

“Protecting Remnant Woodland Corridors”

EARTH FIRST

By PETER WEST, ECCO

In New South Wales, there are over 1000 native species, populations and ecological communities that are listed as threatened with extinction. In the Central West alone there are 122 known threatened plants, animals and communities, and many others may have simply eluded detection or become locally extinct.

Further growth and development within and around Orange could adversely affect many threatened species and communities if appropriate protection is not implemented. Thankfully, conservation reserves such as Mount Canobolas State Conservation Area play a vital role in the conservation of these and many other species. However, conservation is just as important in rural and residential areas as it is in established conservation reserves.

Remnant vegetation, in particular, Box-gum woodlands in the central west (consisting of White Box, Yellow Box or Blakely's Red Gum), have been heavily depleted through generations of land clearing and firewood collection. Box-gum woodlands are listed as an Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) and only small pockets remain in Orange – that are now highly valued because of their existence.

Box-gum woodlands are vital habitats for many species, including an enormous variety of bird life, frogs, possums, wallabies and kangaroos, lizards and insectivorous bats. The iconic Superb Parrot also relies on box-gum woodlands as they migrate through Orange each year, stopping only to nest in suitable hollows in mature trees.

Proposed urban expansion and industrial re-zoning in southern and northern Orange could adversely affect several box-gum woodlands and the species they support. The efforts of many Landcare groups and keen landholders with a green thumb could also be compromised by poorly planned urban and industrial development.

In the southern Orange precinct, an assessment by the Department of Lands identified a number of threatened animals and plants that could be adversely affected if existing remnant vegetation corridors are not adequately protected. The Assessment recommends nature conservation, catchment protection, heritage protection and water conservation for many areas proposed for the southern Orange suburb.

Already, indiscriminate clearing of dozens of trees around the new Orange Base Hospital has further squeezed the range of these threatened species. Now more than ever, there is a clear need for the protection of existing native trees in the Orange district, and a commitment is needed to increase native tree planting activities to re-establish habitats and remnant woodland corridors.

Linking Gosling Creek Reserve, Hinton Reserve and remnant box-gum woodlands in the proposed southern Suburb precinct, is vital for the protection of many threatened and unique species in Orange.

As landholders, there are many things we can do to protect and restore woodland corridors and their unique species. We need to stop clearing native vegetation, removing dead wood and dead trees, and removing hollow-bearing trees to protect habitats for many species. We need to work more closely with Orange City Council (and the Central West Catchment Management Authority) to identify and protect remnant vegetation. And we need to seek funding grants to revegetate or fence off key areas, such as woodlands and creeks, to create corridors that link pockets of remaining woodlands. These steps will ensure Orange's unique flora and fauna are protected for our children and future generations.