

# Clare Cannon: Conservation Champion



Written by Marieke Hoelscher, Hannah Lewry,  
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## Creative Catchment Kids

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between our funding partners and school students by providing opportunities for positive, cooperative activities that encourage students to learn about and respond to, natural resource management and the importance of agricultural production.

**[wirraminna.org.au/petaurus/creative-catchment-kids/](http://wirraminna.org.au/petaurus/creative-catchment-kids/)**

## Petaurus Education Group

Petaurus Education Group identifies, develops and delivers a range of learning and curriculum experiences, resources and initiatives for schools and community groups to connect with land, water, productive farming, sustainability and cultural issues at the local level. The group was established by Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre in late-2014 to support its operations and education activities.

**[wirraminna.org.au/petaurus](http://wirraminna.org.au/petaurus)**

## Biodiversity Conservation Trust

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust works in partnership with landholders to establish private land conservation agreements to conserve and manage high-value biodiversity on private land.

**[bct.nsw.gov.au](http://bct.nsw.gov.au)**

## Enviro-Stories

Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeekKdesigns, 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.

**[envirostories.com.au](http://envirostories.com.au)**

# Clare Cannon: Conservation Champion

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**Photography:** All photos are courtesy of Kelly Coleman, PeeKdesigns, unless otherwise indicated.

## Biodiversity Conservation

In 2018, students from Albury High School participated in creating a book as part of the Creative Catchment Kids program. This case study is about the property 'Woomargama Station' that is part of NSW's private land conservation network. The program was generously funded by NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust.

Creative Catchment Kids is partnered with Enviro-Stories, a PeeKdesigns education program.

### Traditional Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land and pay respect to their Elders – past, present and future.



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Front cover photo: Esther Beaton





Woomargama Station is located in south-eastern New South Wales, in what is called the South-West Slopes of the Great Dividing Range.

Woomargama Station was established as a 40,000-acre sheep run in 1838 by Messrs McKenzie and Wilde. In 1965, Gordon and Margaret Darling bought 2,5000 acres of the property. Their daughter, Clare Cannon, is now the owner of one of Australia's oldest pastoral stations.

Woomargama Station produces grass-fed beef from a herd of 1,000 Poll Hereford cattle and runs about 7,500 fine wool Merino sheep. Woomargama Station's cattle and sheep herds are managed by Nick Wragge and his team. The station continues to be a world leader in farming and pastoral practice. Clare's high-end brand has been developed from her unwavering commitment to traceable, sustainable and ethical produce.





The high-value brand has been developed from a diverse range of accreditations such as pastured, hormone-free cattle and the maintenance of high levels of animal welfare and husbandry. Their lambing percentages consistently reaching 100%.



PHOTOGRAPHER: SEAN MURPHY, ABC





In 2016, Woomargama Station partnered with the Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT) and allocated one-third of her property to a covenant. A covenant with the BCT is a conservation agreement. This covenant is in perpetuity, which means the land can never be cleared and the box gum-grassy woodland must be managed according to the agreement with the Trust.



PHOTOGRAPHER: KAREN RETRA





We travelled to Woomargama Station on National Agriculture Day and met with Clare Cannon and Kylie Durant from Holbrook Landcare. We wanted to find out why Clare decided to conserve biodiversity on her property and to discover if conserving biodiversity and having a passion for sustainability is a worthwhile agribusiness choice.





WOOMARGAMA VILLAGE

WOOMARGAMA  
HOMESTEAD



ROADS



LOCALITIES



GRAZED FARMLAND



STATE CONSERVATION AREA



COVENANT AREA



NATIONAL PARK

The conservation area at Woomargama Station adjoins Woomargama National Park along the south-western boundary of the property. The area supports the critically endangered white box–yellow box–Blakely’s red gum grassy woodland as well as derived native grasslands and the endangered grassy box gum woodland.

As we walked through Woomargama Station we noticed a large number of birds and insects flying around and calling in the trees. Clare and Kylie explained how the station is the perfect habitat for threatened woodland birds. These species include the diamond firetail and the brown tree creeper. Frogs, reptiles and mammals such as the endangered squirrel glider were found on the property during surveys in 2013.

The conservation area is an open woodland area and acts as a transition from the densely forested area of the adjoining national park and the open paddocks of the surrounding farmland. This transitional zone also known as an ecotone, is a valuable habitat and source of food for many different animal species.

This ecosystem is essential for connecting habitats and landscapes for a variety of species. For example, squirrel gliders glide from tree to tree at an average distance of 30 metres. Connections between suitable habitats are therefore essential to support these threatened gliders in avoiding predators and human threats. We discussed how the tree canopy is habitat for many species known in the area but that the understorey is also vital as a food source. Kylie Durant spoke about how this property has had a long relationship with the Holbrook Landcare Group and that over the past 30 years 100,000 native seedlings have been planted on Woomargama Station.



PHOTOGRAPHER: ESTHER BEATON



PHOTOGRAPHER: ESTHER BEATON



Clare spoke about fragile soils in Australia and why it is vital for good ground vegetation to be maintained to keep the topsoil from eroding. Kylie showed us examples of native grasses and shrubs present in the understorey of the conservation area.





Clare said that they are allowed to use the conservation area for grazing which surprised us. Actually, Woomargama Station is allowed to graze six months of the year in the conservation area from March until September. They use grazing as a tool in order to prevent the regrowth of eucalypts to maintain the open woodland habitat. They also spray blackberries and briar in the conservation area to prevent weeds from overtaking. Sheep and cattle are kept out of the paddocks when native grasses are seeding. In addition to weed management on the conservation area, Woomargama Station Management also has to be vigilant in controlling feral animals that commonly occur there. These pests include populations of wild dogs, pigs, foxes and rabbits.



PHOTOGRAPHER: BRENDAN THOMPSON



We chatted with Clare about ecosystem services and how the conservation area supports farm health. We discovered that ecosystem services are the benefits to humans from the environment. For example, native woodland birds can control leaf defoliating insects. The water system running through the conservation area has the endangered southern pygmy perch which indicates how healthy the creek is.

PHOTOGRAPHER: ESTHER BEATON



PHOTOGRAPHER: ESTHER BEATON



We learnt about how the Biodiversity Conservation Trust gives Clare the support and tools to maintain the covenant. This support is important for landholders to be able to maximise profits and still conserve high-value habitats for future generations. The financial assistance provided to Woomargama Station allows the management team to conserve areas instead of relying on high-density stocking to maximise profit.

The information provided about the latest innovations help the team maximise the efficiency of Woomargama Station. For example, the conservation management plan for Woomargama Station provides the station manager information on how to best manage the area while still maximising profits and building the Woomargama brand. Clare is a great example of a landholder who is doing the right thing to conserve landscapes and ecosystems for the future.



Clare spoke about how important it is to maintain your integrity. By ensuring the products from Woomargama Station are accredited, traceable and sustainable, they are increasing their value and the value of the brand. The value the Nick and his team place on the welfare of the animals was obvious as we travelled to the beautiful blue woolshed. Sheep were bounding around after just being crutched so that they did not need to be mulesed. They had sprinklers installed in the holding pen and are developing a unique shelter area to protect and care for the sheep in extreme weather conditions. You can see how passionate the entire team is about the station and it was encouraging to discuss our goals and learn from such a champion landholder.

PHOTOGRAPHER: ESTHER BEATON





To finish off the trip we got to meet her miniature donkeys. We had a great time patting them and talking about her farm and how she runs it. We had a fantastic day and we reflected on our overall experiences as we left.



## Reflections from Tayla

I think it is amazing that Clare's plans for the future are not only beneficial to just her but also to the native plants and wildlife. I find it inspiring that she did not farm the animals that people told her she would gain the most from but cultivates Herefords and Merinos because it was what she wanted. The trip to Woomargama Station taught me the importance of practicing conservation and sustainability the right way and that many people are involved in helping Clare manage her property sustainably. It was also informative to hear Kylie talk about the native plants and animals, including her telling us that the pygmy perch was a part of that ecosystem and only two other ecosystems in Australia, considering that species provides food for native birds and other fish. The project Clare has with BCT is vital in replenishing Australia's natural landscapes.



## Reflections from Marieke

Using sustainability in agriculture is important as it is thinking 50-100 years down the track and preserving our natural ecosystems as well as being able to farm the land. A balance of these things will ensure profitability as consumers are becoming more interested in where their food, clothes and resources come from. So it is a win-win for farmers. Clare has chosen to protect a third of her property with a conservation covenant. Although this approach may decrease the value of her property at first, it will add a lot more in the future. She is an inspirational woman who is very passionate about farming and has been on an amazing journey to get to the point where she has established her Merino brand with an excellent reputation along with her certified pasture-fed cattle. She is working with the BCT to protect the endangered box gum grassy woodland.



## Reflections from Bella

I found it inspirational to hear Clare speak about her property and her decision to dedicate a third of it towards improving the sustainability of the land. I have always been interested in pursuing an agricultural career for as long as I can remember and growing up in a family that is so conscious about the environment the things Clare spoke about were significant to me. Before travelling to her property at Woomargama, I did not know how you could incorporate both conservation of the environment as well as productive and profitable farming. To hear Clare speak about how it has improved the profitability of her farm was good for me to hear because it made me realise that it is something that can be done without jeopardising your own comforts. I did not realise the amount of support that was also provided for farmers such as Clare in the form of funding and support. I would like to learn more about how you can get involved in agriculture without working directly on a farm or if you do not own a property. I would also like to learn more about the things that can be done to improve the land to ensure its longevity and sustainability.



## Reflections from Hannah

Clare has made a heap of improvements to her property. The improvements include building a lot of fences and natural use of the land. While it has dropped the property “value” a bit, it was the right thing to do and it’s a good change for future sustainability and increased the already established reputation of the Woomargama brand.





**Hannah:** From this experience I have gained new insight into environmental sustainability and biodiversity conservation on properties. I did not realise how much impact farmers can have in conserving biodiversity and habitats, and that there are people that will support and help them give back to the land.

**Bella:** I have learnt about the ways that farmers can work to improve their land and maintain its sustainability into the future. It also made me appreciate that there are support resources available for farmers who wish to enhance the biodiversity of their property.

**Marieke:** I have gained knowledge about how sustainable agriculture can be a win-win and how much support is available in the form of conservation tenders and educational resources to encourage and help them implement conservation on their property.

**Tayla:** I learnt so much from Clare and Kylie about how crucial it is to have values and do what's right for the land. I also learnt how important it is to conserve Australia's biodiversity and resources for the future.



Thank you, Clare Cannon, for showing us around your property, the covenant and emphasizing how biodiversity conservation can be a win-win for farmers and our landscapes. You truly are an inspiration. Clare demonstrated to us that landholders are passionate people that care for their land and conserving the landscapes and ecosystems for us and future generations. It also showed how there is a whole community backing our farmers to help them do the best they can.



PHOTOGRAPHER: ESTHER BEATON



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