

# Rewilding the Desert

## *A Conservation Plan 2015– 2019*



**FAUNA**  
RESEARCH ALLIANCE



### Traditional Owner Acknowledgement

Through their rich cultures, indigenous peoples have been intrinsically connected to land, sea and communities for tens of thousands of years. Conservation Volunteers Australia respectfully acknowledges Traditional Owners and Indigenous Peoples, their rich and dynamic cultures and their continuing unique affinity and cultural obligations for Country. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to elders both past and present.



## Introduction

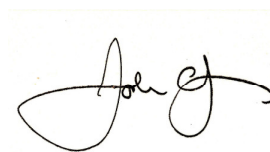
The joint venture between Conservation Volunteers and FAUNA Research Alliance has brought two organisations together with their own skills and expertise that when combined creates a momentum for change that will result in the conservation of Australia's wildlife.

Since European settlement Australians have watched and to a large extent been unaware of the extinction crisis facing Australia's wildlife. Despite the efforts of communities, researchers, business and governments we are the global leaders in species extinctions. A position we are fighting to change.

**Rewilding the Desert** is ambitiously aiming to bring back from the brink Australia's threatened wildlife and place Australia as a global leader in species conservation and research.

Conservation Volunteers and FAUNA Research Alliance are passionately committed to ensuring the survival of Australia's unique wildlife by:

- Reintroducing wildlife and bringing back from the brink Australia's unique wildlife.
- Building a renowned desert conservation centre
- Working within and beyond sanctuaries and reserves to recreate functional desert ecosystems
- Nurturing an engaged community, dedicated to growing and sharing open-source evidence-based knowledge
- Creating a hub of participatory, hands-on learning that purposefully connects people with nature



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*Inspiring change by connecting people with nature*

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## Rewilding Plan

The Rewilding Plan provides a road map for our joint venture, providing a unique and unparalleled opportunity to “re-wild the desert,” demonstrating, through evidence, the roles and functions people and species play in ecosystem processes, and how to use this knowledge for successful Rewilding. Rewilding is also a mechanism for connecting people with each other and nature: Connecting people to wildlife as they engage in the initiative as volunteers, and connecting people to each other around the big, exciting idea that repairing our damaged land is critically important to our long-term survival.

The Rewilding Plan is focussed on achieving the vision supported by five core goals and six key strategies.

## Vision

THE WIMMERA'S ANCIENT DESERT LANDSCAPE HAS BEEN BROUGHT BACK INTO BALANCE, AND ITS WILDLIFE IS ONCE MORE THRIVING UNDER THE CARE OF ENGAGED COMMUNITIES.

## Goals

1. Reintroducing wildlife and bringing back from the brink Australia's unique wildlife.
2. Building a renowned desert conservation centre
3. Working within and beyond sanctuaries and reserves to recreate functional desert ecosystems
4. Nurturing an engaged community, dedicated to growing and sharing open-source evidence-based knowledge
5. Creating a hub of participatory, hands-on learning that purposefully connects people with nature and wildlife

## Strategies

To achieve the goals and ultimately the vision of the joint venture between Conservation Volunteers and FAUNA Research Alliance six key strategies have been identified that form the Plan.

1. BioBlitz, understanding nature through monitoring and survey
2. Build it so they can survive
3. Breeding for rewilding
4. Keeping our wild places wild
5. Lifelong learning in nature
6. Partners in wildlife recovery

Each Strategy is described separately in this document and can be funded as a stand-alone set of activities.



## The location

The Conservation Plan covers three properties owned by Conservation Volunteers in the Wimmera Region of Victoria.

1. **The Lodge** – 110 hectares with an electrified predator exclusion fence, encloses the property, accommodation, conference room, workshop and other infrastructure
2. **The Sanctuary** - a separate 120 hectares block also enclosed by an existing electrified predator exclusion fence.
3. **Salvana** private Conservation Reserve - 1200 hectares of Mallee habitat linking the West and Central blocks of the Little Desert National Park.

## Why we need to act now

Ecosystems, species and genes - the three main components of life on earth are all continuing to show signs of decline. Habitat damage, over exploitation, pollution, invasive species and climate change are the five principal pressures that are directly driving wildlife loss. These pressures are remaining constant or increasing in intensity (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010).

The highly distinctive and mostly endemic Australian wildlife has suffered an extraordinary rate of extinction, over 10% of the 273 endemic mammals over the last 200 years. A further 21% of Australian endemic mammals are now assessed as threatened, indicating that the rate of loss (of one to two extinctions per decade) is likely to continue.

Likewise Australia's birds that are known to have occurred in Australia when Europeans settled in 1788, 2.2% are now extinct and a further 11.8% are threatened

The real significance of species loss is little understood and often over-simplified. But without doubt we are losing forever the functions that species contribute to our world: ecosystem regulation, pest control, good soil and water quality, pollination and seed dispersal.

*The fate of biological diversity for the next 10 million years will almost certainly be determined during the next 50 - 100*

## Return on Investment

The social and environmental dividends of investing in Rewilding the desert are significant, across the world there is growing economic evidence that investing in nature delivers a positive return.

The real question is what price are we prepared to pay to ensure the survival of Australia's wildlife?

**Rewilding the desert will invest \$ 4.2 million over 4 years to support the recovery of Australia's wildlife.**

This initiative has already invested in significant capital infrastructure including the land, predator proof fencing and technical capacity. These are the foundations for successful Rewilding. We now need financial resources to implement on the ground.

## Taking Action - Business as usual is not an option

Conservation Volunteers and FAUNA Research Alliance recognise the need to support broad-based ecological interventions and form ongoing partnerships with the community to achieve the vision.

Every action we undertake will be purposeful and deliver measurable results. Projects have been identified and developed to benefit both ecological communities and key species and that demonstrably enable the vision to be achieved.



*Existing Predator proof electrified fencing*

## Strategy One – Bio Blitz, understanding nature

Much of the loss of Australian wildlife has been in areas that are remote including the vast deserts and tropical savannah's. The loss of Australian wildlife is multi-factored due to predation by introduced species, particularly the cat *Felis catus* and fox *Vulpes vulpes*, changed fire regimes and habitat loss or disturbance.

The 29 Australian endemic mammal extinctions comprise 35% of the world's modern mammal extinctions.

Despite this some wildlife are still fighting for life, in refuges, that have provided them protection from extinction.

Across our three properties a key step is to understand what wildlife remains and build programs that benefit the current condition,



distribution of existing species and reduce threats.

Systematic and repeatable baseline surveys for fauna (invertebrates, reptiles, birds and mammals) and flora (mosses, fungi and vascular plants) will be critical.

We know our properties have a number of nationally threatened species including the malleefowl and red-tailed black cockatoo. By undertaking this critical baseline work we will ensure the action we take is appropriate and that success can be measured.

Over the next four years we will	Cost
<b>Undertake flora and fauna surveys</b> The Rewilding Manager will bring together a range of experts and a contingency of volunteers to design and undertake the surveys	\$250,000
<b>Prepare and implement monitoring protocols for citizen science programs</b>	\$50,000
<b>Deploy remote wildlife cameras and live video feeds to our website.</b>	\$45,000
<b>Undertake aerial mapping</b> using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles	\$20,000
<b>Map vegetation type and condition</b>	\$25,000
<b>Monitor priority species</b> including, malleefowl, red-tailed black cockatoo	\$100,000

**Total Investment**  
**– \$490,000**



## Strategy Two – Build it, so they can survive

A major cause of extinction is predation by the fox and cat.



Two of Conservation Volunteers properties have predator proof fences providing the best chance for recovery and breeding of selected threatened species. These predator proof areas have been established at considerable expense and are a substantial asset for future conservation of threatened fauna.

To maintain these assets and ensure they are fit for purpose requires an ongoing

investment and refurbishment to cater for and support the breeding of a suite of fauna species

1. Western Quolls (vulnerable)
  2. Spot-tailed quoll (endangered)
  3. Red-tailed Black-cockatoo (endangered)
  4. Malleefowl – (vulnerable)
  5. Numbat (vulnerable )
  6. Red-tailed Phascogale (endangered)
  7. Western barred bandicoot (endangered)
  8. Bilby (vulnerable)
  9. Burrowing bettong (vulnerable)
  10. Brush-tailed bettong (extinct)
- EPBC listing shown in brackets

Over the next four years we will;	Cost
Maintain the existing predator fences	\$100,000
Upgrade aviary and establish new pens for malleefowl recovery and other species	\$120,000
Upgrade fire prevention system including sprinkler system	\$70,000

**Total Investment – \$290,000**

## Strategy Three – Breeding for Rewilding

We have the facilities to make a difference and bring back from the brink species that provide a broad ecological role ultimately supporting the recovery of species and improving ecosystem processes.



Breeding and supporting species recovery not only has the immediate tangible benefit, but also has the less obvious benefit of allowing people visiting the lodge to observe the otherwise obscure, small, nocturnal, and shy, Australian wildlife. This is critical to ensuring people value Australian wildlife

A key element of this work will be the establishment of strong and ongoing relationships with Recovery Teams, relevant Government Departments and Zoos to join in our conservation efforts.

Over the next four years we will	Cost
<b>Establish Conservation Objectives for the lodge and sanctuary to support species conservation, rewilding, CVA and FAUNA objectives</b>	\$100,000
<b>Prepare and refine breeding and relocation/translocation and animal husbandry techniques and protocols for:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Western Quolls (vulnerable)</li><li>2. Spot-tailed quoll (endangered)</li><li>3. Red-tailed Black-cockatoo (endangered)</li><li>4. Malleefowl – (vulnerable)</li></ul>	\$250,000



5. Numbat (vulnerable ) 6. Red-tailed Phascogale (endangered) 7. Western barred bandicoot (endangered) 8. Bilby (vulnerable) 9. Burrowing bettong (vulnerable) 10. Brush-tailed bettong (extinct) EPBC listing shown in brackets	
<b>Work with recovery teams and other experts to support national recovery efforts.</b>	\$50,000
<b>Explore needs, opportunities and risks in establishing reptile facilities at the lodge.</b>	\$65,000

***Total Investment – \$465,000***

## Strategy Four – Keeping our wild places wild

Conservation Volunteers properties are in good condition and a modest maintenance regime is required to keep on top of the usual invasive plants and animals, and to manage and restore degraded areas.



Managing threats and restoring degraded areas is critical to the survival of wildlife. Indeed, to some extent, the apparent naturalness and extent of the Australian

Outback has beguiled the public into thinking that Australia's unique wildlife was and is secure.

Over the next four years we will	Cost
Research and implement a restoration program for Salvana Reserve	\$350,000
Manage and monitor pest plants and animals	\$100,000
Prepare, implement and monitor a fire management plan	\$45,000
Support wildlife populations across the properties	\$300,000
Upgrade fencing of the Salvana property with the support of adjacent land owners	\$175,000

**Total Investment – \$970,000**

## Strategy Five – Lifelong learning in nature

In the main, Australian society is unaware or complacent about the loss of wildlife and the ecosystem services they provide. It is alarming to know that Australia is leading the world in the extinction of wildlife. This is despite a well-developed National Reserve System and major initiatives like “Landcare” and more recently Green Army.

We know that the provision of knowledge and the ability to learn in nature and delivered with hands on practical experiences result in long lasting knowledge retention and behavioural change.

Cartoon by David Pope/National Museum of Australia



Consequently the Rewilding Centre plays an important role in providing

education, knowledge and experiences in nature to support Australians in addressing and identifying solutions to our wildlife extinction crisis.

The Rewilding centre is deliberately ambitious and together FAUNA Research Alliance and Conservation Volunteers see education, training and lifelong learning as key elements in shifting Australia to the top of the global ladder in wildlife recovery

Over the next four years we will	Cost
<b>Initiate a Scholarship fund</b> A fund to support PhD and further study in wildlife conservation	\$350,000
<b>Deliver a series of wildlife conservation seminars</b>	\$100,000
<b>Develop a rewilding research agenda</b> Targeting specific research needs to respond to the	\$350,000
<b>Deliver learning seminars and wildlife experiences to visitors and volunteers to the lodge.</b>	\$100,000

**Total Investment – \$900,000**

## Strategy Six – Partners in Wildlife Recovery

Collaboration and partnership are at the essence of our joint venture.

We understand that the easiest way to plant a million trees is to have a million people plant a tree each.

It is this value that forms the foundation of both our organisations.

We also recognise that partnerships don't just happen they need resources, commitment and passion to succeed.

While the joint venture between FAUNA Research Alliance and Conservation Volunteers is the foundation partnership we recognise the need for others to be directly involved.



This will include partnerships with;

- the local community
- Habitat 141°
- Wimmera CMA
- Parks Victoria
- Department of Environment Land Water and Planning
- Department of Environment
- Businesses

and many others

To support and nurture the partnerships to re-wild the desert we need to build and invest in strategic alliances and partnerships.

Over the next four years we will	Cost
<b>Rewilding Project Manager</b>	\$750,000
<b>Threatened Species Recovery Team partnerships</b>	\$100,000
<b>Marketing and communications</b> Including Web based communication and collateral	\$250,000

**Total Investment – \$1,100,000**



## Conclusion

The facilities at the lodge, the volunteer resource and partners Conservation Volunteers brings to the joint venture, complemented with the technical, science and research of FAUNA Research Alliance provide the ingredients for success. Rewilding the desert is a bold initiative to recover Australia's wildlife.



