productivity. From fencing to appreciating soil and land types and plant species, it allows us to control our grazing better" James said.

"We've trained the sheep to the new electric fencing system. We've only got three wires. There is a mob of 1,600 out there and you're unlucky to have three out. We run cattle around the paddocks and it has improved their temperament because they are handled every two or three days.

We record our grazing periods more accurately as well as meeting planned numbers and density of species benchmarks for groundcover diversity. It's enjoyable to work with my Dad, Cam, on this project. We've now done a quarter of our farm. We started on 500 acres, used that as a template to develop the rest of the farm and now have 1,000 acres covered".

Over the past 3 years the family have seen the real benefits of moving to a more sustainable production and landscape management system, learning how to best utilize their pasture to benefit the land and their animals.

Paddocks and ecosystem improvement have been excellent and sustained in both growing and non-growing seasons. It has built on the family's decades of farming experience in a more co-ordinated way.

Cam Armstrong started farming in the 60's when monitoring of livestock and pastures, grass, assessing budgets etc. were not nearly so detailed as today's farming management methods.

"We had not expected the degree of improvement in our sheep and cattle through this process. They are more content with regular paddock movement into fresh pastures. We have peace of mind through closer planning and more regular stock physical assessment. Riparian areas have been fenced off and sensitive landscape areas protected" James said.

"The old stock camp was also badly damaged and fencing off the area has shown significant vegetation recovery, ensuring protection of our history for this land.

We are confident the investment we put into these changes will continue to give benefits to our business and our environment".

James Armstrong



With "Dodge" the top farm dog



Setting up a new water trough

## Tortoise or Turtle

Tortoises and Turtles are reptiles and whilst they may look a lot alike, are cold-blooded, have a hard shell (called a carapace), scales, breathe air, lay eggs on land and come in all sizes, there are differences.

Terrestrial (land dwelling) species are commonly known as tortoises, including some semi aquatic ones that live near creeks, ponds and streams. Turtles usually spend most of their time in freshwater or in the ocean.

A female tortoise lays up to thirty eggs below ground, in a burrow. The eggs incubate in the warm ground for up to 120 days. The young hatchling then uses a sharp egg tooth to break out of its shell and dig up to the surface.

Most tortoises are herbivores, meaning they feed on grasses, weeds, leafy greens, flowers and fruits. When fully grown some tortoises are only a few centimetres long but others can be over two metres in size.

The Galapagos tortoise has the longest lifespan and it can live for over 160 years. Imagine living for that long! A female Galapagos Tortoise at Western Plains Zoo in Dubbo is over 90 years old. Three years ago she produced her first live hatchling called NJ who now weighs over 1kg. This year two more were hatched from more of her eggs. They will be about 5 years old before their keepers will be able to tell if they are female or male.

The Eastern long-necked turtle can be seen around farm dams or creeks.

Have you seen any at your local creek, dam, wetland area or even seen marine turtles in the ocean? How big were they?

Unlike the land dwelling tortoise, a turtle lives primarily in water. The way some have their eyes set in their heads lets them look down at objects in front of them. Some such as the Snapping turtle and soft-shelled turtles have eyes closer to the top of their head. They can hide from predators in shallow water, lying submerged except for their eyes and nostrils.

Turtles usually have either webbed feet or long flippers.

They have rigid beaks and use their jaws to cut and chew food. They can have sharp ridges for slicing food or serrated-edged ridges that help them cut through tough plants and use their tongues to swallow food but unlike most reptiles they cannot stick out their tongues to catch food.

An adult turtle might eat aquatic plants, insects, snails and worms but sea turtles may not eat meat at all, feeding mostly on algae or eat jellyfish and sponge. Freshwater turtles however eat small fish and a wide range of aquatic life. As protein is essential to turtle growth young turtles are purely carnivorous.

Ruth Hardy



*Eastern long-necked turtle*

## Primary Colours

DevilArk Advocates held a colouring-in competition for 5-8 year old Primary School students in the Upper Hunter Shire. Teachers co-ordinated the distribution of "Daisy the Devil" colour-in pages and the collection of all entries.

Over 150 entries were received by DevilArk. They were displayed at Coles (Scone) supermarket for two weeks, giving opportunity for students to show their families and community what they had achieved.

Local artist Sarah Bishop judged the entries and commented "I was impressed with the imaginative colour usage by the children and the number of entries there were".

Kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2 winners were presented with their prizes at their school assemblies. Big Dev was there too!

Students displayed a surprising amount of knowledge of the DevilArk conservation breeding project and the plight of the endangered Tasmanian Devil.

Ruth Hardy



## Library Tales

Our local libraries are full of information, resources and learning opportunities but how often do you visit one? Most of us would use a computer and have Internet access but this does have its limitations. Libraries hold books, CD's, DVD's, magazines etc., provide social aspects for all ages, local knowledge and opportunity to share stories.

From Baby talk, Toddler time or Story time activities, songs and stories for parents and young children, Early literacy training - Read, talk and rhyme with your child to youth and adult written and media resources.

A range of information on the environment, sustainability and agriculture can be found in our local libraries.

New library resources include the CMA published: A Guide to Common Fungi of the Hunter-Central Rivers Region; Where Land meets water Resource Kit; Managing Native Pastures for Agriculture and Conservation and Aboriginal culturally Significant Landscapes. DPI: publications include the Grasses of the NSW Tablelands and the AgGuide to Managing Weeds.

For insight into local landscape, farming, social, historical and indigenous aspects have a read of Remembering Country: History & Memories of Towarri National Park.

If you cannot find a book or other resource on the shelf, ask your librarian!

Ruth Hardy

## Resources & Funding

National Tree Day - be a Co-ordinator for this event in your neighbourhood or at your school. First time Co-ordinators can register for this event and share their school or public site 'story' at [www.treeday.planetark.org/](http://www.treeday.planetark.org/)

Weeds of National Significance (WONS) information can be accessed via the Weeds Australia website [www.weeds.org.au/wons](http://www.weeds.org.au/wons) and via the Atlas of Living Australia website.

Aussie Bee - promoting the enjoyment and preservation of Australian Native Bees. This website also holds information on interviews, events/workshops and research information, Go to <http://www.aussiebee.com.au>

FeralScan - website has been upgraded to provide more resources: e.g. mobile website for smart phone users and a community group facility for groups to create/join a group within FeralScan. Go to <http://www.feral.org.au>

"Field Guide to Pest Animals" iPhone App - Released by the Invasive animals CRC (Apple iOS devices only at present). Go to <http://www.feral.org.au/mobile-phone-apps/> or download from App Store.

Rural Career Guide - a Rural Skills Australia resource for students, parents, job seekers, educators etc. It includes interactive displays and education/training options. Go to [www.ruralcareers.net.au/rural-skills-australia](http://www.ruralcareers.net.au/rural-skills-australia)

Native Seaweeds for Agricultural Products - a Landline story on using seaweeds as food, medicine, agricultural products, aquaculture feed. To view go to <http://www.abc.net.au/landline/content/2014/s4002127.htm>

Meat & Livestock Australia have a new App with the latest market information on cattle, sheep and goats. Searches can be customised specific to your region. Go to Apple iTunes App Store or Google Play and 'MLA market information' or visit [www.mla.com.au/marketinfoapp](http://www.mla.com.au/marketinfoapp) to download the App.

Karsts, Caves & Florentine Forests - the Forest Education Foundation (FEF) interactive online learning program for students and teachers. In August the 2014 Expedition Class Cave Search can be followed via a daily blog. Go to [www.forest-education.com/karsts-caves-and-florentine-forests](http://www.forest-education.com/karsts-caves-and-florentine-forests)

Feral Photos Competition 2014 - the Invasive Animals CRC is looking for the best images of Australia's pest animals and impacts they have on biodiversity and agriculture. Competition closes 30th September. To enter go to [www.invasiveanimals.com/feral-photos/](http://www.invasiveanimals.com/feral-photos/)

### Funding

Norman Wettenhall Foundation - Small Environmental Grants Scheme provides funding up to \$10,000 and can be applied for throughout the year (applications assessed quarterly). For information on the Small Grants Biodiversity Conservation funding, Sustainable Land Management Rural NSW grant or Leadership Development Grant go to <http://nwf.org.au/>

## Events for your Diary

"A Day in the Life of Landcare" - 20th July is the 25th Anniversary of Landcare in Australia. Celebrate this In the Upper Hunter Shire with:

Murrurundi Landcare & Tidy Towns, Pages River Warriors Project - a Weed, Plant & Eat Morning on 20th July. Tel: Robyn on 0419 705 753 or email [ethelo009@hotmail.com](mailto:ethelo009@hotmail.com)

Scone Landcare -Tree Giveaway & Photo Shoot Project 20th - 27th July. Tel: Ruth 0407 232 539 email [sconelandcare@gmail.com](mailto:sconelandcare@gmail.com)

National Tree Day Sunday 27th July  
Schools Tree Day Friday 25th July & also Tree Day at Work. For information & to register your group, school or business event go to [www.treeday.planetark.org](http://www.treeday.planetark.org)

Pages River Warriors Working Bee, Wilson Memorial Oval, Murrurundi 3rd August & 7th September from 8.00am, Lunch afterwards at a local cafe. Tel: Robyn on 0419 705 753 or email [ethelo009@hotmail.com](mailto:ethelo009@hotmail.com)

Keep Australia Beautiful Week 25th -31st August. Go to [kab.org.au/](http://kab.org.au/) keep-australia-beautiful-week

Threatened Species Day 7th September

National Bilby Day 8th September

National Landcare Conference 17th - 19th September in Melbourne. Go to [www.landcareonline.com.au/nationalconference](http://www.landcareonline.com.au/nationalconference) for the conference program, Field trip information & registration.



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## Land for Wildlife

*Land for Wildlife* (LFW) is a simple but dynamic network that can assist rural landholders with conserving flora and fauna in the Upper Hunter.

It is part of a national program that anyone with half a hectare of native bushland can join at no cost. It is a straight forward way to engage with others who share a love of their native surroundings and want to commit to improving their bushland.

The Community Environment Network (CEN) in Ourimbah co-ordinates *Land For Wildlife* in NSW.

In joining *Land for Wildlife* landholders are in a unique position to create much needed corridors of native vegetation for flora and fauna to flourish.

Landholders have the opportunity to participate in workshops on issues of bush regeneration, weed control and feral animals to name a few. Regular newsletters are distributed and other resources shared by partners and supporters of the program.

A free property assessment from LFW staff can include details of native plants, weed control such as lantana, bush regeneration, species indigenous to your area, other plants, habitat description, water supply/ issues, connectivity with surrounding land and wildlife corridors, photos etc.

LFW provide participating owners with a copy of the assessment, a certificate, a LFW property sign, invitations to workshops etc. and also have opportunity to include your achievements and details on land regeneration in the State newsletter.

At a recent 'Friendly Farming' Workshop held at Merriwa, LFW State Coordinator John Asquith gave insight to the program, the assessment process, Regional Providers and the benefits of landholders joining LFW.

Environmental Consultant Julia Imrie talked about Cineraria, an emerging weed in the Hunter. Julia has produced a great fact sheet on Cineraria which you can download at <http://www.cen.org.au/Land-for-Wildlife/>. This link also contains other information and resources and now on Facebook under 'Land for Wildlife - Hawkesbury to Hunter'.

There are 4,350 isolated bushland patches on Hunter Valley private lands.

LFW works in partnership with the Great Eastern Ranges (GER), Stepping Stones project in supporting landholders to reconnect bushland to the backbone of the Great Eastern Ranges in the Hunter, increasing ecosystem resilience to climate change and development threats by strengthening connections between key habitat.

To apply for a property assessment download an Expression of Interest form at <http://www.cen.org.au/Land-for-wildlife/Join-LFW/>

For more information on *Land for Wildlife* contact the CEN office on 4349 4756 or email [lfw@cen.org.au](mailto:lfw@cen.org.au)

Carolyn Smith



Clearing riparian weeds

Visit us at [www.landcare.nsw.gov.au/groups/scone-landcare-group](http://www.landcare.nsw.gov.au/groups/scone-landcare-group)