



CASE STUDY

Social & Environmental Benefits of Koala Habitat

One of the first things Helen and Ian Hasty did when they moved permanently to their farm in the rolling hills of Mardan, south of Mirboo North, was to join the local Landcare group.

They have been active in Landcare for the past nine years, valuing the social aspects of their membership just as much as the on-farm and environmental benefits.

Now a member of the Friends of the Strzelecki Koalas (FOSK), Helen places great value on the connection Landcare gives the couple to their farm and its place within landscape of the Strzelecki Ranges.

“Landcare provided us with an instant social network when we moved here,” explained Helen. “Everyone collaborates on fencing and revegetation projects and the sharing of knowledge and information has been invaluable to us as ‘new’ farmers.”

According to Helen, she and Ian always knew that when they retired from their business in Melbourne they wanted to do something that would keep them busy and involve their love of farming.

Photos

Left - Mardan Mirboo North Landcarer Helen Hasty.

Right - Angus steers enjoying a warm spot on the property.

Key Project Facts

Property Owners

Helen and Ian Hasty

Location

Mardan

11km south of Mirboo North

South Gippsland Landcare Network Group

Mardan Mirboo North

Property Description

57ha beef grazing property.
Steep slopes and creek gullies.

FOSK Project Description

Zone A - Fencing and revegetation of 0.8ha to link with other plantings

Zone B - Fencing and revegetation of 0.3ha to link with other plantings

Previous Landcare Work

A total of 4ha fenced, revegetated and managed across the entire property.





Linking Through Landcare

“I’ve always had an affinity with farming,” reminisced Helen. “We holidayed with the kids on a farm in Berry’s Creek over a twenty year period and the farmer kindly let me help out, even in the dairy.”

Over the years, Helen also did lots of agricultural-based courses and she and Ian did a lot of research into making their move to the country.

“We had to make sure it would work. We looked at a number of locations and a range of properties before deciding on Mardan.”

Helen and Ian spent time at their farm learning the ropes; even leasing the property next door to learn how to run cattle.

When they moved permanently to their beef-grazing property, Helen and Ian had already established an association with Landcare and knew how their steep-slopes would benefit from additional ridge and gully plantings.

“Apart from some cypress wind breaks and a small patch of remnant bush, there was very little vegetation on the property when we got here,” explained Helen.

“Thankfully a couple of revegetation sites done by previous owners had persisted and their benefits were obvious; you could feel that those sections of paddock were ‘warmer’.”

Over the years Helen and Ian’s involvement with Landcare has meant they have been able to strategically plan revegetation projects to provide shelter and protection for stock and pasture and, importantly, to stabilise erosion sites in steep gullies and on creek banks.

With the aid of a map, Helen detailed how revegetation work as part of the FOSK project will join up with existing plots to create biolinks within the property and connections with neighbouring properties.

“One of the key components of the FOSK Habitat for Life Project is to protect and support the unique Strzelecki Koala population by creating vegetation corridors and planting new sites with ‘koala-friendly’ plant species.”

Photos

Left - Fenced-off gully prior to revegetation works (2007).

Middle - Landcare planting day.

Right - The same site 6 years later (2013).



Photo courtesy of HVP.

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 koalas in the future.

Good Planning, Joint Projects and Koala Habitat

Helen points in the direction of Ian who is deep in a gully fencing off a section of the FOSK site.

“That spot is about 0.8 hectares of gully and incorporates some existing trees. Add that to 0.3 hectares at another site and we’ll be putting in around 4,500 tubes of indigenous plant stock this year.”

Fencing off and revegetating these particular areas of the Hasty property is all part of a broader, coordinated Landcare plan to improve koala habitat in the area in the Strzelecki Ranges area. Over the period of a year project officers with the South Gippsland Landcare Network worked with groups in the Network area to identify key habitats and biolinks for koalas and other species, and to identify key properties and their owners.

The groups were then able to work together to create action plans that identified joint projects that would provide good quality koala corridors across the Network. These action plans became a fundamental part of the Koala Habitat Preservation, Enhancement and Restoration Plan that is now being implemented across the SGLN with an on-ground focus in the Strzelecki Ranges.

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.

Herb-rich Foothill Forest EVC

Occurring on the southerly and easterly aspects of hills and gullies in the Strzelecki Ranges, this Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) is characterised by a high cover and diversity of herbs and grasses.

Messmate Stringybark, Mountain Grey-gum and Narrow-leaf Peppermint tend to be the dominant tree canopy.

These are eucalypt species that are part of habitat preferred by the Strzelecki Koala.



Photo

A planting day on the Hasty property where Landcare members join forces to revegetate a gully and, as a bonus, preserve a healthy stand of tree-ferns.

Social and Environmental Investment

Importantly, particularly from Helen's perspective, the FOSK Habitat for Life Project is relatively unique in that it ranks all proposed sites on both potential environmental benefit as well as social benefit.

"With the value the FOSK project places on social connection, and with funding and on-ground support in place, I'm sure planting koala habitat will appeal to landholders who might not have been involved in the past," adds Helen.

"Work has already started on a number of properties and, with a clear blueprint for action, the Landcare Group is keen to contact more farmers in the area to get them on board – that's exciting."

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.

