

VICTORIAN

LANDCARE

SPRING 2026 ISSUE 92

& CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT



VICTORIAN LANDCARE AWARDS FEATURE

Celebrating Victoria's landcarers





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Ian and Gay Cornthwaite, winners of the Australian Government Community Partnerships Landcare Award.



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Kate Mirams and Peter Neaves, winners of the Australian Government Sustainable Agriculture Landcare Award.

Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management

Spring 2026 Issue 92

Cover photograph

Leadbeater's possum, Victoria's animal emblem. Photo: Justin Cally.

Editorial committee

Sarah Vella (Landcare Victoria Inc.), Barry Kennedy (Melbourne Water), John Robinson (DEECA), Alandi Durling (Landcare Australia) and Currie Communications (Editor).

Editorial contributions

Email: info@landcarevictoria.org.au

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We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it.

We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partnering with Victorian Traditional Owners and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.

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Minister's Foreword

It is my pleasure to introduce this special edition of the *Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management* magazine, celebrating the winners of the 2026 Victorian Landcare Awards.

These awards recognise the outstanding efforts of individuals, schools, community groups, Traditional Owners, and landcare networks that are making a lasting difference to Victoria's landscapes, waterways and communities. Their dedication demonstrates the power of local action, and the vital role landcare continues to play in building a sustainable and resilient future.

This special edition of the magazine includes insightful stories about the winners of the 2026 Victorian Landcare Awards, which showcase the innovation, commitment and collaboration that define Victoria's landcare movement.

Among them is Australian Government Landcare Innovation Award winner, Dr Elia Pirtle, who works as a landcare facilitator with Project Platypus Landcare Network in the upper Wimmera catchment. Elia is helping shape the future of conservation using artificial intelligence, habitat mapping and citizen science to reconnect fragmented habitats across western Victoria, and to engage more people in landcare and environmental volunteering.

I am also inspired by the achievements of the Wodonga Urban Landcare Network, winner of the Landcare Network Award, which is leading landscape-scale restoration through strong partnerships and coordinated community action in north-east Victoria.

The work of Moogji Aboriginal Council and Far East Victoria Landcare, winners of the First Nations Landcare Collaboration Award, highlights the value of combining Traditional Owner ecological knowledge with contemporary land management practices to achieve positive environmental and cultural outcomes.

As Victoria celebrates 40 years of landcare, Joan Kirner Landcare Award winner Dorothy Reid, stands out for her decades of service. A founding member of the Birchip Landcare Group in 1988, she has helped strengthen communities, protect biodiversity and inspire generations of Landcare volunteers across the Mallee.

The NextGen Landcare Award winner Annette Cavanagh, from north-east Victoria, co-founded Upper Goulburn Intrepid Landcare. Annette is a leading advocate for youth participation in landcare, inspiring and supporting young environmental leaders across Australia.

The stories featured in this edition show us that landcare is about more than caring for the environment. It is about people coming together to strengthen communities, share knowledge, inspire future generations and create meaningful change.



Whether restoring coastlines, improving biodiversity, supporting sustainable agriculture or engaging young people in environmental stewardship, each award winner represents the very best of what can be achieved through collective action.

I congratulate all award winners and nominees, and thank the award judges and thousands of volunteers, landholders, educators, community leaders and environmental champions who contribute their time and expertise to landcare. Your efforts are helping to protect and enhance Victoria's natural environment for generations to come.

“The Victorian winners of the nine National Landcare Awards categories will go on to represent Victoria at the 2027 National Landcare Awards. I wish them all the best for that journey.”

I hope the stories in this special edition of the magazine inspire others to get involved and continue the important work of caring for Victoria's land, waterways and biodiversity.

Jaclyn Symes

Jaclyn Symes MP
Minister for Environment
Minister for Energy and Resources
Minister for Climate Action
Minister for the State Electricity Commission

Environmental Volunteer Group Award



Winner

TreeProject

Every year, thousands of Victorians grow indigenous seedlings in their own backyards, helping restore habitats and landscapes they may never personally visit.



Tree Project has 2,500 volunteers across Victoria who produce around 160,000 seedlings each year.

Below right: Tree Project volunteers at a tree planting day.

That simple but powerful idea sits at the heart of TreeProject, an organisation that has created one of Victoria's most successful volunteer-driven environmental programs by connecting urban communities with regional revegetation projects.

TreeProject's model trains volunteers to grow indigenous seedlings at home before they are supplied to landcare groups, conservation organisations and private landholders undertaking restoration projects across the state.

The approach has made environmental volunteering accessible to people from all backgrounds and levels of experience, creating meaningful opportunities for participation and bridging the city-country divide.

The program started in 1989 with the production of 15,000 seedlings and has grown to now support more than 2,500 volunteers each year producing over 160,000 seedlings each year.

Participants learn practical skills in seed preparation, germination and plant care while gaining a deeper understanding of local ecology and the role indigenous vegetation plays in healthy landscapes.

Volunteer trainers provide ongoing support throughout the growing process, helping participants build confidence and environmental knowledge.

The learning continues beyond the backyard. TreeProject's planting days bring volunteers together with landcare groups and landholders across Victoria, allowing participants to gain hands-on experience in habitat restoration, biodiversity conservation and long-term land management.

For many volunteers, these activities provide their first direct connection with regional communities and environmental work on-the-ground.



“This sustained participation demonstrates TreeProject's success in fostering an informed, active and resilient community of environmental volunteers across Victoria.”

Susi Millton, General Manager, TreeProject

“The organisation not only mobilises thousands of volunteers each year but also equips them with the knowledge, confidence and motivation to continue contributing to environmental restoration,” TreeProject General Manager Susi Millton said.

“This sustained participation demonstrates TreeProject's success in fostering an informed, active and resilient community of environmental volunteers across Victoria.”

The program has also created multiple pathways for volunteers to stay involved through seed packing, nursery activities and recycling programs.

These opportunities strengthen participants' sense of stewardship while reinforcing the connection between individual action and landscape-scale environmental outcomes.

By combining practical environmental education with meaningful volunteer experiences,

TreeProject has built a model that not only restores landscapes but also builds environmental awareness and community connection.

Through thousands of volunteers and countless seedlings, the organisation continues to demonstrate the power of grassroots action in creating lasting environmental change. 🌱

Highly commended

Hamilton-Coleraine Rail Reserve Committee

A neglected former railway corridor in Victoria's south-west has been transformed into a thriving conservation reserve thanks to the efforts of the Hamilton-Coleraine Rail Reserve Committee.

Spanning 37 kilometres and 157 hectares, the reserve now protects native grasslands, woodlands and heathlands while providing important habitat connectivity through a largely agricultural landscape.

The volunteer-led group has planted more than 8,000 native trees, shrubs and grasses, while engaging schools, community organisations, local businesses and neighbouring landholders in restoration activities.

Since work begun 26 years ago, the committee has overcome challenges including major weed infestations, ageing infrastructure and complex landholder negotiations.

Its success demonstrates how long-term community commitment can transform degraded land into an asset valued for both biodiversity and recreation.



Top: Community involvement has been central to the Hamilton-Coleraine Rail Reserve Committee's success.

Above: Wombat forestcare oversees environmental monitoring initiatives, along with habitat restoration projects, citizen science initiatives and educational activities.

Wombat Forestcare

Long-term monitoring and protection of native wildlife has been at the core of Wombat Forestcare's work in one of Victoria's most significant forest ecosystems.

The group maintains hundreds of nest boxes throughout the Wombat Forest, east of Macedon, providing critical habitat for species including brush-tailed phascogales and sugar gliders while generating valuable long-term ecological data.

Beyond its monitoring program, the organisation delivers habitat restoration projects, citizen science initiatives and educational activities that

encourage people to engage with the forest and its conservation.

Through partnerships with volunteers, researchers and community groups, Wombat Forestcare has helped build a strong culture of environmental stewardship while contributing important knowledge about the region's biodiversity and ecological health.

Joan Kirner Landcare Award 40th Year Anniversary



Winner

Dorothy Reid

Having helped establish the Birchip Landcare Group in 1988, Dorothy Reid continues her environmental leadership, now serving as the group's president almost 40 years on.

Dorothy has helped shape conservation efforts across the Buloke region through her vision, advocacy, collaboration and practical action.

At 86 years of age, when most people would be pulling back from their involvement in volunteer groups, Dorothy stepped into the role of Chair during a period of uncertainty for the Birchip Landcare Group.

In their nomination, fellow landcarers remarked at how Dorothy provided the leadership, stability and direction to deliver meaningful environmental outcomes.

However, her influence reaches far beyond landcare meetings and project planning.

Dorothy has long been a passionate advocate for environmental protection, regularly writing articles for local newspapers and publicising environmental issues affecting her community.

She has also represented regional voices through the Mallee Catchment Management Authority's Land and Water Advisory Committee, helping inform natural resource management decisions across the wider region.



A lifelong teacher and learner, Dorothy Reid is renowned for her knowledge of the local landscape.

Dorothy has carefully documented the biodiversity of her property, amassed an extensive collection of pressed plant specimens and contributed to environmental publications and technical reports that continue to support conservation and education throughout the Mallee.

On the Reid family farm, Dorothy has demonstrated landcare principles through action.

The family's 75-acre Trust for Nature covenant protects an important wetland known as Reid's Dam, while ongoing revegetation and habitat improvement works have enhanced conditions for native birds, mammals, reptiles and insects.

Dorothy regularly welcomes visitors, students and landcare members to the property, generously sharing her knowledge and experience.

One of her most significant achievements came through the 'Pipe-right' campaign.

Concerned about the environmental impacts of replacing the Wimmera Mallee open channel system

with pipelines, she helped mobilise more than 200 community members to advocate for environmental water allocations.

Years of persistence helped secure environmental water for wetlands across the region, creating important refuges for wildlife and lasting benefits for local communities.

"Dorothy's exceptional memory, extensive knowledge of the local landscape and ability to bring people together have made her one of the Mallee's most respected landcare leaders," South East Mallee Landcare Network Facilitator Marissa Shean said.

"Her dedication, resilience, and willingness to continue serving her community well into her late eighties exemplify the values on which the Landcare movement was founded."

Dorothy continues to attend field days, workshops and training opportunities, always looking for new knowledge to bring back to her community.

Through her leadership, generosity and unwavering commitment, she has inspired generations of volunteers and created a lasting environmental legacy that continues to shape the future of landcare in the Mallee. 🌱

Highly commended

Ken Beasley

Ken Beasley has become one of the most recognisable and respected figures in landcare across the Bendigo region.

Through leadership roles with the Northern Bendigo Landcare Group and Ironbark Gully Friends Landcare Group, he has spent years building partnerships between volunteers, schools, government agencies, businesses and community organisations.

His work has helped secure funding for environmental projects, strengthen local landcare networks and create opportunities for people of all ages to connect with nature. A hands-on volunteer, Ken combines governance, advocacy and practical environmental action.

From revegetation projects and wetland restoration to school programs, nest box construction and community events, he has consistently led by example.

His enthusiasm for mentoring young people, supporting community groups and championing environmental causes has significantly benefited both the landscape and the broader Bendigo community.

Phil Williams

For more than three decades, Phil Williams has used his knowledge of native plants to support landcare and conservation efforts in the Pomonal district beneath the Grampians.

Together with his late wife Jane, he operated a nursery that supplied thousands of indigenous plants for revegetation projects, helping build strong relationships between landcare groups, landholders, government agencies and industry.

Phil's commitment to the community was perhaps most evident after the devastating Pomonal bushfire of 2024 destroyed his home, native garden and nursery.



Top: Ken Beasley (right) with fellow members at Ironbark Gully Friends Landcare Group's National Tree Day event. **Above:** Phil Williams stands in a polytunnel built after the 2024 Pomonal bushfire.



Rather than walk away, he returned to help rebuild the nursery as a community-owned asset that now supports fire recovery and environmental restoration across the district.

Through workshops, school partnerships and volunteer activities, Phil continues to share his knowledge and inspire others to become active custodians of their local environment.

“Her dedication, resilience, and willingness to continue serving her community well into her late 80s exemplify the values on which the landcare movement was founded.”

Marissa Shean, Network Facilitator,
South East Mallee Landcare

Victorian Farmers Federation/ Landcare Victoria Inc. Heather Mitchell Memorial Fellowship



Winner

Lisa Wangman

Thousands of Bass Coast residents have learned about sustainable land management, biodiversity and environmental stewardship through programs designed or delivered by Lisa Wangman.

As Education, Training and Communications Manager with Bass Coast Landcare Network, Lisa helps people of all ages connect with landcare, from preschool children discovering nature for the first time to farmers exploring more sustainable ways to manage their land.

One of her most significant achievements has been expanding Bass Coast Landcare Network's Environmental Detectives program into a suite of school-based activities that has reached more than 50 schools, delivered over 900 activities and engaged more than 20,000 students.

By identifying knowledge gaps and developing targeted courses, workshops and practical learning

experiences, she has helped build environmental awareness across the wider community.

Lisa's ability to bring people together through learning has been evident throughout her landcare career.

Since joining Bass Coast Landcare Network in 2006, Lisa has worked across the network's 11 member groups, supporting volunteers, securing funding and developing projects that encourage community participation and environmental action.

"Lisa Wangman deserves recognition for 22 years of inspiring, practical landcare leadership, strengthening groups, delivering projects, educating communities



Education sits at the centre of Lisa Wangman's contribution to landcare.

and building lasting environmental action," Bass Coast Landcare Network Executive General Manager David Bateman said.

Lisa proposes to use the Heather Mitchell Memorial Fellowship to undertake a professional study tour of environmental, sustainability and agricultural education centres. 🌱

Landcare Network Award



Winner

Wodonga Urban Landcare Network

Planning is often what happens behind the scenes of landcare, but for Wodonga Urban Landcare Network it has become the foundation for achieving environmental outcomes at a landscape scale.

Supporting 18 member groups across north-east Victoria, the network has built a reputation for combining strategic thinking, strong partnerships and community-led action to tackle some of the region's most pressing environmental challenges.

A standout achievement has been the development of the Wodonga Regional Waterways Action Plan, the first municipal-wide waterways plan in the region to be led by a community organisation rather than a government agency.

Developed in partnership with Wodonga Council and the North East Catchment Management Authority, the plan provides a shared framework for restoring waterways, improving biodiversity and directing investment across all 13 key waterways within the municipality.

The network's impact can be seen across waterways, urban bushland, rail trails and conservation reserves.

Between 2020 and 2025, volunteers from member groups contributed more than 56,000 hours of on-ground restoration work and planted more than 35,000 native grasses, shrubs and trees.

Through coordinated planning and support from the network, these individual projects contribute to broader goals around habitat connectivity, water quality and biodiversity conservation.

Collaborations with Traditional Owners, universities, local government, schools, community organisations and neighbouring landcare networks have supported initiatives ranging from threatened

species conservation and citizen science to pest management and sustainable farming. 🌱

Right: Wodonga Urban Landcare Network volunteers planting trees at Federation Hill.



Highly commended

Bass Coast Landcare Network

Working with 10 Landcare groups, more than 850 members and a broad range of partners, Bass Coast Landcare Network supports environmental stewardship across much of the Bass Coast region.

In 2025 alone, it facilitated the planting of more than 416,000 indigenous plants, established almost 24 kilometres of stock-proof fencing and delivered large-scale restoration projects that strengthened habitat connectivity, improved waterways and enhanced biodiversity.

From landscape-scale biolink projects and threatened species conservation to innovative mangrove restoration works and climate-smart agriculture programs, Bass Coast Landcare Network continues to demonstrate how strong partnerships can achieve environmental outcomes well beyond the capacity of any single organisation.

South Gippsland Landcare Network

A commitment to evidence-based, landscape-scale planning has positioned South Gippsland Landcare Network as a leader in regional environmental stewardship.

Supporting 17 landcare groups across a 262,000-hectare region, the network combines community action, scientific knowledge and strong partnerships to address biodiversity decline, strengthen sustainable agriculture and improve climate resilience.

The network's leadership in developing and implementing the South Gippsland Biodiversity Protection Plan has brought together government agencies, conservation organisations and community groups around a shared vision for the region.

Highly commended

Kristy Stewart

Bringing farmers, advisors and landcare groups together around regenerative agriculture has become a defining feature of Kristy Stewart's contribution in the Upper Barwon region.

As Project Manager with Upper Barwon Landcare Network, she has led the development of a landscape-scale resilient farming program that supports farmers to improve biodiversity, soil health and farm resilience while

maintaining productive agricultural businesses.

Kristy has built strong partnerships with neighbouring landcare networks, industry organisations and agricultural service providers, creating opportunities for peer learning and long-term practice change.

Through workshops, field days, discussion groups and collaborative projects, she has helped connect farmers with new ideas and practical approaches that can be applied on-farm, while strengthening relationships between producers and the broader landcare movement.



Kristy Stewart has led the development of a program that supports farmers to improve biodiversity, soil health and farm resilience.

First Nations Landcare Collaboration Award



Winner

Moogji Aboriginal Council

A decade-long partnership between Moogji Aboriginal Council and Far East Victoria Landcare is demonstrating how First Nations knowledge and community-led environmental action can work together to deliver lasting benefits for people and Country.

Built on mutual respect, shared learning and genuine collaboration, the partnership has helped strengthen environmental restoration, cultural knowledge-sharing and community connection across East Gippsland.

Together, the organisations have developed projects that blend traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary landcare practices, creating stronger environmental, cultural and social outcomes across the region.

Their work has supported habitat restoration, seed collection, biodiversity conservation and community education while ensuring Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives play a central role in caring for Country.

The partnership draws on Moogji's nursery and bushbank operation, which supplies locally indigenous plants and seed to restoration projects across East Gippsland, helping support biodiversity recovery while preserving locally collected seed for future generations.

The collaboration proved particularly valuable in the aftermath of the Black Summer bushfires.

Working together, Moogji and Far East Victoria Landcare supported rare plant seed collection and propagation projects, helped establish community seedbanks and contributed to the preservation of culturally significant and critically endangered species.

They also played an important role in restoring glossy black cockatoo habitat, collecting seed from local black sheoak populations and propagating more than 6,000 plants to help rebuild critical feeding habitat across the region.

Partnership projects extend well beyond plant production. Moogji staff regularly work alongside landcare volunteers on revegetation programs, wetland restoration, weed management projects, biodiversity recovery initiatives and Firewise demonstration gardens.

Moogji Aboriginal Council and Far East Victoria Landcare have developed a strong and enduring partnership over close to a decade.



The combination of local environmental knowledge, cultural understanding and practical restoration expertise has strengthened outcomes across numerous projects and helped broaden community understanding of Indigenous land management practices.

Education and community engagement have become defining features of the collaboration. School groups, landcare members and community visitors participate in nursery tours, cultural learning activities and on-Country experiences that promote two-way learning and cultural exchange.

These activities have created opportunities for people to learn about Aboriginal connections to Country while strengthening relationships between First Nations and non-indigenous communities.

Over the past five years alone, the partnership has supported more than 150 landholders and community members and contributed more than 20,000 indigenous plants to landcare projects.

Just as importantly, it has demonstrated the value of genuine collaboration in environmental stewardship and community development.

"This partnership brings passion, cultural knowledge, skills and love of Country into landcare," Far East Victoria Landcare Facilitator Josh Puglisi said.

"Collaboration strengthens cultural awareness, enriches environment and demonstrates the value of genuine partnership."

By placing Aboriginal leadership, knowledge and participation at the heart of environmental restoration, the partnership between Moogji Aboriginal Council and Far East Victoria Landcare provides a powerful example of what can be achieved when communities come together to care for Country. 🌿



Pat Larken and Uncle Dozer Atkinson (Bangerang Elder) with Ian Minns of Wangaratta Sustainability and Landcare Group.

Highly commended

Warby Range Landcare Group

For more than 30 years, Warby Range Landcare Group has worked alongside Bangerang Aboriginal Corporation and Bangerang Traditional Owners to build a partnership founded on mutual respect, shared learning and practical action on country.

Working across north-east Victoria, the collaboration demonstrates how First Nations knowledge and contemporary land management can be combined to deliver environmental, cultural and community benefits.

Projects such as the Itjumatj Woka Healthy Country Project and the Ngalan Wala ("Our Water") initiative have brought together Bangerang Rangers and landcare volunteers to undertake cultural burning, wetland restoration, revegetation, biodiversity monitoring and waterway management.

Alongside improving ecosystem health, the partnership has strengthened cultural knowledge, supported employment and training opportunities, and created valuable opportunities for intergenerational learning and community connection.

By embedding Traditional Owner leadership throughout its programs, the partnership has helped local landholders, volunteers and schools gain a deeper understanding of caring for Country while creating a practical model for reconciliation through land stewardship.

“
This partnership brings passion, cultural knowledge, skills and love of Country into landcare. Collaboration strengthens cultural awareness, enriches environments and demonstrates the value of genuine partnership.
”

Josh Puglisi, Facilitator, Far East Victoria Landcare

Australian Government Community Partnerships Landcare Award



Natural
Heritage
Trust



Winner

Ian and Gay Cornthwaite

Hundreds of thousands of indigenous plants grown at the Strzelecki Plant Farm have found their way onto farms, creeklines, revegetation projects and community plantings across Gippsland.

Behind those plants are Ian and Gay Cornthwaite, whose lifelong commitment to restoration, knowledge-sharing and community action has helped shape environmental stewardship throughout the region.

Ian helped establish the Allambee Community Landcare Group more than 30 years ago after local concern about the loss of native forest brought the community together around a shared vision for restoration and environmental care.

Gay later joined Ian in both the nursery business and landcare efforts, learning the trade and becoming an integral part of the partnership.

Together they spent 35 years growing indigenous plants for farms, landcare groups and restoration projects throughout Gippsland.

Their nursery became more than a supplier of plants. It became a source of encouragement, practical advice and technical expertise for landholders looking to improve

biodiversity and restore native ecosystems on their properties.

On their own 388-hectare farm, they have demonstrated what long-term ecological restoration looks like in practice.

Over decades they planted more than 50,000 native seedlings, fenced waterways, stabilised landslips and created a wetland that improved both habitat and water quality throughout the catchment.

The wetland project also inspired innovation within the nursery itself, leading to the development of new propagation techniques for wetland species that were later supplied to restoration projects across the district.

Education and mentoring have been central to their contribution.

Through open days, field visits, workshops and informal conversations, they have shared knowledge with generations of landholders, volunteers and nursery workers.

A recent propagation workshop on their property attracted farmers, retirees, volunteers and new residents, providing practical skills in seed collection, germination and indigenous plant production.

Their commitment extends beyond restoration and landcare.

For almost a decade they have been active members of the Preserve Our Forests Mirboo North campaign, contributing local knowledge, advocacy and strategic thinking to efforts that ultimately helped secure protection for 440 hectares through the creation of the Mirboo North Conservation Park.

The outcome protected important habitat for species including the greater glider, powerful owl and lace monitor while strengthening community support for conservation.

Perhaps their greatest achievement is the network of people they have inspired. Former employees, local growers,



Ian and Gay Cornthwaite at the Strzelecki Plant Farm.

“
Their leadership has never been loud or self-promoting; it has been steady, practical, and grounded in genuine care for the land.

Tilia Lohmus, member, Allambee South Landcare

landcare volunteers and community members continue to draw on the knowledge, encouragement and values Ian and Gay have shared so generously over the years.

Their own children now work in environmental fields, continuing a family commitment to caring for the land.

“Their leadership has never been loud or self-promoting; it has been steady, practical, and grounded in genuine care for the land,” Allambee South Landcare’s Tilia Lohmus said.

“Through their example, knowledge, and long-term commitment, they have helped shape a culture of environmental responsibility across

the district, influencing both community action and the next generation of landcarers.”

As Ian and Gay step towards retirement, their legacy can be seen in healthier waterways, stronger habitat, protected forests, thriving revegetation projects and the many people who continue the work they helped begin. 🌱

Highly commended

Bass Coast Shire Council

Landscape-scale restoration often relies on strong partnerships, and the long-standing collaboration between Bass Coast Shire Council and Bass Coast Landcare Network has solid foundations.

Established in 1994 and underpinned by a formal Memorandum of Understanding, the partnership has created a coordinated approach to biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture and community participation across the municipality.

At the heart of the collaboration is the Bass Coast Biodiversity Biolinks Program, which identified more than 200 priority wildlife corridors to reconnect fragmented habitat across the region.

Since 2019, the partnership has facilitated the planting of approximately 1.68 million indigenous plants while engaging thousands of landholders, volunteers, schools and community members in environmental stewardship.

By aligning local government investment with community action, the partnership has become a leading example of how collaboration can deliver significant long-term environmental outcomes.

Port Phillip EcoCentre

With more than 2,800 volunteers, partnerships spanning over 300 organisations and programs reaching across more than 130 Melbourne postcodes, the Port Phillip EcoCentre has become one of Victoria’s most influential community environmental organisations.

Through environmental education, citizen science and on-ground restoration programs, it connects people of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to care for local landscapes, waterways and wildlife.

The EcoCentre’s impact is reflected in both participation and outcomes.

Volunteers contribute between 15,000 and 20,000 hours each year, while projects have included



Top: Bass Coast Landcare Network and Bass Coast Shire Council run partnership planting days each year to strengthen their partnership and build Biolinks.

Above: Xavier Xu and Morayo Adeyemi at a Port Phillip EcoCentre planting day.

planting more than 41,500 indigenous plants since 2021, removing hundreds of thousands of microplastic particles from waterways annually and engaging thousands of students through sustainability education programs.

By bringing together scientists, schools, community groups, businesses and volunteers, the EcoCentre continues to demonstrate the power of partnerships in driving environmental change.

Australian Government Individual Landcarer Award



Natural
Heritage
Trust



Winner

Dr John Cable

The Glenlyon Biolink Walking Trail has become one of the most visible symbols of environmental restoration in the Upper Loddon catchment, and itself is part of the legacy of the late Dr John Cable.

John's leadership was integral to improving a local landscape and a community.

When John and his partner Jill Teschendorff purchased their 48-hectare property, Greenlion, on the Loddon River in 2000, they were confronted by dense infestations of gorse, blackberry, hawthorn and willow.

Rather than seeing an impossible task, John saw an opportunity to restore the river and help others do the same.

Over the following 25 years he became one of the driving forces behind environmental restoration in the district through his work with the Glenlyon Upper Loddon Landcare Group.

John served as the group's president for 15 years and was awarded life membership in 2020.

During that time, he championed projects that improved the health of the Upper Loddon River, strengthened community engagement and built partnerships between landcare, government

agencies and public land managers.

He was equally comfortable discussing local weed control with landholders as he was working alongside local government, Parks Victoria and catchment management authorities to advance larger landscape-scale projects.

The Glenlyon Biolink became one of his most significant achievements.

More than a walking trail, it created a stronger connection between the community and the river, encouraging people to understand and value the natural environment around them.

John's vision helped make the Loddon River a focal point for the community while supporting broader environmental restoration efforts along the waterway.

A lifelong advocate for practical, locally led solutions, John also became a respected voice on natural resource management issues well beyond Glenlyon.

He served on committees including the Victorian Gorse Taskforce,



Dr John Cable has left a legacy of environmental restoration across the Upper Loddon catchment.

advocated for coordinated weed management and worked to ensure local landholders had access to knowledge, equipment and support.

His practical understanding of farming, plant biology and land management helped countless others tackle environmental challenges on their own properties.

Education and community capacity building were central to John's approach. Through Waterwatch activities, field days and workshops, he welcomed people onto Greenlion to learn about river health, biodiversity and restoration.

Scientific monitoring became an important part of that work, with regular water quality testing and community education helping build a greater understanding of local waterways and the benefits of long-term stewardship.

The results were clear. Native vegetation recovered, birdlife increased, frogs and aquatic life returned, and the time required to manage weeds declined significantly as restoration efforts took effect.

Just as importantly, John inspired a culture of collaboration that brought together community

groups, landholders and government agencies around a shared vision for the landscape.

"John's avid knowledge and willingness to share it, involve people and mentor those around him was inspiring, and set him apart," North Central Catchment Management Authority Project Manager Tess Grieves said in nominating John for the award.

"He set an example for volunteers looking to form long-term partnerships, to improve areas of public land and upper catchment waterways, knowing downstream users, environments and communities will benefit from the actions taken upstream."

John passed away in late 2025, but his legacy lives on in the restored landscapes, connected

communities and healthier waterways he helped create.

Through his leadership, generosity and unwavering commitment to landcare, he demonstrated the enduring impact that one person can have on both people and place. 🌿

Highly commended

Karl Kny

What began as a degraded grazing property near Newham has become one of Victoria's most compelling examples of regenerative land management.

Over nearly four decades, Karl Kny and his wife Brigitte transformed Kolara into a living classroom where ecological restoration, productive farming and community learning come together.

Drawing on a career managing major plantation and conservation forests, Karl has applied science, monitoring and long-term planning to habitat restoration, revegetation and biodiversity conservation.

More than 103 bird species have now been recorded on the property, alongside the return of koalas, platypus and many other native species.

Through extensive mentoring, field days and leadership roles across landcare and conservation organisations, Karl has helped landholders and volunteers understand that environmental stewardship and productive landscapes can thrive together.

Below left: Karl and his wife Brigitte, have transformed a degraded grazing property into a living classroom where science, practical land management and community learning come together. **Below right:** Nest boxes have become a hallmark of Bruce McInnes' contribution to landcare in Victoria's Wimmera region.

Bruce McInnes

Recognising the shortage of natural hollows for wildlife, Bruce McInnes developed practical nest box designs and community workshops that have engaged volunteers, families and young people while creating valuable habitat for species such as sugar gliders and owllet-nightjars.

An inaugural member of the Laharum Landcare Group, Bruce has spent more than three decades supporting revegetation, salinity management, weed control and community education.

His workshops have helped hundreds of participants develop practical conservation skills while contributing directly to habitat creation across the Wimmera region.

Whether organising nest box workshops, helping coordinate landscape-scale weed management programs or creating opportunities for young people to engage with conservation, he has consistently combined practical action with a commitment to building stronger communities and healthier environments.



“
John's avid knowledge and willingness to share it, involve people and mentor those around him was inspiring, and set him apart.

Tess Grieves, Project Manager, North Central Catchment Management Authority

”

Junior Landcare Award



Winner

Skipton Primary School

Skipton students are tackling invasive carp, protecting platypus habitat and inspiring community action.

For most primary school students, fishing is a weekend pastime. For the students at Skipton Primary School, it has become a powerful tool for environmental restoration, community engagement and hands-on learning.

At the heart of the school's innovative, student-led 'Clear the Carp' initiative is a simple but ambitious goal: improving the health of Mount Emu Creek, which flows through the centre of Skipton in Victoria's Western District.

Students became concerned about the growing impact of invasive European carp, a pest species that damages waterways and threatens habitat for native wildlife including platypus, turtles and eels. Rather than leave the problem to adults, they decided to take action themselves.

The project is part of a strong environmental and sustainability program at the school, led by teacher Georgie Green.

From prep to year six, students learn about water quality and help monitor the health of local waterways through regular Waterwatch activities.

As students learned more about carp and witnessed the damage being caused in local waterways and the Stewart Park billabong, they became determined to remove the pest. Many spent weekends fishing carp from local waters before approaching landcare for support to expand their efforts. The result was the inaugural Clear the Carp fishing competition in 2025.

The first event attracted more than 70 anglers and removed 45kg of

carp from the creek system. By 2026, registrations had grown to 120 participants, transforming the competition into a major community event.

While fewer carp were caught in the second year, participants were rewarded by sightings of platypus, turtles and eels within the fishing area — encouraging signs that the ecosystem may be responding to their efforts.

What makes the project particularly impressive is the depth of learning it has created. Students can confidently explain how carp affect waterways and native species, and they continue seeking new ways to improve habitat.

Their next ambition is to build 'fish hotels' to provide shelter for native fish and further strengthen creek biodiversity.



Skipton Primary School students at a 'Clear the Carp' day.

“
From prep to year six, students learn about water quality and help monitor the health of local waterways through regular Waterwatch activities.”

Lynette Heenan, Upper Mount Emu Creek Landcare Network

The competition has also become a celebration of community knowledge. Residents share stories of a time when native fish and eels were abundant in the creek, while students learn practical skills ranging from fishing techniques to habitat restoration.

Carp cooking demonstrations have explored ways the invasive fish can be put to productive use, from food and leather-making to artistic projects using scales.

Students have embraced responsibilities well beyond the

event itself. They secure sponsorship, write letters to businesses seeking prize donations and promote the competition throughout the community.

Clear the Carp is only one part of the school's wider commitment to landcare. Students also contribute to revegetation projects, maintain a productive vegetable garden that supports the local community shop, and advocate for environmental issues through radio interviews, video messages and correspondence with elected representatives.

For a school with fewer than 20 students in its senior class, the impact has been extraordinary.

By combining environmental education with practical action, Skipton Primary School has created a project that is improving local biodiversity, strengthening community connections and inspiring the next generation of landcarers. 🌱



Above: Cowes Primary Students with Threatened Species Conservancy staff planting the butterfly gardens.
Right: All Kids Junior Landcare has donated hundreds of plants to local restoration efforts.



Highly commended

Cowes Primary School

Located on Phillip Island, Cowes Primary School has transformed a degraded one-hectare bush sanctuary into a thriving outdoor classroom.

Working with Bass Coast Landcare Network and the Threatened Species Conservancy, students restored habitat, planted 600 indigenous plants, established butterfly gardens and created dedicated conservation and learning spaces.

A landcare elective gives senior students hands-on experience in citizen science, biodiversity restoration, weed control and environmental monitoring.

Students have also tackled litter through waste audits and student-led recommendations that significantly reduced rubbish across the school.

The project demonstrates how environmental education can create lasting change across an entire school community.

All Kids Junior Landcare

Founded by young environmentalists Chris and Lennon, All Kids Junior Landcare grew from weekly volunteering with community conservation groups into an inspiring program focused on plant propagation, habitat restoration and environmental education.

Since 2022, the pair have learned seed collection, native plant growing and revegetation techniques before sharing those skills with schools and the wider community.

They have donated hundreds of plants and seeds, run workshops for other students and advocated for better waterway management along Stony Creek.

Their work shows how young people can become powerful leaders in conservation and community engagement.

Australian Government Landcare Innovation Award



Natural
Heritage
Trust



Winner

Dr Elia Pirtle

Across a fragmented western Victoria landscape, Dr Elia Pirtle has transformed more than 10 landcare groups into a coordinated force for biodiversity restoration.

For more than five years, Elia has been asking a deceptively simple question: how can landcare groups select the best planting sites to maximise outcomes for wildlife?

As Landcare Facilitator with Project Platypus and coordinator of the Grampians/Gariwerd to Pyrenees Biolink Project, she has developed new tools, methods and partnerships that are helping volunteers answer that question with confidence.

The challenge is significant. More than 90 per cent of the native woodland between the Grampians/Gariwerd and the Pyrenees regions in western Victoria has been cleared over the past two centuries, leaving wildlife isolated in scattered patches of habitat on farms, roadsides and public reserves.

Species such as woodland birds and squirrel gliders can become stranded in these islands of remnant vegetation, with shrinking access to food, shelter and mates.

While many landcare groups shared a desire to tackle this challenge, Elia recognised that enthusiasm alone was not enough. Volunteers needed practical ways to identify high-value habitat, assess its condition and



Dr Elia Pirtle.

determine where new wildlife corridors would have the greatest impact.

Her response has been to create a system that makes sophisticated conservation planning accessible to community volunteers.

One of the most innovative elements of the project is the use of autonomous bird monitoring. Commercial BirdWeather PUC units, running the Cornell University-developed BirdNET artificial intelligence model, can identify bird calls around the clock.

However, they typically require mains power and internet access, making them difficult to use in remote bushland.

“Perhaps Elia’s greatest achievement has been bringing people together. More than 10 landcare groups are now working toward a shared goal of reconnecting habitat between two major mountain ranges.”

Dr Alicia Merriam, Landcare Facilitator, Yarrilinks Landcare Network

Elia adapted the technology for Australian landcare conditions by integrating solar power, batteries and 4G connectivity, creating fully autonomous off-grid monitoring stations.

The result is a network of 29 monitoring stations being deployed across the landscape with support from Victorian Government and National Heritage Trust funding.

The stations collect continuous data on woodland bird communities, providing an objective measure of habitat quality. Importantly, volunteers do not need specialist bird identification skills to participate.

The technology does the heavy lifting, while community members contribute to survey efforts and conservation planning.

However, technology alone is not enough to solve the problem. Elia also developed a simple habitat assessment index that allows volunteers to record vegetation quality consistently across sites. Combined with bird monitoring data, this creates a robust picture of where important habitat remains and where revegetation could provide the greatest benefit.

The third piece of the puzzle is connectivity. Through a partnership with conservation technology company Patchweave, Project Platypus has developed a mapping application that enables landcare groups to contribute habitat information to a shared biolinks map.

The platform brings together habitat surveys, species records and revegetation opportunities into a single landscape-scale planning tool.

Perhaps Elia’s greatest achievement has been bringing people together. More than 10 landcare groups are now working toward a shared goal of reconnecting habitat between two major mountain ranges.

Rather than replacing local priorities, the project provides common tools, methods and data that allow each group to contribute to a broader vision, while maintaining local ownership.

To support this collaboration, Elia established a cross-group Biolinks Team and developed a 2026–28 strategic plan built around an easily understood four-step process: find the remnant vegetation islands, measure their quality, find the best bridge sites and build the bridges.

The approach turns a complex ecological challenge into a practical roadmap that volunteers can follow.

Elia is praised for her presentations, which combine science, storytelling and original illustrations to explain complex conservation concepts in ways that inspire action.

These creative communication tools have helped attract partners, funding and community support, ensuring that the project continues to grow.

“Elia gave volunteers the tools to see,” Yarrilinks Landcare Network Landcare Facilitator Dr Alicia Merriam said.

“Her solar-powered AI bird monitors and shared habitat map turn 10 landcare groups into a landscape-scale biolink.”

Highly commended

Romawi Landcare Group

Established in 1995, Romawi Landcare Group received a Highly Commended award for its decades-long restoration of the Forge Creek Water Reserve in East Gippsland.

The group has pioneered innovative techniques, including rock chutes to recreate a chain-of-ponds ecosystem, reusable exclusion plots to protect revegetation from floods and grazing animals, and coir collars that have achieved seedling survival rates of up to 100 per cent within six months.

Long-term water quality monitoring, fish surveys and community engagement have helped restore habitat for threatened species, including the endangered Flinders pygmy perch, while inspiring landcare groups across the region.

Left: Romawi Landcare runs macroinvertebrate surveys in Forge Creek, supported by keen helpers.



Australian Government Sustainable Agriculture Landcare Award



Natural
Heritage
Trust



Winner

Kate Mirams and Peter Neaves

For many farmers, balancing productivity with environmental responsibility has been an ongoing challenge.

For Kate Mirams and Peter Neaves, the answer has been to stop treating those goals as competing priorities and instead recognise that healthy soils, resilient pastures, clean water and profitable farming are deeply connected.

Farming at Newry in Gippsland, Kate Mirams and Peter Neaves have operated their dairy business, Neaves Mirams Ag, since 2003, milking about 320 cows.

In 2018 they began asking questions that many dairy farmers

on irrigated properties are now exploring; could they grow the same amount of pasture while reducing their dependence on synthetic fertilisers? And could they rebuild soil health more rapidly in landscapes that had been heavily modified through laser grading?

Rather than rely on theory, they turned their farm into a living laboratory. With support from the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, Agriculture Victoria and later

GippsDairy, they established demonstration trial sites comparing conventional dairy farming systems with regenerative approaches.

Seven years later, the results have attracted attention from farmers, researchers and industry leaders across Australia and New Zealand.

Their changes were significant. Cultivation was phased out. Herbicide use, chemical seed treatments and synthetic fertiliser applications were reduced.

Kate Mirams and Peter Neaves on their dairy farm in Newry, in Gippsland's Macalister Irrigation District.



In their place came multispecies pastures, biological seed treatments, natural soil amendments, beneficial microbes and direct drilling techniques.

Grazing management also changed to encourage deeper root growth, greater plant mass and more consistent groundcover.

At the heart of the project is soil health. Rather than focusing solely on feeding plants, Kate and Peter shifted their attention to building living soils.

Diverse pasture species, including grasses, legumes and herbs such as chicory and plantain support beneficial soil biology while creating stronger, deeper root systems. These deeper roots improve soil structure, increase organic matter and help plants access moisture during dry conditions.

Monitoring on the farm revealed a striking difference. Roots in regenerative paddocks were accessing water at depths of up to 60 centimetres, compared with around 30 centimetres in conventionally managed paddocks.

Improved infiltration and water storage have enhanced drought resilience while reducing runoff and improving irrigation efficiency.

The couple's research focus has now turned to water retention, nutrient losses and water-use efficiency, to better understand these benefits.

The environmental gains have been matched by strong commercial outcomes. Despite substantially reducing synthetic nitrogen inputs, the business has maintained one of the highest pasture consumption rates within its benchmarking group.

It has also ranked among the top 25 per cent for return on assets in the Victorian Dairy Farm Monitor Project, demonstrating that lower input costs and improved nutrient efficiency can support profitability without sacrificing production.

Above ground, the farm tells an equally compelling story.

Extensive revegetation along Newry Creek has restored native vegetation, protected waterways and created shade for livestock. These plantings help conserve

“

Kate and Peter have shown that regenerative farming can support productive, profitable agriculture while improving biodiversity, water quality and soil function.

Sandra Jefford, Maffra & Districts Landcare Network

”

endangered ecological vegetation communities including floodplain riparian woodland, plains grassland and billabong wetland aggregate.

By fencing waterways and protecting streambanks, Kate and Peter have reduced erosion, improved water quality and strengthened ecological health across the property.

Their commitment to biodiversity extends beyond native vegetation. Diverse pastures create habitat for insects and other beneficial organisms, while healthy soils support complex microbial communities below ground.

Ecological Outcome Verification assessments have recorded improvements in water cycling, nutrient cycling, energy flow and biodiversity, providing independent evidence that the farm's regenerative practices are enhancing ecosystem function.

Importantly, Kate and Peter have not kept these lessons to themselves. A defining feature of their work has been a commitment to rigorous measurement and knowledge sharing.

Rather than adopting regenerative practices on faith, they established side-by-side trial paddocks and monitored soil health, pasture growth, root depth, moisture levels, profitability and ecological outcomes.

This evidence-based approach has strengthened confidence among other farmers considering similar changes.

Their leadership extends well beyond the farm gate. Peter has served on the board of the Maffra and Districts Landcare Network for eight years. He is acting chair, and

has previously served as treasurer, while Kate joined the board two years ago.

Together they have hosted field days, farm walks and demonstrations, sharing practical lessons about regenerative farming with producers across the region.

Interest in their work continues to grow. They have presented at Dairy Australia's Grounds for Growth conference, spoken at the Quorum Sense conference in New Zealand, featured in a Soils for Life case study and hosted the launch of Soils for Life's Dairy Resilience Project.

Their story has also reached a wider audience through ABC's *Landline*, radio interviews, newspaper articles and social media.

The significance of their achievement lies not only in what they have done on one Gippsland dairy farm, but in what it demonstrates for Australian agriculture more broadly.

Kate and Peter have shown that regenerative farming can support productive, profitable agriculture while improving biodiversity, water quality and soil function.

Their approach offers a practical example of how farming systems can become more resilient, environmentally responsible and economically sustainable.

Kate and Peter's journey began with a simple question about reducing dependence on synthetic inputs. Seven years later, that question has evolved into a model of sustainable agriculture that is inspiring farmers well beyond Newry and helping shape a more resilient future for Australian farming. 🌱

Next Gen Landcare Award



Winner

Annette Cavanagh

When Annette Cavanagh first joined the Yellow Creek-Dairy Creek Landcare Group in 2017, she was motivated by a love of nature and a desire to bring people together.

Nearly a decade later, she has become one of Australia's most influential young landcare leaders, helping to build a new generation of environmental champions through her work at local, regional and national levels.

During more than three years as president of the Yellow Creek-Dairy Creek Landcare Group, Annette worked with established members and new landholders to strengthen sustainable land management practices, improve biodiversity and build stronger community connections.

Recognising that younger people were often underrepresented in landcare, Annette helped establish Upper Goulburn Intrepid Landcare.

The group was created to provide opportunities for young people to connect with nature, contribute to their communities and develop leadership skills through environmental action. Today, the organisation continues to attract young volunteers through events, education programs and practical conservation projects.

Her influence extends far beyond her local region.

Since 2021, Annette has served as chair of Intrepid Landcare, a national youth-focused organisation supporting young environmental leaders.

In this volunteer role she has helped connect and support between 16 and 20 Intrepid Landcare groups across Australia, creating



Annette Cavanagh has become one of Australia's most influential young landcare leaders.

opportunities for collaboration, knowledge sharing and leadership development.

One of her greatest strengths is her ability to inspire participation. Annette has played a key role in major youth initiatives including

the NextGen Youth Forum in 2022 and the NextGen Youth Summit in 2026. These programs have helped young people build networks, develop practical skills and gain confidence as environmental leaders.

“**Since 2021, Annette has served as chair of Intrepid Landcare, a national youth-focused organisation supporting young environmental leaders.**

Beth Hamilton, North East Melbourne Intrepid Landcare



She also contributed to developing the *Do Stuff That Matters* journal, a resource designed to support emerging young landcarers.

Annette combines practical conservation with education and communication.

Locally, she has helped organise biodiversity projects, community planting days and sustainable agriculture initiatives. She developed a blackberry management guide which was distributed to more than 50 landholders, and contributed to the publication *Caring for the Land – Sustainable Agriculture*,

providing practical advice on biodiversity enhancement and regenerative farming.

Her approach to leadership is deeply inclusive. Through social media, mentoring, public speaking and innovative events, she has helped make landcare more accessible to younger audiences.

Activities such as the Upper Goulburn Intrepid Landcare 'Canoe and Weed' event demonstrate her ability to combine environmental action with creativity and community engagement, attracting participants from well beyond the local area.

Alongside her volunteer leadership, Annette is undertaking PhD research into farm-scale natural capital accounting. Her work aims to help farmers better understand and value the environmental assets on their properties, strengthening connections between agriculture, biodiversity and sustainable land management.

Whether mentoring emerging leaders, building partnerships or contributing new ideas to sustainable agriculture, Annette has dedicated herself to ensuring landcare remains relevant, inclusive and impactful for future generations. 🌱



Left: Corey McFadyen is a driving force within Intrepid Landcare. **Right:** Wattle runs fortnightly events to restore urban nature corridors in Melbourne.

Highly commended

Corey McFadyen

Corey McFadyen has become a driving force behind Intrepid Landcare since first discovering organisation through an Intrepid Landcare Leadership Retreat in 2021.

Known for his gentle and inclusive leadership style, he has helped create a welcoming environment where young adults can develop environmental and leadership skills.

Corey has organised butterfly surveys, planting projects, weeding events and the annual 'Planting with Pride' initiative, while also mentoring new volunteers.

As a facilitator with Nature Stewards, he helps teach participants about biodiversity, waterways, climate change and Indigenous knowledge, inspiring more young people to connect with and care for nature.

Wattle

Founded in 2024, Wattle is a youth-led environmental organisation creating welcoming pathways into landcare for young adults.

Based in Melbourne, the group delivers habitat restoration, tree planting, clean-up events, biodiversity workshops and stewardship projects focused on the Birrarung (Yarra River) and Port Phillip Bay catchments.

In 2025 alone, Wattle engaged more than 400 young people through regular events and helped restore urban nature corridors with hundreds of native plantings.

Through creative activities, partnerships and youth-led advocacy, Wattle has shown that environmental stewardship can be social, accessible and engaging, while building a strong new generation of environmental leaders.

Women in Landcare Award



Winner

Dr Kate Fitzherbert

For more than two decades, Dr Kate Fitzherbert has combined ecological expertise, strategic thinking and community spirit to strengthen landcare in Victoria.

As president of St Andrews Landcare, she has helped transform a small volunteer group into a highly effective organisation delivering lasting environmental outcomes while building strong community connections.

Kate joined St Andrews Landcare in 2002, just a year after moving to the area. At the time, the group was largely focused on plant propagation and occasional revegetation activities.

While enthusiasm for conservation was abundant, Kate recognised the need for a more strategic approach if landcare efforts were to achieve lasting landscape-scale benefits.

Drawing on her professional background in ecology and environmental management, she helped shape a new direction for the group.

A major turning point came when Kate represented the group during

development of a Nillumbik-wide regional landcare strategy in 2009-10. Her experience with Bush Heritage Australia and strategic conservation planning helped create a coordinated framework that aligned landcare efforts across the region.

The strategy shifted the focus from isolated revegetation projects to a more targeted and outcomes-driven approach.

When Kate became St Andrews Landcare president in 2016, she ensured the strategy was translated into practical action.

Her leadership style centres on encouraging others, recognising individual strengths and creating opportunities for people to pursue projects they are passionate about. Under her guidance, the committee has become a supportive and empowered team capable of delivering ambitious environmental initiatives.

One of the group's most significant achievements has been the restoration of riparian habitat along Diamond Creek.

Working closely with volunteers and partner organisations, Kate helped secure funding for weed control, erosion management and large-scale revegetation works. Supported by Melbourne Water and the Stringybark Nursery, the project has delivered lasting improvements to the health of the creek corridor.

Kate is equally passionate about engaging the broader community. Together with the landcare committee, she helped develop the highly successful Feral Feast event, which turns pest species such as deer, rabbit and blackberry into a celebration of local food and environmental awareness.



Dr Kate Fitzherbert has been the president of St Andrews Landcare since 2016.

The event attracted new audiences, increased membership and demonstrated how creative approaches can connect people with conservation issues.

Sustainability underpins all aspects of Kate's work. The group prioritises locally-sourced indigenous plants, reuses tree guards and stakes wherever possible, and actively avoids single-use plastics.

Even catering at working bees reflects these values, with home-grown food often shared among volunteers.

Kate has also contributed significantly to the Caring for Our Rural Land initiative, a practical guide designed to help rural landholders better manage their properties.

Developed through collaboration between multiple landcare groups

and government agencies, the publication makes land management knowledge more accessible to people of all experience levels.

Perhaps Kate's greatest contribution is her ability to bring people together. Whether helping landholders access funding, supporting volunteers, sharing expertise or simply taking time for a good yarn, she has fostered a culture of inclusion, learning and mutual support.

Through strategic leadership and genuine community connection, she has strengthened both the landscape and the people who care for it.

Highly commended

Annette Cavanagh

A passionate advocate for youth engagement, Annette Cavanagh has become one of Australia's leading young landcare voices.

Beginning with the Yellow Creek-Dairy Creek Landcare Group, she went on to co-found Upper Goulburn Intrepid Landcare and later became chair of Intrepid Landcare, supporting 16-20 youth-focused landcare groups nationwide.

Through innovative events, sustainable agriculture education, biodiversity projects and inclusive leadership, Annette has inspired young people from diverse backgrounds to participate in environmental action.

Her work combines community engagement, practical conservation and scientific research, helping ensure landcare remains relevant and accessible to future generations.

Commended

Annette Robertson

Horrie Poussard Prize



Winners

Cassie Wright and Jillian Staton

The Horrie Poussard Prize was established in 2023 to commemorate the late Horrie Poussard's contribution to the Victorian landcare movement. Horrie was Victoria's first landcare executive officer. He formed training groups, created incentive grants and educational materials and oversaw the formation of the first 50 groups in Victoria.

Horrie maintained a close interest in landcare for the rest of his life and was committed to telling the landcare story.

The winners of this year's Horrie Poussard Prize, Cassie Wright and Jillian Staton, showed how landcare is shaped by curious people with open minds who are willing to challenge accepted norms.

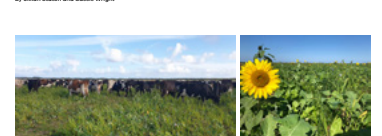
Their story, published on page eight of edition 90 of the Victorian Landcare Magazine, drew on strong farmer quotes and made the

process of establishing multispecies pastures easy to understand.

The article explained the scientific feedback from the trial clearly, helping readers see both the practical approach and the evidence behind the results.

Judges commented this was the kind of story that would encourage farmers to consider multispecies pastures. It also demonstrated the value of trying something new, collecting results and sharing what is learnt.

Demonstration trial highlights multiple benefits of multispecies pastures



Multispecies pastures may hold the key to building more profitable and climate resilient farm businesses.

A new year trial on a commercial dairy farm at Werribee Bay in South Gippsland found numerous benefits from multispecies pastures compared to conventional forage crops. The trial included clover, lucerne, vetch, and other legumes, which provided a range of benefits including improved soil health, increased biodiversity, and enhanced resilience to climate change.

The trial was led by Dr. Mary Cate, a research officer at the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. She noted that the trial was a significant step towards understanding the potential of multispecies pastures in Victoria.

The trial was funded by the Victorian Government and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. It was part of a larger program to promote sustainable agriculture and improve farm resilience.

Kate recognised the need for a more strategic approach if landcare efforts were to achieve lasting landscape-scale benefits.

Scott Allen, Nillumbik Shire Council

Highly commended

Marissa Shean

Landcare driving change at agriculture's cutting edge (Edition 91, page 20-21).

Coastcare Award



Winner

Breamlea Coastcare

Breamlea Coastcare has helped transform degraded dune and saltmarsh ecosystems while building a strong culture of environmental stewardship.

The group was established by local residents committed to conserving the unique coastal landscapes of Breamlea for future generations.

A major focus has been combating invasive weeds, including *Polygala myrtifolia*, purple senecio, aloes, succulents and *Typha*, which threaten native vegetation and sensitive saltmarsh habitats.

Through years of persistent volunteer effort, the group has reduced weed impacts, improved habitat condition and supported greater biodiversity along the coast. The results can be seen in the health of the local coastline. Volunteers participate in weekly working bees focused on environmental weed removal, indigenous revegetation, habitat restoration and site monitoring.

These ongoing efforts have reduced the spread of invasive species, improved the condition of coastal dune systems and saltmarsh habitat, and enhanced biodiversity along the Breamlea coast.

One of the group's most innovative initiatives has been its Adopt-a-Patch program. Supported through grant funding, the project encourages local residents to become active caretakers of small areas within the coastal environment. Participants learn how to identify environmental weeds, remove invasive species and care for Indigenous vegetation. The result is a growing network of community members taking direct responsibility for the health of their local environment.

Below: Breamlea Coastcare members assist at Coastal Discovery stalls to educate the community about restoration projects.



Education and community engagement are central to the group's success. Members regularly support activities during the busy summer season, help at environmental education programs for school groups and work alongside corporate volunteers on restoration projects. These activities not only deliver on-ground outcomes but also help build a broader understanding of coastal conservation challenges.

The group is equally committed to fostering the next generation of environmental leaders. By hosting participants undertaking the Duke of Edinburgh Award, volunteers provide young people with practical conservation skills and firsthand experience caring for coastal ecosystems.

Their success is measured not only in healthier dunes, cleaner saltmarshes and reduced weed infestations, but also in the growing number of people who now feel connected to and responsible for the coastline they call home. 🌿

Highly commended

Port Phillip EcoCentre

Since 1999, Port Phillip EcoCentre has connected communities with the health of Port Phillip Bay through citizen science, education and hands-on environmental action.

Its Baykeeper program has engaged more than 4,000 volunteers and a wide network of schools and partners to tackle coastal pollution, habitat loss and climate impacts.

Projects have ranged from microplastics monitoring and marine pest research to dune restoration and multicultural community engagement.

Since 2014, citizen scientists have measured more than half a million microplastic pollutants, helping inform policy, management and environmental protection across Port Phillip Bay and its catchments.

From the Ground Up Film Festival

By Barry Kennedy

Among the chomping of popcorn and unwrapping of choc tops, the lights dim and the big screen bursts into life. Images of lush bushland and birds set the scene.

It had been a big few months bringing the concept of the inaugural From the Ground Up Film Festival to life. We'd locked in the famous Nova Cinemas in inner-city Carlton as the venue, had a logo designed, programs drawn up and pushed out promotions and invites. It was now a full house at Cinema One.

We also had the great fortune of securing the talented Costa Georgiadis as host, having previously had him interview and narrate a film to headline the event. Now Costa whispered across to me 30 seconds into the first film and he asked, "is it supposed to have no sound?"

I had no answer for him at this point. I was frozen. Around 240 people had rocked up to a film festival which had evidently become a silent film festival.

Intrepid filmmaker Michael Portway shot into action bound for the control room.

Another 30 seconds and a few mumbles in the crowd later, as new sense awakened. Sound! It arrived like a welcome dawn chorus.

The From the Ground Up Film Festival concept came out of a need to hold the mirror to the many great groups and people working in landcare and other forms of environmental volunteering across Greater Melbourne.

The long COVID lockdowns had put the brakes on many projects and groups. Momentum and morale were down. But so much good work was still being done.

This didn't need to be a "Melbourne Water supports landcare" film event. We just needed volunteers to tell their own stories.

What the films could demonstrate was a varied movement working in



Filmmakers Tim Brown and Michael Portway with host of the inaugural From the Ground Up Film Festival, Costa Georgiadis.

different places in different ways — all trying to do something greater than themselves.

The films were designed to tease out the why people do things, rather than having a talking head read out the deliverables a project had achieved.

Two other aims were important — first, the films would be at least six or seven minutes long. Landcarers need time to explain their place and are prepared to listen to others explain theirs. We didn't need a Tik Tok version.

The other observation was that these films were too compelling to sit only on a website, getting a few dozen views.

The film festival idea was launched in July 2024.

As the night went on at Cinema Nova, the 10 films and panel session unfolded.

The best measure of the night was the cheers, sighs and laughter as the audience — many from the groups profiled — as viewers connected with the stories.

It was a genuine celebration for a movement that is often understated.

Since the From the Ground Up Film Festival launch, the same films have been shown at the Re-Set Festival at Federation Square, the National Landcare Conference, at landcare network films nights, and a few funerals too.

The second From the Ground Up Film Festival was held at ACMI Cinemas, following the 2026 Victorian Landcare Awards. 🌿

2026 Victorian Landcare Awards nominees

There were
99 nominations for
the 2026 Victorian
Landcare Awards.
See the list of all
the nominees
below.

Al Siraat College
Alice Whenn
All Kids Junior Landcare
Amanda McGirr
Annette Cavanagh
Annette Robertson
Anthony Casanova
Anthony Griffiths
Bacchus Marsh Grammar
Staughton Vale Ambassadors
Bass Coast Landcare Network
Bass Coast Shire Council

Bianca Fammartino
Breamlea Coastcare
Brendan McCosh
Bruce McInnes
Callum Lawson
Charlie, Amanda, Clive & Anna
Fairbairn-Calvert
City of Ballarat
Claire Gilbert
Co Exist Victoria
Corey McFadyen
Cowes Primary School
Daniel Paech
Daryl Colless
David Wilson
Dennis Arne
Dorothy Reid
Elia Pirtle
Emma Doyle
Forest Creek Implementation
Group
Gayle Osborne
Georgina Green
Goulburn Murray Landcare
Network
Hamilton-Coleraine Rail
Reserve Committee
Hamish Bailey
Ian and Gay Cornthwaite
Jemma Norman
Jennifer Lyndon
Jo and Greg Bear

John Birse
John Cable
John-Paul Murphy
Judy Crocker
Julie Grahame
Julie Keating
Karin Shepherd
Karl Kny
Kate Mirams & Peter Neaves
Kate Fitzherbert
Kate Lee
Ken Beasley
Kevin Sparrow
Kiewa Catchment Landcare
Kristy Stewart
Lakes Entrance Community
Landcare Group
Lake Tyers Coast Action
Lindsay Jolley
Lisa Wangman
Lyn Heenan
Lyndell Driscoll
Macedon Ranges Shire
Council
Maelor Himbury
Malcolm Legg
Mara Chambers
Melinda Black
Merricks Coolart Catchment
Landcare Group Inc
Merrivale Primary School
Michael Watson

Moogji Aboriginal Council
Mornington Peninsula Intrepid
Landcare
Murrayville Landcare
Neil Devanny
Pam Cunningham
Peter Wiltshire
Phil Williams
Port Phillip EcoCentre
Robert Belcher
Romawi Landcare
Rosalind Ellinger
Ross Creek Landcare
Ross Dawson
Skipton Primary School
South Gippsland Landcare
Network
Southwest Environment
Alliance
St Mary's Junior Landcare
Stuart McCallum
Suzie Patrala
TreeProject
Upper Deep Creek Landcare
Network
Warby Range Landcare
Wattle
Wilder Cote
Wodonga Urban Landcare
Network
Woodleigh School Field Gnats
Wyndham City Council

Next issue

The next 40 years of landcare

Landcare Victoria Inc seeks contributions for Issue 93 of the magazine, which will be published in 2027. The theme is 'The next 40 years of landcare', with a focus on stories of renewal and succession.

We are looking for stories that show how landcare communities are planning, adapting and preparing for the future. Contributions could explore topics such as:

- keeping landcare thriving
- recruiting and supporting volunteers
- building a culture of succession
- sharing ideas and projects that look to the future

The magazine fills quickly, so please contact us before the contribution deadline if you would like your story to be considered. Contributions are due by the end of **March 2027** and should be sent to info@landcarevictoria.org.au.

The *Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management* magazine is published and distributed by Landcare Victoria Incorporated and funded by the Victorian Government through the Victorian Landcare Program. The magazine aims to raise awareness of landcare and natural resource management among Victorian farmers, landholders, the Victorian landcare community and the wider community.

Read the magazine online

We know many readers enjoy reading the magazine at the kitchen table and sharing copies with family, friends and neighbours. As we continue to celebrate stories of sustainability and collaboration, we also encourage readers to consider switching to an online subscription.

Reading online helps reduce paper, printing and postage, supporting a more sustainable approach to sharing the magazine. If you are ready to make the change, please email info@landcarevictoria.org.au.

To access *Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management* magazine online as web pages since the Spring 2016 issue (#67) go to www.landcarevic.org.au/landcare-magazine.

Back issues of the magazine since the Spring 1996 issue (#1) can be accessed online as PDFs.

Together we can make a difference for Victoria's landscapes

To donate to Victorian landcare, scan the QR code below or visit landcarevictoria.org.au/donate



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