

Wildlife Land Trust

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Abstract:

The Wildlife Land Trust was originally established in North America 17 years ago by The Humane Society of the United States, and was established in Australia through Humane Society International in 2007, with a primary focus of encouraging private land holders with an interest in habitat protection to join with like-minded people in a national and global effort for wildlife conservation. The program is completely voluntary and there are no costs or legal obligations involved - becoming a member of the Wildlife Land Trust will effectively complement any current arrangements landowners already have on their properties, legal or otherwise.

The Wildlife Land Trust welcomes owners of properties small or large that provide for the needs of all wildlife, common and rare species alike. Currently, our Australian members collectively represent just over 22 200 acres of land across 52 properties in six states. Of these, 20 are owned by wildlife carers and rehabilitators - a proportion which highlights the compatibility between committed people involved in critical wildlife rehabilitation programs, and the aims of the Wildlife Land Trust. Nearly all of our partnership sanctuaries in Africa, India and Indonesia are also operating wildlife rescue and rehabilitation programs. We are extremely interested in strengthening this relationship in Australia, and potentially developing the Trust into a network more synonymous with wildlife rehabilitation and care.

Introduction:

The Wildlife Land Trust network was originally established in North America 17 years ago by The Humane Society of the United States, and was set up in Australia through Humane Society International in 2007. The primary focus of the Trust is encouraging private land holders who have an interest in habitat protection to join with like-minded people in a national and global effort for wildlife conservation. The program is completely voluntary and there are absolutely no costs or legal obligations involved - becoming a member of the Wildlife Land Trust will effectively complement any current arrangements landowners have on their properties, legal or otherwise.

The Wildlife Land Trust welcomes owners of properties small or large that provide for the needs of all wildlife, common and rare species alike. We are primarily offering any landholder membership of a national and international sanctuary network or “club”. We are still a young community but are growing steadily, with our Australian members

collectively represent just over 22 200 acres of land across 52 properties in six states. Of these, 20 are owned by wildlife carers and rehabilitators - a proportion which we believe highlights the compatibility between committed people involved in critical wildlife rehabilitation programs, such as yourselves, and the aims of the Wildlife Land Trust. Nearly all of our international partnership sanctuaries in Africa, India and Indonesia are also operating wildlife rescue and rehabilitation programs. We are extremely interested in further strengthening this relationship in Australia, and potentially developing the Trust into a network more synonymous with wildlife rehabilitation and care.

What's on offer?

Joining the Wildlife Land Trust is a simple and worthwhile process. After filling out our brief application form, a personalised non-binding "letter of agreement" is drafted and sent out to the applicant, basically saying that they and the Trust both aim to help protect wildlife and habitats on the property. After this letter of agreement has been returned, an official Wildlife Land Trust membership certificate is developed and the property is featured on our website under its relevant State. We provide property signs, hard and electronic copies of our newsletter, *Wildlife Lands*, a regular E-newsletter, Humane Society International technical bulletins, a group email link for member to member interaction, management advice for those who need it, and advice on increasing property protection if required. Additionally, we run a small grants program with other non-government organisations to which covenanted property owners can apply for funding.

The Wildlife Land Trust's biannual newsletter, *Wildlife Lands*, not only provides a chance for members to let everyone know about their sanctuary and the conservation efforts they are involved with, but also keeps them up to date with new properties that have joined the network, the latest statistics with regard to the Trust, news on relevant Humane Society International projects such as ecological community nominations, opportunities for funding through various land management grants, and information regarding our international sanctuaries and partners such as those of Wildlife SOS in India and the SanWild Wildlife Rehabilitation Center and Sanctuary in South Africa. As mentioned, members also receive other Humane Society International publications such as technical bulletins, which summarise the organisations recent involvement in a wide variety of conservation and animal protection efforts. These technical bulletins feature a double page of Wildlife Land Trust news, which help get word of the program out to a wider audience, as well as providing important news for members between issues of *Wildlife Lands*.

The legal and management advice that we endeavour to provide our members varies greatly, as would be expected through a program which caters for such a wide range of conservation minded property owners, such as working farmers, wildlife rehabilitators and carers, as well as regular individuals who would like to do as much as they can to make a difference. For example, Michelago Wildlife Sanctuary just south of Canberra wanted to better contribute to the Kosciusko to Coast corridor initiative, and badly needed to begin a revegetation program. The WLT was able to facilitate this through an arrangement with Greening Australia, which mechanically planted approximately 10 hectares of land to help re-green the sanctuary. On the other hand, occasionally legal advice is required for properties under various threats, for example, where a mining

company has an exploratory license, and wants access to a WLT member sanctuary. Should it be the desire of the member, we can also provide advice on how any given sanctuary may be better protected under such avenues as Voluntary Conservation Agreements and Nature Refuge listings etc.

Importance of private land conservation:

The Wildlife Land Trust is essentially all about the conservation of private land, which we believe to be pivotal in the protection of Australia's wildlife and their habitats. You may be familiar with the recent discovery of a population of yellow-spotted bell frogs, a species thought to have been extinct for more than 30 years, which were found on private land in the New South Wales Southern Tablelands. A frog expert with the New South Wales Environment Department, Dr David Hunter, proclaimed that the find highlights the critical role private landowners can play in habitat conservation, and we couldn't agree more. Australia is fortunate to have one of the richest assemblages of endemic species on the planet, occupying an amazing diversity of habitats. Yet less than 12% of the Australian landmass has some form of security as a protected area, and as a result we have one of the worst records for mammal extinctions and near extinctions of any developed country.

Protecting and preserving our habitats and ecosystems is essential to the survival of all wildlife, every acre left unexploited safeguards wildlife that desperately need our help to survive. The role of private lands has now become an integral part of the solution, and private landholders with concern for wildlife and habitat protection are in the unique and important position to make a very real contribution to conservation efforts across the country. I'm sure this is particularly well understood by wildlife rehabilitators, as it takes caring and committed people to do the work you do. These are traits shared by the Wildlife Land Trust, which is why I would certainly encourage those of you that own a bit of bush to seriously consider joining the WLT and facilitate improved networking with one another while uniting to protect as much of Australia's wildlife habitat as possible.

Sanctuary profiles:

Just to give you a few examples of sanctuaries that are already a part of the Wildlife Land Trust, I'd like to introduce Monteith, a 49 hectare property here in South Australia owned by dedicated wildlife rehabilitators who are also actively involved in the revegetation of cleared areas and management of invasive species on their land. Monteith was purchased with the purpose of conservation and wildlife release, and is home to three threatened ecological communities and the great abundance and wide variety of wildlife with which these communities are associated.

Cooper Creek Wilderness is only a recent addition to the Trust's list of sanctuaries, and is a 67 hectare World Heritage listed property situated in northern Queensland's Daintree region, which boasts the title of having the oldest living rainforest in the world at 135 million years. The owner's conservation efforts are made possible through funding derived by a sustainable ecotourism wildlife walk business she runs on the sanctuary which respects the fragility, biodiversity and antiquity of the land. The property is also

protected as a Nature Refuge under the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, and with its World Heritage status is one of the best-protected portions of land in the country.

On the other end of the spectrum, our largest member, Talawanta, is a 2000 hectare working farm in New South Wales with hundreds of acres of untouched scrub. The owners are conservation minded people wanting to bridge the gap between environmental groups and farmers by keeping large areas of habitat untouched for wildlife in the region. The property is home to 3 threatened ecological communities and 17 threatened species, which highlights the importance of conserving every bit of land possible, regardless of whether or not further legally binding protection is being sought.

This range of property sizes, uses and locations emphasizes the Wildlife Land Trust's focus on providing for the needs of all wildlife and habitats, and our willingness to put aside some of the more strenuous selection tools used by other similar programs in order to encompass as much invaluable land for conservation as possible. Although we cater for all conservation minded landholders, wildlife carers and rehabilitators are by far the majority group in the Trust, and we are extremely keen to make this even more so the case with your help.

International sanctuaries:

As previously mentioned, in addition to our Australian members, our international partnership sanctuaries in Africa, India and Indonesia are also involved in wildlife care and rehabilitation. The most recent of these to sign up to the Wildlife Land Trust was Wildlife SOS in India, an organisation which does incredible work rescuing and rehabilitating wildlife such as dancing sloth bears, leopards and elephants. One of their sanctuaries, the Karnataka Sloth Bear Rescue and Conservation Centre, sits on the Deccan Plateau of Southern India where the rocky outcrops, caves and enormous boulders are some of the oldest in the world. It is one of the few areas in India with a rich wild bear population, and is also home to leopards, hyenas, pangolins, black bucks, wild boars, civet cats and porcupines. A teeming and rich bird life is supported by the picturesque "Thungabhadra" river that also abounds in crocodiles. This area is severely under threat from illegal mining, quarrying, organised ritual hunting and rapid deforestation, and Wildlife SOS is therefore acquiring private land in the area to protect it and allow it to return to its original wild state, thus conserving wildlife and the ecosystem. In the United States, the Trust manages over 100 sanctuaries, more than half of which are owned by the WLT. Exposure to information on projects such as those of Wildlife SOS are an extra perk of becoming a member of the Wildlife Land Trust, as although it's extremely important to look after our own backyards, we should never overlook the vital work done by similarly minded people and organisations from around the world.

Conclusion:

To conclude, the Wildlife Land Trust fully recognises the immense contribution that wildlife rehabilitation programs and all those dedicated to the welfare of animals through these efforts make to wildlife conservation across Australia. We would consider it a huge

privilege to be able to work more closely with you all, and wish you nothing but good luck in your future endeavours.

I would like to extend the invitation to all of you who have a bit of bushland, big, small, or somewhere in between, to seriously consider filling in a Wildlife Land Trust application form. There are no costs or legal obligations involved, meaning you really don't have anything to lose, and we accept most applications put before us – we are a very "inclusive" club. You can find out everything you need to know by seeing me afterwards, or by heading to the Wildlife Land Trust section on the Humane Society International website. We'd love to have you on board.