

Landcare farming the 'Wycombe' way



Written by Lauren Hawkins, Eliza Hart, Ryan McDowell,
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St Patrick's Primary School, Holbrook



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/

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

Holbrook Landcare

Holbrook Landcare Network (HLN) is a Not for Profit community network based in southern NSW, established in 1989. HLN is a vibrant rural organisation managing a range of agricultural and NRM projects to deliver information and support to our community, predominantly farmers. HLN supports farmers to achieve environmental care and improved management; the adoption of sustainable and productive agricultural practices and the support of innovation.

HLN achieves this in 3 key ways:

- Knowledge transfer – education
- Facilitator for engagement leading to practice and cultural change
- Broker for funding and knowledge, for on-ground environmental works and Research and Development

holbrooklandcare.org.au

Enviro-Stories

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.

envirostories.com.au

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Landcare in action

In 2018, St Patrick’s Primary School, Holbrook were involved in the Creative Catchment Kids program delivered by Petaurus Education Group Inc. Creative Catchment Kids is partnered with Enviro-Stories, a Peekdesigns education program.

This project is supported by Holbrook Landcare Network, through funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program Small Environmental Grants.





History of Alan and Yvonne Roach's farm 'Wycombe'

'Wycombe' (why-comb) is the farm owned by Alan and Yvonne Roach. It is just west of Holbrook in southern NSW. It is 520 hectares in size.

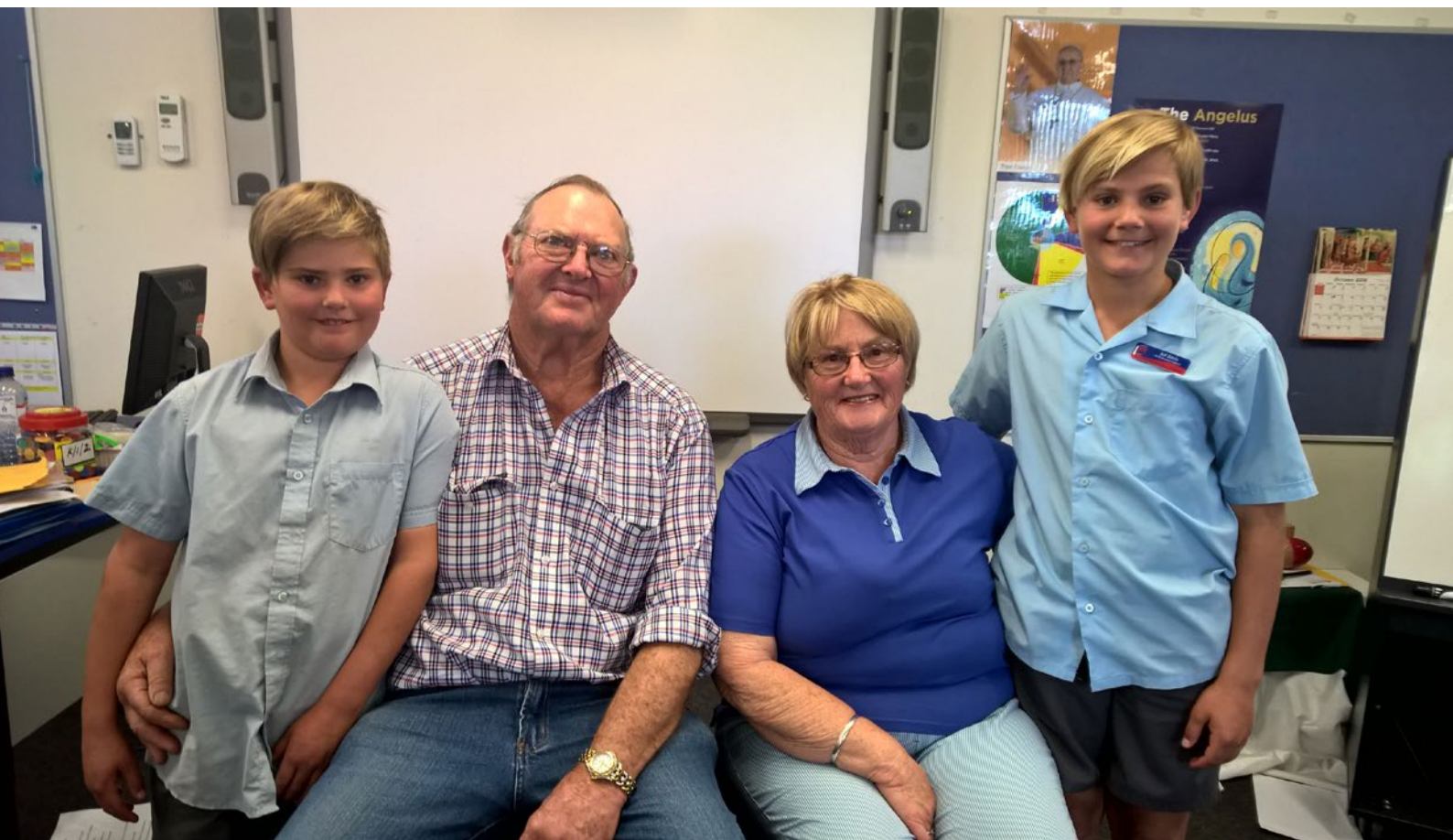
The name 'Wycombe' comes from the name of a famous race horse.

One part of the Roach's farm has been in the family for 150 years (4 generations) and the other part about 70 years. Alan has been on the farm for 69 years and Yvonne has been on the farm ever since they got married 46 years ago. They have three daughters.

Part of 'Wycombe' was originally part of 'Roachdale' owned by David James Roach (Alan's grandfather). 'Roachdale' was split into soldier-settler blocks, it went from 10,000 acres to 3,000 acres. This was for returned soldiers who had come back from World War One or Two. The government did this so returned soldiers had something to make a living/money off.

When Alan's grandfather died, Alan's father (also David) chose what is now the back of 'Wycombe'. The 'Roachdale' homestead was taken over by Ron Trescowthick. The front part of 'Wycombe' was bought from Bob Humphrey in 1947. It was named 'Wycombe' and Alan's mother and father kept the name when they combined the holdings.

Alan and Yvonne took over the farm in 1999 and now live in the first house that Alan's father built from material from Bob Humphrey's original house.



ABOVE: ALAN AND YVONNE ROACH WITH GRANDSONS JED AND OLLY DAVIS

LEFT: THIS IS BILLY, ONE OF THE FARM DOGS



LANDCARE - WHAT DO THEY DO?

By Eliza Hart

Revegetation: across our dry nation
Bird corridors: safe from cat paws
Sometimes along fences, or put in a line,
It doesn't really matter because it's your creation.

A place for birds to nest and rest,
A place for them to lay eggs and build families and friends,
Sheltered from prey all through the day.
With Landcare standing by farmer's sides,
Helping birds... numbers be on the rise.



Landcare and farming

Alan and Yvonne Roach are members of Holbrook Landcare Network and incorporate the landcare ethic of sustainable natural resource management and ecologically sustainable development into their farm business.

They took over running the farm in 1999 and started fencing for land capability, installing laneways for stock movement, planting trees and protecting native grasslands and woodlands with careful grazing management.

They enjoy having native birds and animals living on the farm and keep stock out of the Billabong Creek with fencing and water troughs. The creek is crash grazed to control weeds.



WHEAT



WHEAT



CANOLA
(CREDIT: CARL DAVIES)

Cropping

'Wycombe' has 135 hectares of cropping. Alan and Yvonne used to grow wheat and canola in rotation. They planted wheat for 2 years and then planted canola the next. This helps the soil stay healthier.

This year they leased out the farm and it has a wheat crop. Wheat is a grass widely cultivated for its seed. Usually you get bugs like Looper, Armyworms, Aphids, Cutworms, Flea Beetles, Flea hoppers and Diamondback moths in canola. This year they have been lucky and didn't get any of these bugs. They try not to use pesticides if possible as they don't want to hurt the 'good' insects like bees and native wasps. There are insects that help crops by preying on the 'bad' insects and pollinate the flowers.



IMPROVED PASTURES

Grazing

Alan and Yvonne have sheep but no cattle. They did have some cattle until 2002. Alan and Yvonne like sheep more than cattle but admit that sheep are more work than cattle.

What type of sheep do Alan and Yvonne have? Well, woolly ones, of course.

They have Merino and Poll Dorset. 'Wycombe' has one goat called Victa. He is brown and white and gets put in a paddock with the sheep. Alan and Yvonne are very good at looking after the sheep, whether feeding them hay, providing shade and shelter or turning on a well to fill the sheep troughs. They are careful not to graze the paddocks too low to protect their soil, improved pastures and native grasses.



Designated stock movement laneways

On 'Wycombe' there are designated fenced laneways that the sheep use to move between paddocks. The laneways protect the soil and keep the stock safe. Every year Alan and Yvonne have planted trees along the laneways for shade, shelter and biodiversity. Yvonne says the laneways have made a real positive change to their farm.



Landcare revegetation

Alan and Yvonne Roach have planted many tree corridors and woodlots for revegetation in partnership with Holbrook Landcare and Greening Australia. They first started planting in 1989. Revegetation means to replant or rebuild disrupted soil and land. In this case, it was planting tree corridors and woodlots.

They planted tree corridors along fence lines to include existing trees and join larger patches of trees like woodlots and remnant woodlands. The tree corridors are designed to provide shade, shelter, new habitats for wildlife and windbreaks. Tree corridors provide great shade for livestock especially on hot summer days and provide a windbreak for cold winter days. When Alan and Yvonne first came to the farm there weren't many trees. They have worked hard to change that.



The Billabong Creek

Protecting the Billabong Creek

'Wycombe' backs onto the Billabong Creek. We need to protect the Billabong Creek. We need the Billabong Creek because we need the water from the creek to be clean, healthy and accessible especially when we're in a drought. If we don't protect the creek, a flood could wipe out lots of land, native fish and plants. The creek is one of the most important things on the farm to look after.

Landcare fencing along the Billabong Creek

Fencing-out the creek allows the creek to not be messed up by the dung and hooves of cows and sheep leaving footprints all over the banks and making the water dirty. When they come down for a drink they mess up all the dirt and plants along the creekbank and the dirt falls into the creek. When it rains the bank washes away. Excluding stock also helps the grasses and plants grow. That's why fencing the creek helps protect the Billabong Creek.





Reeds stops erosion along the Billabong Creek

The reason that Alan and Yvonne encourage the reeds and water plants is when there is a flood the reeds slow the water down so the water doesn't travel as quickly. If the plants were not there the water would travel very quickly and would tear down trees, take lots of the bank with it and leave a terrible mess.

Fish in the Billabong Creek

In the Billabong Creek they have Murray cod, European carp, yellowbelly and redfin. They do not want redfin or European carp as they are not native to Australia. European carp make the water muddy, eat the native fish and damage the plants and it makes it very hard for some of the native animals to survive. Yellowbelly are excellent to eat and very healthy for you. They have a clean white flesh that can be cooked any way you like.



Wildlife habitat

The tree corridors and woodlots that Alan and Yvonne have planted provide awesome habitats, nesting areas and shade for animals like possums, bats, lizards and especially birds. There are at least 174 diurnal, nocturnal and wetland birds on the Holbrook Area Bird List, including Australian magpies, cockatiels and galahs. Also, the trees provide cover, which gives more safety so our Australian animals and birds don't become extinct due to loss of habitat or predators like owls, eagles, cats and foxes. They have also fenced out remnant woodland patches from stock so they can regenerate.





Nesting areas

There are lots of nesting areas around Alan and Yvonne's farm such as dead or old trees. They are used by birds, possums and lizards to nest and live in. Alan and Yvonne have planted lots of trees as tree corridors which provide great shade and cover for nesting. Some birds that nest on Alan and Yvonne's farm are Willy Wagtails and Sacred Kingfishers. They also have Sugar gliders. Trees provide cover from other predators that may steal or destroy the eggs and young or attack nesting birds and other animals.



Birds

List of Birds that Have Been Seen on 'Wycombe' during bird surveys

Laughing kookaburra

Rufous whistler

Willie wagtail

Eastern rosella

Rainbow bee-eater

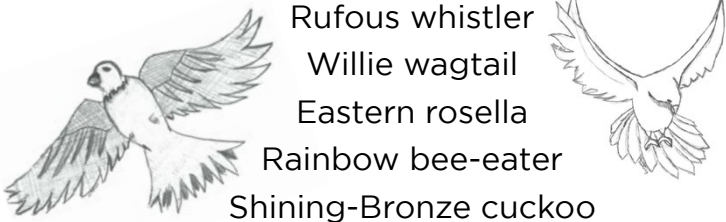
Shining-Bronze cuckoo

Striated pardalote

Black-faced cuckoo-shrike

Magpie lark

Superb fairy wren



Birds are an important part of farm life. They control pests and are good for pollination. Birds are also responsible for slowing the spread of disease. Trees benefit from birds: when birds make a habitat out of a tree thus reducing the amount of leaf-eating bugs.

Farmers who leave dead trees standing allow birds to roost and use the hollows as nesting sites year after year.



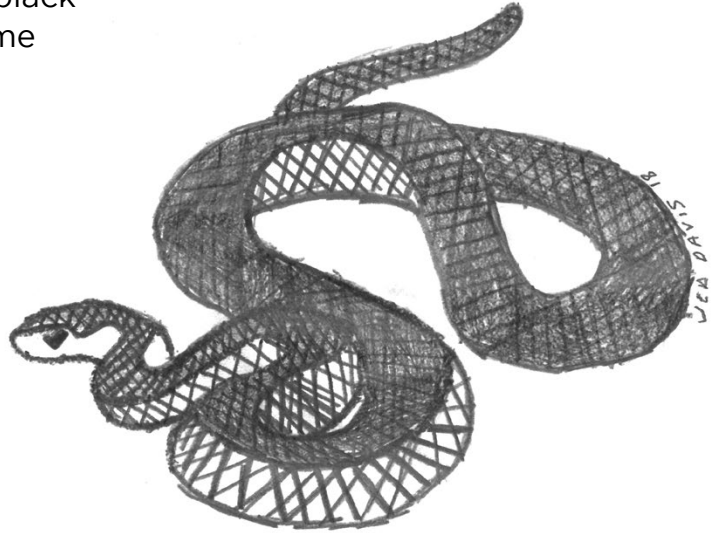
Reptiles

Some of the native animals on Alan and Yvonne's farm are reptiles. Some of the reptiles they see are blue-tongued lizards, brown snakes and red-bellied black snakes.

Australia has several species of blue-tongued lizards. The common blue-tongued lizard is the one most people come across in and around Holbrook and along the creek. Sometimes people think they are a snake.

There are two types of snakes in this region. The eastern brown snake and the red-bellied black snake. They are both very dangerous. Some specimens will reach over 2.5 metres long. Eastern brown snakes can be found all along the Billabong Creek and around different parts of the farm. Sometimes they come close to the homestead looking for water and shade.

The red-bellied black snake is dangerously venomous but bites are rare because it is not as aggressive as the eastern brown snake. It grows to a length of 2.5 metres, and likes to live around rivers, creeks, swamps and other wetland areas. Alan has only seen red-bellied black snakes along the creek.



(CREDIT: KELLY COLEMAN)



(CREDIT: FREDY MERCAY)

Pest animals

On Alan and Yvonne's farm they have pest animals like feral cats, foxes, rabbits, slugs and flies. They can get really annoying. If you live on a farm you will have that same problem too. Alan and Yvonne are always on the look out for signs of pest animals.



Pest animals can destroy habitats and grazing land. Foxes and wild dogs can attack your sheep. Feral cats are a problem because they eat birds, lizards and other small animals.

A lot of people forget about animals like slugs that can get into the canola crop or establishing new pastures as they are growing.

All farmers have to think about what to do about pest animals. Some use poison and baits or shooting. Dung beetles are great at reducing flies as they move stock poo deep underground and then flies can't breed in it. Dung beetles have been introduced as a biological control.

Weed control

Weeds are a big problem on farms. They can harm crops by stealing water, important nutrients and sunlight. This results in poor crop quality and quantity, and costing farmers precious time and money. Weeds can also potentially harm livestock.

A method of controlling weeds is spray-grazing. Spray-grazing is when the farmer uses a method that combines the application of an appropriate herbicide at a low rate followed by a short amount of intensive grazing after the recommended withholding period. Spray-grazing works because the reduced dose of herbicide, which by itself can't kill the weeds, causes weeds to become more pleasing to stock to graze.

Another method is using biological controls like insects which attack various parts of the weed and stop them growing and spreading. Yvonne and Alan encourage a variety of insects that attack weeds like Paterson's curse, such as leaf-mining moth, crown weevil, root weevil, tap root flea beetle, and the stem-boring beetle. There are very few Paterson's curse plants on the farm now which is a huge relief.





Alan Roach, Lauren Hawkins, Eliza Hart, Ryan McDowell, Cruz Schirmer, Tadhg Scholz, Jed Davis, Yvonne Roach and Hannah Mackinlay

2018 Year 5-6, St Patrick's Primary School, Holbrook

We acknowledge the Wiradjuri people as the traditional custodians of the country on which our school stands.



National
Landcare
Program

