

Towards new habitat connections in the Yarra Valley

Yarra4Life is a major environmental project in the Yarra Valley that aims to protect, improve, increase and connect habitat for native animals including the Helmeted Honeyeater and the Leadbeater's Possum.

A long-term goal is to have habitat links from the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve north to the Yarra Ranges National Park, south-east to Kurth Kiln Regional Park and west to the Dandenong Ranges National Park, thereby expanding the habitat range for these and other native animal species.

Partner organisations working together in Yarra4Life in 2015/16 included Parks Victoria, Yarra Ranges Council, Melbourne Water, Yarra Ranges Landcare Network, Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater, Trust for Nature, Victorian National Parks Association, Friends of Leadbeater's Possum, the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning, Wurundjeri Tribe Land & Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Inc. and Conversation Volunteers Australia.

The Port Phillip & Westernport CMA coordinates Yarra4Life on behalf of the partner organisations by convening a Coordination Committee, managing the project's finances and employing project staff who lead the delivery on on-ground works, reporting and promotion.

Achievements in 2015/16

The major Yarra4Life activity in 2015/16 was delivering the third year of a five-year, \$1 million project funded through the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme. This included the completion of on-ground works by 13 landholders engaged in the first round of the private land incentives program, which improve habitat values in high-priority locations. By the end of 2015/16, these on-ground works resulted in:

- 21.2 hectares of weed control
- 13.5 hectares of pest animal control
- 28.7 hectares of revegetation
- 6.2 hectares of existing native bushland protected by 2.5 kilometres of fencing

An additional property owned by the Wandooon Estate Aboriginal Corporation was also engaged in 2015/16. A grant of \$108,474 was awarded to the property owners to complete environmental works to improve habitat suitability for threatened species.

Yarra4Life secured a \$100,000 grant from the Victorian Government's Threatened Species Protection Initiative to assist in the purchase of 2.3 hectares of land adjoining the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve. The land will be rehabilitated and added to the reserve to expand habitat for threatened species. Additional funds were also provided through the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme.

Final completion of three on-ground environmental projects funded through the Judith Eardley Yarra Wildlife Grant was also achieved. The projects were completed by Greening Australia, Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater and Warburton Primary School.

Ongoing engagement and reciprocal learning activities between the Yarra4Life Coordination Committee and the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Compensation and Cultural Heritage Council were also undertaken. A Wurundjeri representative presented at the Yarra4Life Coordination Committee meeting in May 2016 and the Committee plans to meet again with the Wurundjeri in the coming months.



Wandooon Estate's Brooke Collins, Small Farm Services Victoria's David Stewart and PPWCMA's Mary-Kate Hockey discussing planned works with Federal Member for Casey, Hon Tony Smith MP

Looking ahead

Significant landholder assistance and on-ground work, as well as community engagement activities, will continue in 2016/17 and 2017/18 with the funding allocated to this work from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme. Yarra4Life will also commence Round 2 of the financial incentives program, targeting landholders in priority locations.

In addition, Yarra4Life will roll-out a series of education/training events in partnership with the Yarra Ranges Shire Council, Southern Ranges Environment Alliance and the Yarra Ranges Landcare Network.

The transfer of the newly purchased 2.3 hectares of land into the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve is anticipated to take place in 2016/17. On-ground rehabilitation works will commence which will include weed and pest animal control and revegetation.



Yarra4Life Coordination Committee at Karwarra Gardens in Kalorama

Case study - Collaboration at Coranderrk

Through the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme, Yarra4Life awarded the Wandoon Estate Aboriginal Corporation a grant totalling \$108,474 for environmental works to be undertaken at their property, 'Coranderrk', in Healesville.

Wandoon Estate is owned and operated by the Wurundjeri people. For many years, the 81 hectare property has been primarily used for cattle grazing. In 2014/15, the Port Phillip & Westernport CMA's Regional Landcare Facilitator project developed a Whole Farm Plan to identify opportunities to boost farm productivity whilst improving environmental values.

Through this process the property was identified as a very high priority for restoration by the 'Ecological Character Description' model developed in the early stages of the Yarra4Life project. This means that the property was identified as having high potential for the restoration of habitat for the Helmeted Honeyeater and the Leadbeater's Possum.

The grant will support on-ground works over two years. Activities will include:

- 5.3km of stock exclusion fencing to protect 18.2 hectares of large trees and remnant vegetation along the Yarra River;
- 19.1 hectares of weed control; and
- 25.7 hectares of revegetation to create a network of 20 metre wide shelterbelts, thus increasing connectivity across the property and between the Yarra River, Badger Creek and Coranderrk Bushland Reserve.

These activities will not only significantly improve habitat suitability for the Helmeted Honeyeater and Leadbeater's Possum, but also provide real benefits to farm productivity.



Hon Tony Smith MP and PPWCMA staff presenting grant to Wandoon Aboriginal Estate Corporation at Coranderrk



This project is supported by the PPWCMA, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme, Yarra Ranges Council and Melbourne Water.