



Key Project Facts

Property Owners

Stephen and Dianne Brew

Location

Wild Dog Valley
16km north west of Leongatha

South Gippsland Landcare Network Group

Mt Eccles/Wild Dog Valley

Property Description

140 acre grazing property.
Steep slopes and creek flats.
Sheep and Jersey bull production.

FOSK Project Description

Zone A - Fencing and protection of 2.21ha of remnant vegetation

Zone B - Fencing and revegetation of 0.99ha to link with the remnant site and other plantings

Previous Landcare Work

A total of 8.2ha fenced, revegetated and managed across the entire property.

CASE STUDY

Koalas, Jersey Bulls and Giant Earth Worms

Two years ago Dianne Brew had her first official sighting of a Strzelecki Koala in her back yard, a cause for great excitement and sense of achievement.

Dianne, Stephen and their children have lived on their Wild Dog Valley property, 16km north west of the township of Leongatha, for over 20 years and in that time they've done a lot of work that has led to the all important koala sighting.

As members of the Mt Eccles/Wild Dog Creek Landcare Group, Dianne and Stephen value the importance of their property to the Friends of Strzelecki Koalas (FOSK) Project, an initiative set up through the South Gippsland Landcare Network Fund.

With remnant vegetation and over 5ha of revegetation sites on their property, the Brews were keen to be part of the FOSK – Habitat for Life Project.

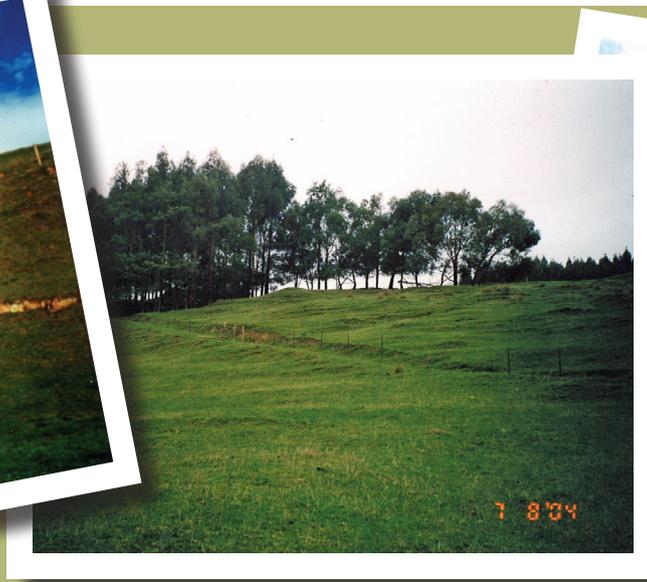
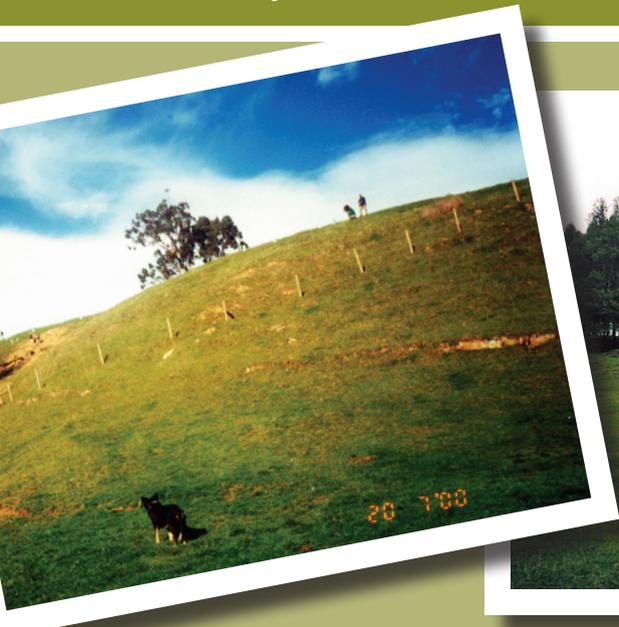
Funding from the project will enable Dianne and Stephen to fence off and protect 2.21ha of remnant bush. They will also do 0.99ha of supplementary planting that will result in the remnant area linking with their revegetation efforts along the stretch of Wild Dog Valley Creek that runs through their property, some of which are now 20 years old.

Photos

Left - FOSK project member Dianne Brew

Right - Jersey bulls enjoying a warm spot on the property, protected by vegetation planted 9 years ago.





Linking Remnants

To the north of the Wild Dog Valley and in the western end of the Strzelecki Ranges is Mt Worth State Park.

It is representative of the tall wet forests of Mountain Ash, Blackwood, Mountain Grey Gum and tree ferns that once covered the hills, slopes and gullies of the area. It is also great koala habitat.

Many properties in the area still have small pockets of this remnant bushland in deep gullies or on steep slopes. It is these remnants and the newer plantings on the farm that Dianne Brew attributes to her visiting koala.

“With more people fencing off and planting or protecting vegetation, even though it may not all connect at this point in time, it provides stepping stones for the koalas to move about, particularly during the mating season.”

As part of the FOSK project the Brew family, along with the members of their Landcare group, used aerial maps and local knowledge to identify current stands of native vegetation in their area.

Armed with this information they were able to better explore opportunities for landholders to work together to link remnants to new plantings.

This will effectively create vegetation corridors or biolinks between properties and, importantly, provide on-farm and production benefits.

On-farm Benefits

While allocating portions of farmland to native vegetation is part of the Brew farming ethos, their willingness to make this investment is not just for the wildlife.

It is an effective method of erosion control on steep slopes and along waterways and it has helped to provide shelter for livestock and increase pasture growth.

“Back in 1991 the Catchment Management Authority, then the Tarwin River Management Board, got local farmers on-board to do river restoration work on many sections of Wild Dog Valley Creek.”

Photos L to R

Site prior to revegetation works (2000).

Four years growth (2004).

Shelter provided by strategically planted vegetation can improve pasture and stabilise erosion sites (2013).



Photo courtesy of Helga Binder

The Strzelecki Koala is one of the most important koala populations in southern Australia. The fact that they have a very high genetic variability may be the key to the survival of Victorian koalas in the future.

According to Dianne, the waterway is more stable now and less prone to flooding. With over 20 years growth along the creek banks, and combined with stands of strategically sited shelter belts, the Brews have found that the vegetation has significantly minimised the effects of wind and frost.

This has 'warmed' the paddocks and helped to improve pasture productivity and the health and welfare of their sheep and prized Jersey bulls.

Farming on such steep slopes, Dianne and Stephen have always actively fenced-off and revegetated landslips, especially those close to the road. This practice has not only helped stabilise their paddocks and provide shelter belts, it has also started to contribute to some real biodiversity outcomes.

Biodiversity Success

"One of the things that tells me we're doing a pretty good job is that around the property, but especially in my garden, more and more natives are germinating which means we're at a point now where we've developed our own seed bank on the property.

"This has influenced the philosophy behind fencing off our 2.21ha FOSK remnant. Once cattle are excluded, we feel confident that the revegetation we do there will be supplemented over the coming years by the self-seeding and natural regeneration potential within the site," explained Dianne.

"Another big reason to minimise the disturbance up there is that the site is also home to the endangered Giant Gippsland Earthworm."

Strzelecki Koala

Historically koalas were widespread across Victoria but populations declined in the early 1900s.

In order to combat this, koalas were translocated from populations with a very low genetic diversity on Phillip and French Islands to the rest of Victoria.

These koalas overwhelmed most of the remaining koala population in Victoria, except for those in the Strzelecki Ranges in Gippsland.

As a result, the Strzelecki Koala population is believed to be unique in Victoria as a genetically intact and diverse population.

It is therefore feasible that this genetically diverse population will better withstand threats such as climate change than their genetically uniform cousins.

Giant Gippsland Earthworm

Listed as a threatened and protected species under the *Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*, the Giant Gippsland Earthworm is limited to a small range within South Gippsland.

Although the clearing of its preferred tall, wet eucalypt forest habitat has limited its numbers, the Giant Gippsland Earthworm can be found living deep in the blue-grey clay of cleared farmland.



Photo
2.2ha remnant
vegetation site to
be protected as
part of the FOSK
project.

Worth the Investment

Farming families such as the Brews have invested a great deal of time, money and love over the years to protect the remnant bush on their property and have gradually added to the vegetation on their property as funds have been available.

Dianne adds, “This kind of work is gradual, you add to it bit by bit, and you’ve got to be patient. I’ve waited over 20 years to see a Strzelecki Koala in my backyard, but with projects like FOSK and other work supported by Landcare in the area, I’m sure koala sightings will be a common occurrence.”

Become a FOSK Supporter

Contact South Gippsland Landcare Network
phone | 5662 5759
email | sgln@landcare.net

www.fosk.org.au
www.facebook.com/SouthGippslandLandcareNetwork

FOSK Habitat For Life Project

The FOSK Habitat for Life program is a community based four year program aiming to protect and support the unique Strzelecki Koala population in the Strzelecki Ranges.

The project aims to do this through a combination of strategic on-ground projects on private properties across South Gippsland and an extensive community education and volunteering program.

What Can You Do?

Many of the threats faced by koalas are due to the effects of urban growth and habitat loss.

You can help by:

- Becoming a FOSK supporter and subscribing to the quarterly newsletter
- Joining your local Landcare Group and planting trees for koala habitat
- Driving slowly on roads especially at night near remnant bush
- Joining a community education day where you can learn to monitor koalas
- Adding Fosky Koala as a friend on Facebook
- Looking after any trees you have by fencing them off from stock and controlling weeds.

