

Local Lovers of the Environment: Pam and Phill O'Neill



Catchment Champion

Sophie Disher, Hannah Membrey, Elle
Petrascu and Tammika Thompson

Barham Public School



Creative Catchment Kids

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of the Murray Darling Association and Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between the Murray Catchment Management Authority and school students by providing opportunities for positive and authentic ventures that encourage students to develop creative solutions to natural resource management issues. **www.murray.cma.nsw.gov.au/creative-catchment-kids.html**

Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre

The Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre is located in Burrumbuttock, north of Albury in southern NSW. Since 1995, the centre, which is adjacent to Burrumbuttock Public School, has provided opportunities for discovery and learning about the natural environment, the ecology of the local woodlands and the beauty of native plants. **www.wirraminna.org**

Murray Darling Association

The Murray Darling Association has membership of over 100 Local Government councils in the Murray-Darling Basin, as well as community groups, businesses and individuals with an interest in ensuring that the Basin continues as a valuable asset for all Australians. Since 1950, the Association has initiated various school and community education programs on managing the Basin's land and water resources. **www.mda.asn.au**



Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeeKdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area. **www.envirostories.com.au**

Local Lovers of the Environment: Pam and Phill O'Neill

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Illustrations: Hannah Membrey

Teacher: Sue Radywonik

School: Barham Public School

Catchment Champions

In 2013, students involved in the Creative Catchment Kids program researched and wrote stories about 'Catchment Champions', people who have made important contributions to managing natural resources in their local community. The program was generously funded by the Murray and Murrumbidgee catchment management authorities.

The Catchment Champions books are part of the Enviro-Stories Education Program.



**Catchment Management
Authority**
Murray



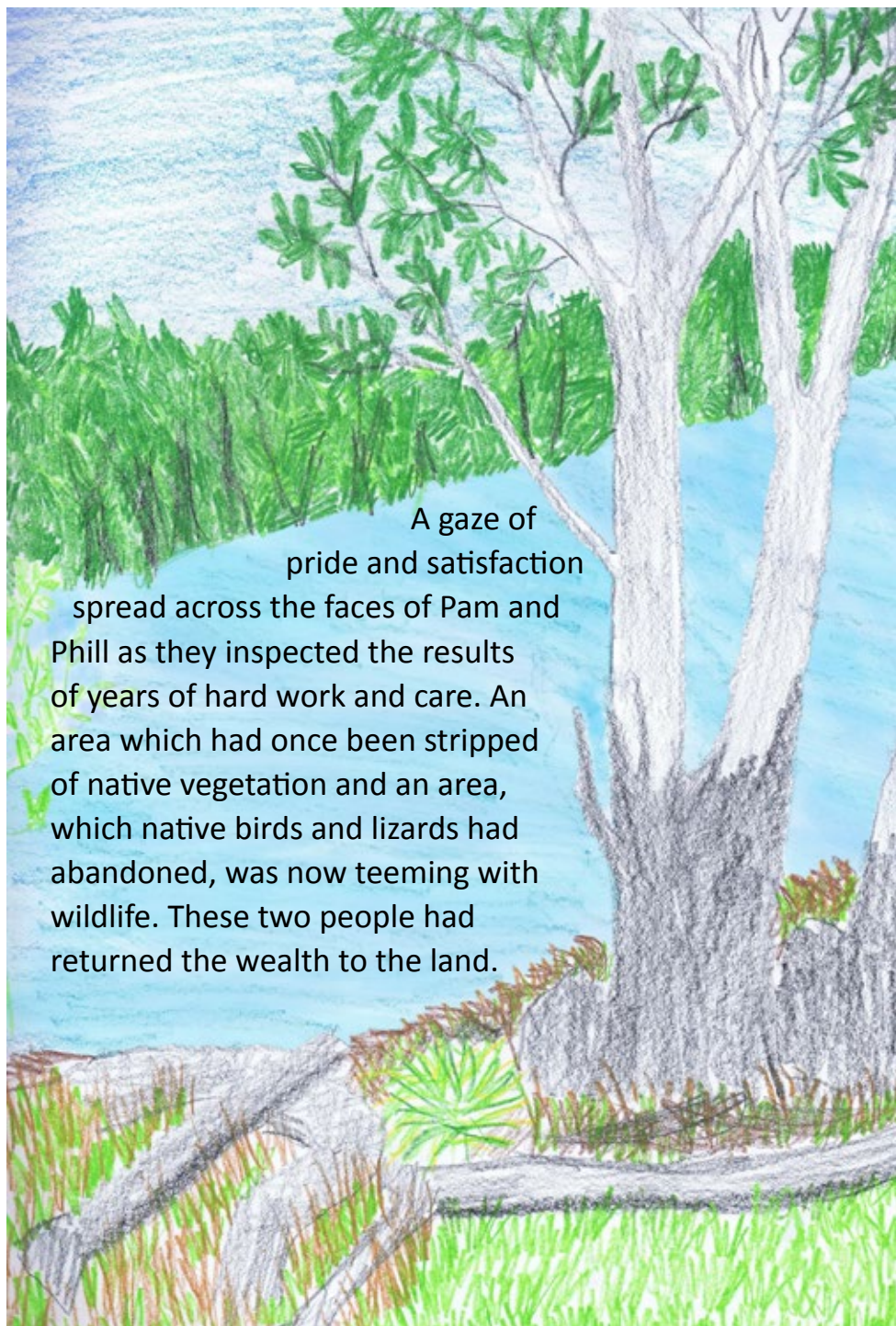
**CARING
FOR
OUR
COUNTRY**



**Catchment Management
Authority**
Murrumbidgee

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A gaze of
pride and satisfaction
spread across the faces of Pam and
Phill as they inspected the results
of years of hard work and care. An
area which had once been stripped
of native vegetation and an area,
which native birds and lizards had
abandoned, was now teeming with
wildlife. These two people had
returned the wealth to the land.



This is the story of Pam and Phill O'Neill; two people who have worked so hard, with great passion, to restore the land to its natural state and raise awareness of endangered native species.



Pam was born in Barham in 1958 and grew up in Koondrook, the neighboring Murray River town. Pam's father was a sleeper cutter so she was allowed to go to the forest while he worked. This led to her love of the majestic red gums of the area. Pam has always loved animals, and hated animals being hurt in any way. Her love of wildlife continued to develop after she met Phill.



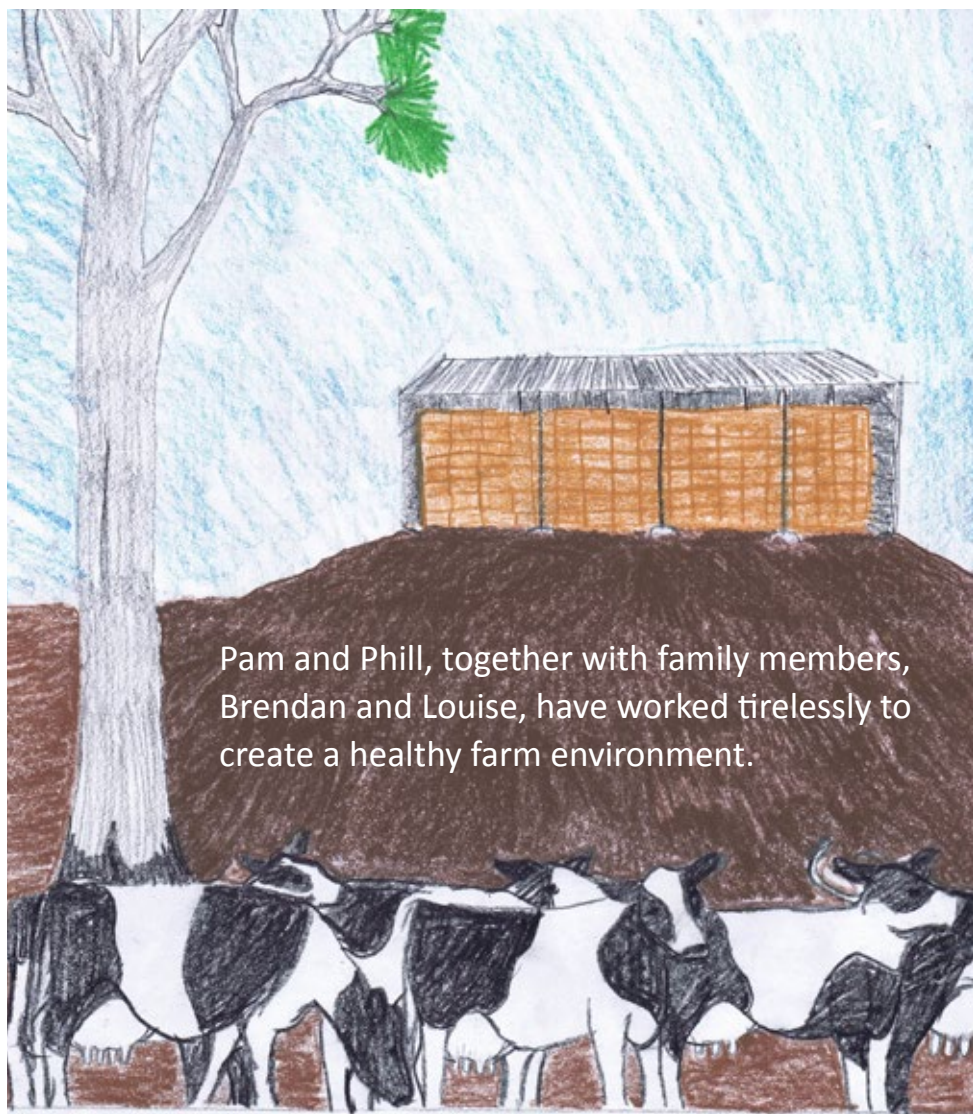
Phill was born in 1957 and grew up in Barham. He was an enthusiastic bird lover, who often would care for injured birds he took home. After leaving school, he did an apprenticeship as a boiler maker and started his own business. When Phill's father died in 1989, he and his brother Brendan returned home to run the family dairy farm. So began the sons' opportunity to improve the land.



Pam and Phill were married in January, 1980. They moved to Barham and two children followed; a boy named Ashley and girl named Kate. Both children have also developed a love for wildlife and the environment.



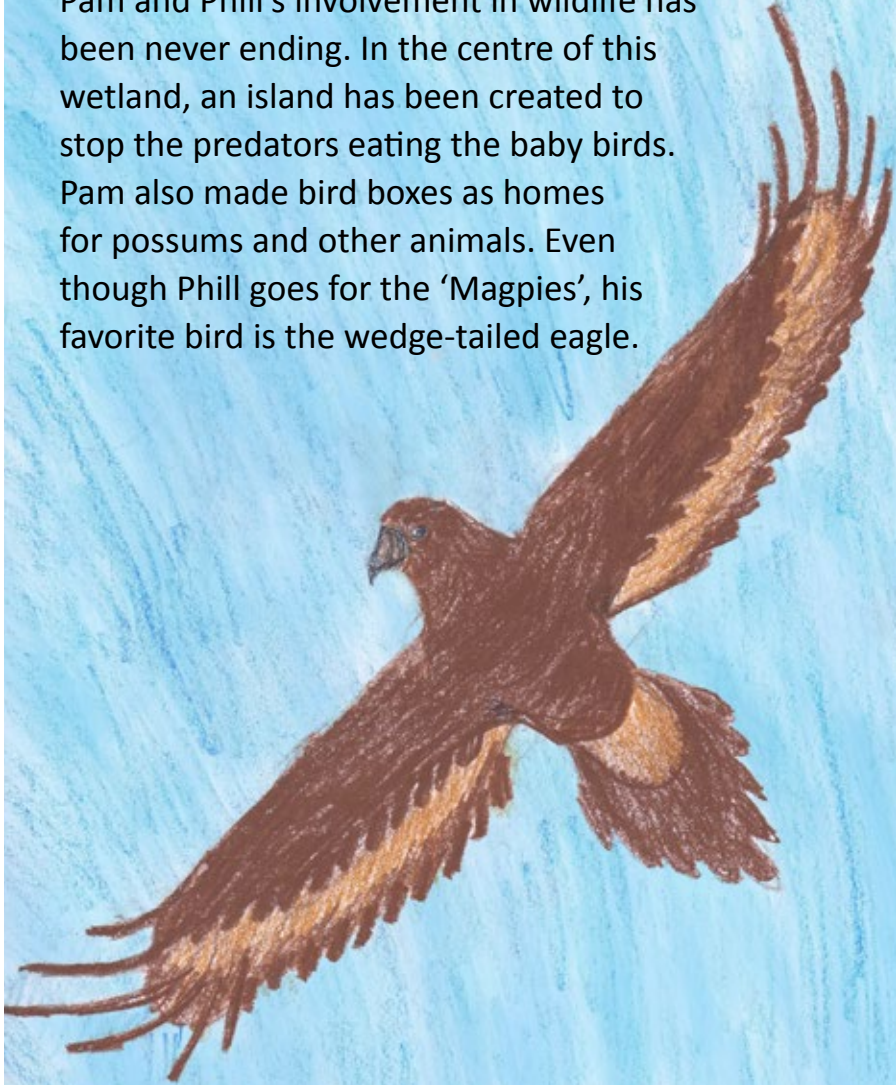
This couple has worked passionately to create a better environment. Through their involvement in the Western Murray and Improvement Group and the Barham Landcare Group, they applied for and received grants to fund direct seeding of native plants and local farms, to help return the land to its natural state.




Pam and Phill, together with family members, Brendan and Louise, have worked tirelessly to create a healthy farm environment.

Phill and his brother have planted corridors of trees, linking them to the forest for shelter for the cattle and to encourage native animals and birds. The river has been fenced off to stop cattle eroding the banks and an artificial wetland has been added to their recycling system.

Pam and Phill's involvement in wildlife has been never ending. In the centre of this wetland, an island has been created to stop the predators eating the baby birds. Pam also made bird boxes as homes for possums and other animals. Even though Phill goes for the 'Magpies', his favorite bird is the wedge-tailed eagle.





A number of people have influenced and inspired both Pam and Phill and developed their knowledge and interest in native flora and fauna. These include Peter Disher, a local 'birding legend', as well as Ken Simpson, the renowned author of birding identification books, and Matt Herring, a well-respected wildlife ecologist.

Pam and Phill with Peter Disher



The achievements of Pam and Phill are many. They have always had a love of nature and wildlife which continues to give them a driving urge to better the environment. We all need more people like Pam and Phill to help make our world a better place.







Back (L-R): Tammika Thompson, Sophie Disher and Elle Petrascu
Front (L-R): Pam O'Neill, Phill O'Neill and Hannah Membrey

2013 Year 6, Barham Public School

The 2012 and 2013 Creative
Catchment Kids writing
program was showcased
at the Seventh World
Environmental Education
Congress, held in Morocco
during June 2013.



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