

Woodland Watch

farmers integrating bush management into whole farm management

By RICHARD McLELLAN

WOODLAND Watch is a field-based conservation initiative, which recognises good woodland stewardship by farmers and other land managers, and promotes 'best-practice' woodland management. It is an initiative of WWF Australia and is funded through the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust.

"We aim to help landholders achieve better woodland management on private or shire land. Farmers involved in this program recognise that looking after the patches of bush on their property is an integral part of whole-farm management," says Woodland Watch Manager Chris Curnow.

It's no secret that Australia's woodlands have been declining – in both extent and quality – for decades. Some types are on the verge of disappearing all together. Woodland Watch focuses on four of the most 'under-conserved' woodland types in the Wheatbelt – those dominated by red morrel, salmon gum, gimlet and york gum.

Established in the WA wheatbelt in 2000, Woodland Watch has been keenly adopted by farmers who want to enhance the conservation of tall eucalypt woodlands on private lands in the substantially-cleared region.

Typical of the farmers who still have woodlands and other patches of bush on their farms is Mukinbudin farmer Jeff Seaby.

Seaby became involved in the pro-



Trunks of gimlet (*Eucalyptus salubris*) glisten in a WA Wheatbelt woodland. Photo by Richard McLellan

ject to improve and understand the management needs of 40 hectares of bush on his property. Gimlet and white gum woodland had been fenced-off for years, providing a refuge for a wide range of native animal and plant species.

Despite being in the middle of one of the harshest droughts on record, a flora survey conducted by staff from WWF and the Western Australian Herbarium produced a list of almost 30 species.

Seaby has been provided with valuable information, including a comprehensive species list, informa-

tion on habitat value for native birds and other fauna, and notes about species that have known bush-tucker value.

"Collecting this critical data and getting it back to the farmers as a management tool is one of the key objectives of the project," Curnow says.

"We now have more than 100 farmers involved in the project. Our aim is to raise awareness of the importance and complexity of woodlands, their intrinsic values to the farm and landscape, their current health and their future.

"Once these values have been recognised, we assist landholders to achieve 'best practice' management and permanent protection of their valuable asset.

"While a legal conservation covenant is a good mechanism to ensure the long-term protection of the bush that they now actively manage, we also use a range of voluntary management agreements," Curnow says.

"Woodland Watch also aims to increase public awareness of the variety of woodland types and their distribution patterns throughout the wheatbelt.

"We do this through face-to-face contact with farmers, and other bush managers like local government authorities. Our field officers organise flora surveys, assist with management advice and understanding, and offer a range of bush conservation options."

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