

Free Range Farming at 'Bellevue'



Written by Hamish Livermore, Annabel Pincott,
Georgina Barr Smith, Georgie Cardile and Jack Pitzen

Holbrook Public School



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/

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.

Vision: An economically and socially resilient rural community demonstrating strong environmental stewardship.

Mission: We exist to support our rural community to achieve positive and enduring changes in agricultural productivity, environmental sustainability and social capacity in the region.

holbrooklandcare.org.au

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

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

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Authors: Hamish Livermore, Annabel Pincott, Georgina Barr Smith, Georgie Cardile and Jack Pitzen

School: Holbrook Public School

Teacher support: Miss Chrissy Lavis

Technical support: Paula Sheehan, Holbrook Landcare Network and Stacey Bell, Petaurus Education Group and Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre

Acknowledgements: The Year 4, 5 and 6 English class from Holbrook Public School, along with their teacher Miss Chrissy Lavis and Holbrook Landcare Network, would like to thank Sam and Prue Pincott for sharing so much of their time and experience with us. We really enjoyed the visit to the farm.

Holbrook Landcare Network celebrating 30 years of Landcare 1989-2019

Funding: In 2018-19, Holbrook Public School 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.



Family History

In 2008, Sam and Prue Pincott first moved to 'Kamaroo', Holbrook. Soon after, they decided to introduce chickens onto the farm. Their main reason for this was to help improve the health and quality of the soil, without using chemicals or bulk fertilisers.

In late 2012, Sam and Prue decided to purchase 'Bellevue', on the Wagga Road, around 6km north of Holbrook, to continue their operations. When they began at 'Bellevue', they could see that the soil needed a lot of attention.

After 7 years, the soil quality is beginning to show exciting improvements and the chickens are definitely doing their job.



Above: Prue and Sam Pincott with their daughters Amelia, Arabella, Annabel and Abigail (CREDIT: Holbrook Paddock Eggs)





Imagery courtesy of NSW Land and Property Information. Base data sourced from the Office of Environment & Heritage. Holbrook Landcare does not guarantee this data is free from error.
Produced - 14.6.2014

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"Bellevue" Pincott

Aerial photo: 2014

How Chickens are Helping the Farm

Sam and Prue Pincott wanted a more natural way to improve the land. They want to encourage as many grasses as possible, without using bulk fertilisers. The chickens help to improve the soil health and the groundcover. The chicken manure helps create an environment where the good grasses can germinate. The quality of the soil keeps improving allowing better quality, perennial and pasture grasses to grow.



Grasses and Soil

It's important to have these grasses because they help protect the soil and provide nutritious feed for the sheep and cattle that sometimes graze there.

When the Pincotts first bought the property, there were lots of weeds, such as thistles, Capeweed and Paterson's Curse. Now, the growth of desirable grasses has overtaken the weeds, creating the right environment for better quality native and pasture grasses to grow.



(CREDIT: Holbrook Paddock Eggs)

Trees

There are many types of trees on the farm, such as River Red Gum, Forest Red Gum, Yellow Box, Apple Box, wattles and other native shrubs. Some are naturally occurring and some have been planted.

For the Landcare 'Bushlinks' project in 2013 and 2014, trees and shrubs were planted along the whole outline of the property, allowing shade for the chickens and a safe place for native birds. This 20-40-metre-wide corridor attracts a lot of biodiversity, which means lots of different plants and animals including possums, Superb Parrots (bottom right), Butcherbirds, insects, lizards, native grasses, orchids (bottom left) and blue bells.



(CREDIT: Peter Merritt)



There are many large paddock trees. The Pincotts are really pleased to see that their decision to invest in chickens is having a positive effect on the land, as lots of trees are starting to come back and regenerate. The revegetation in the paddocks and wetlands provides shade and habitat for insects and other small animals. The trees are linked underground by their roots in something called the Wood Wide Web.







2013 'Bushlinks' Site



2019 'Bushlinks' Site



Wetlands

The wetlands were also fenced off for the 'Bushlinks' Project. This was done to try to preserve what is there by keeping the cattle and sheep out. By doing this, the grasses and trees are given a chance to grow and help build a stronger, healthier ecosystem. The more diversity, the stronger the ecosystem is because they rely on each other to survive. There is more benefit keeping the domestic animals out and letting the natural vegetation grow. This helps encourage on-farm biodiversity.

One Day Old

The chickens are Bond Browns and they arrive at 'Bellevue' when they are one day old. There are about 2,700 in each batch. They are put straight into the brooder shed where they stay for 12 weeks to grow and become used to farm life. After 12 weeks, the chickens are moved to their portable shed in the paddocks.



Arabella, Annabel, Abigail and Amelia with young chicks (above) and a day old chick (below)
(CREDIT: Holbrook Paddock Eggs)



Brooder Shed

In 2017, Sam and Prue decided to raise their own chickens. In the past, they received the chickens when they were 16 weeks old. This led to the chickens laying later than they should because they were not familiar with the climate, ground and grass, or the feed. Now, the one day old chicks arrive by truck or plane, which means that they are quickly introduced to their new home and settle in. The brooder shed is fully enclosed at night time to stop predators from getting inside.



Portable Sheds

When the chickens move into their new shed, they meet their new friend, a Maremma guard dog. They are free to roam during the day and have their trusty Maremma to protect them at night. The sheds are moved once a week so the chickens always have fresh pasture to scratch in.





(CREDIT: Holbrook Paddock Eggs)

Eggs to Packing Shed

When the chickens have laid their eggs, the eggs are collected each morning from the nest boxes in the portable shed and transported to the packing shed in Holbrook. It takes 4 hours to collect the eggs each morning. There are approximately 7,000 eggs collected each day.

At the packing shed, the eggs are scanned, sorted and checked for quality, before being packaged into cartons to be sent off to the customers.



(CREDIT: Holbrook Paddock Eggs)

Free Range Eggs

The free range eggs that the chickens produce are more nutritious because they do not feed them chemicals. The chickens are free to roam all day, happily scratching and pecking the fresh grass for seeds, bugs and grubs. The hens are also provided with a commercial pellet to make sure they have the nutrition they need all year. The eggs the chickens lay are 100% natural and are guaranteed to be available all year.





Life after 'Bellevue'

After 24 weeks, the chickens have finished their time at 'Bellevue' and are sold on to a range of people in large and small lots. They then spend their days exploring new homes, scratching in the ground and laying eggs in small backyard flocks.



(CREDIT: Holbrook Paddock Eggs)

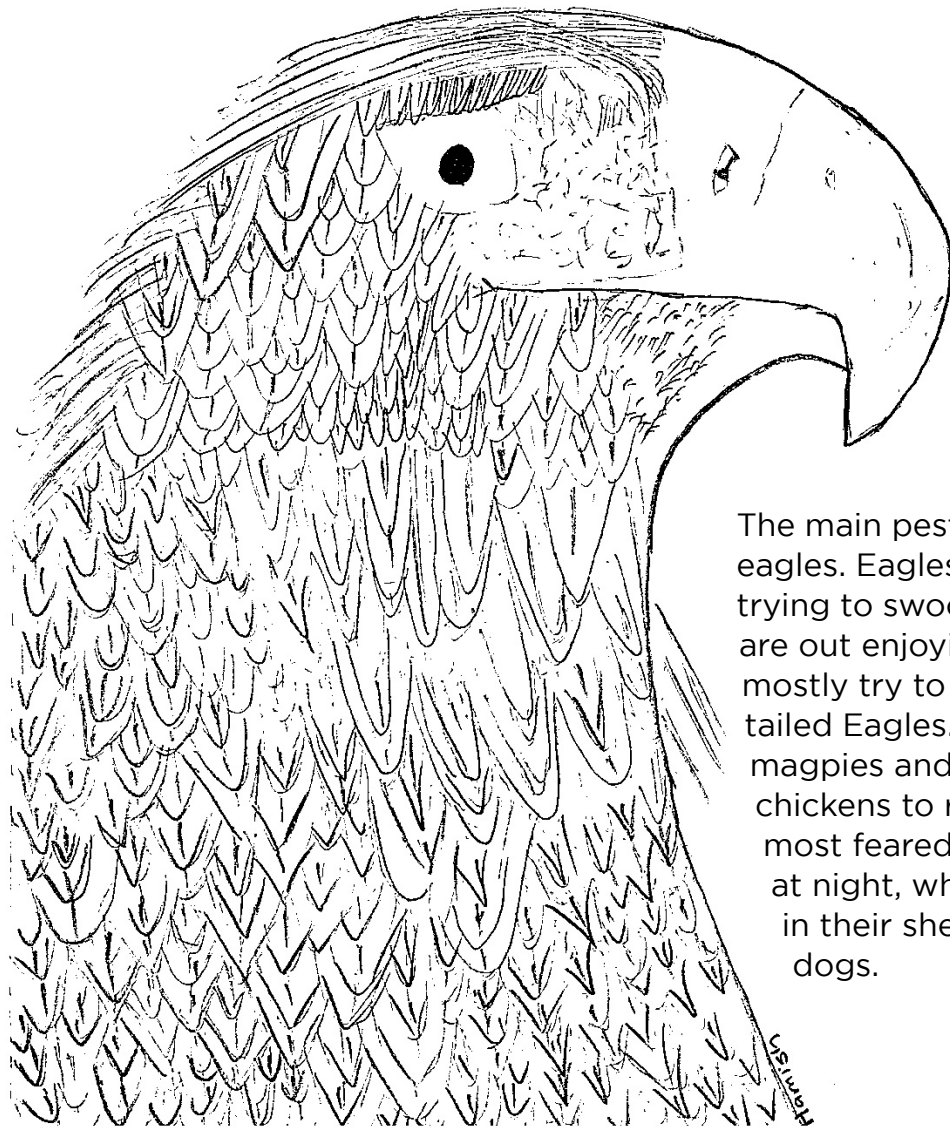
Keeping Them Safe

There are eight Maremma dogs to protect the 15,000 chickens from predators, such as eagles and foxes, so they can roam freely all day and night.

Each Maremma dog adopts a flock of chickens and protects that group while they move through the stages and paddocks of the farm. The workers and farmers look after the dogs well, but try not to show too much affection to the dogs, so they will stay devoted to the chickens and do their job properly.



(CREDIT: Holbrook Paddock Eggs)



Predators

The main pests on 'Bellevue' are foxes and eagles. Eagles often fly over the chickens trying to swoop and grab them, while they are out enjoying the pasture. The eagles that mostly try to grab the chickens are Wedge-tailed Eagles. If an eagle is going to attack, magpies and galahs fly over to warn the chickens to run for cover. Foxes are the most feared predator. They usually hunt at night, while the chickens are sleeping in their sheds, guarded by the Maremma dogs.

Drawing by Hamish Livermore



European fox (John Green / DPI)



Jack Pitzen, Georgie Cardile, Georgina Barr Smith,
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2019 Holbrook Public School

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



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