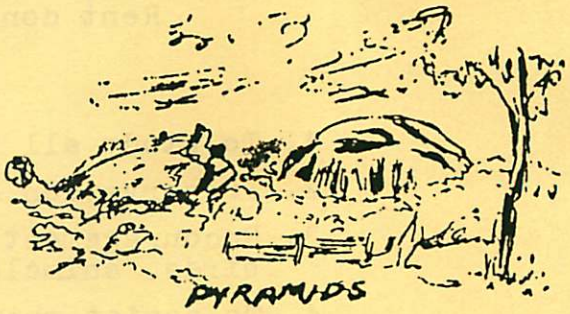
THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST

Monthly Newsletter of the Stanthorpe Field Naturalist Club



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THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

STANTHORPE FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

P.O. Box 154,
Stanthorpe, Q.,4380.

OFFICERS OF CLUB FOR 1988 - 1989

PRESIDENT	RAY MARSDEN (811 593)
VICE-PRESIDENTS	ROBIN MC COSKER JEAN HARSLETT B.E.M.
SECRETARY	DOT ARCHER (811754)
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MEETINGS - 4th WEDNESDAY of each month in the Q.C.W.A. Rooms at 8 p.m.

OUTINGS - The Sunday PRECEDING the 4th Wednesday of the month

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Single $6.00 Family $10.00

Rent donation per family per meeting

AIMS OF THE CLUB

1. To study all branches of natural history.
2. Preservation of the Flora and Fauna of Queensland.
3. Encouragement of a spirit of protection towards native birds, animals and plants.
4. To assist where possible in scientific research.
5. To publish a monthly Newsletter.

Minutes of the general monthly meeting of the Stanthorpe Field Naturalist Club, held in the QCWA Rooms, Victoria Street on Wednesday February 28 ,1990 at 8pm.

Pres ent 18 Apologies 6

Opening. President Ray Marsden opened the meeting and welcomed all present, particular welcome to visitors Betty and Rollo Haworth from Caloundra and Narelle Crawford from Warwick,

Minutes. "That the minutes as circulated in the February Newsletter be taken as a true record of the last meeting" was moved by Esmé Lacey and seconded by Herb Colley. Carried.

Correspondence. Moved by A ilsa Wilkinson and seconded by Mary Walters that the inward correspondence be received and the outward endorsed. Carried.
Inward included *. Scenic Rim Ass. with attached survey form 2. Newsletter and Journals from Darling Downs Naturalist, Toowoomba Bushwalkers Club, Chinchilla Field Nats.
Outward to 4QS with outing details.

Financial Statement. In the absence of the treasurer Julia Brown her prepared statement was read by M. Marsden.
Receipts $99.10 Expenditure $35.30 leaving a credit balance as at 28/2/90 of $381.65. Accounts for Magazine Postage $21.00, Room Rent $8.00 and Magine Duplication $6.00 were presented. M. Marsden moved that the report be received and the accounts be pass ed for payment. Seconded by Frank Wilkinson. Carried.

Outing Report. The February outing report was presented by the leader Tom Archer. 16 people attended the outing to Mt. Dillon following by a walk through Horan's Gorge. The re-growth after a fierce fire experienced since the last Nats. outing has changed things quite a lot. Goats have eaten out any rock orchids and ferns that had previously grown on the rocks at the summit of Mt. Dillon. At the end of the gorge the little stream which had acconpanied the party as they proceeded through the gorge, became quite a sturdy little stream - having been fed by several other small streams from each side.

Specimens. Rob McCosker showed quite a collection of ferns from the outing including Botrychium australe.

March Outing. The outing is planned to Severn Hills under the leadership of Jean Harslett. Owing to the Harsletts having visitors from overseas they are not able to be at the meeting and details will be made available in the March Newsletter.

MARCH Program. The program for March 28 is set down for John Walter, as he has not been contacted yet, the program will either be by John and Ruth Walter or, if they are unavailable, Ray Marsden will show slides on Eulo area.

General Business. Moved by Tom Archer that the letters from YMCA and Scenic Rim survey be left in the hands of the president. Seconded Mary Walters. Carried

M. Marsden moved that letters of thanks to Michael Sibley and Les Baldwin be written for allowing access to their properties for the Horan's Gorge outing. Seconded Tom Archer Carried.

Brian McDonagh spoke on the great number of beautiful Jewel Beetles he is encountering on his grapes. The colours are quite superb and there are greater numbers than he has seen for some years.

February Program. Tom Archer's program entitled "Memories" was very well presented and certainly provided memories for many of the members present. It was interesting to view slides from Nats. outing of many moons ago - Just who is that person! was the question asked many times during the program. A lot of people have been members of the club over the years and all have enjoyed their involvement. Thanks Tom for the "Memories". We should have some more of the same in the future. Tom was thanked by the usual spirited acclamation.

Minutes were taken by M. Marsden in the absence of Dot Archer Secretary.

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Report of February's Outing through Horan's Gorge.

By Leader Tom Archer

The last outing , on February 25, was to Horan's Gorge, a small area of National Park roughly between Ballandean and Storm King Dam. 16 members came on the outing and we parked our vehicles on private property near Mt. Dillon, which is at the eatern end of Horan's Gorge. From there, by an easy walk, we came to the base of Mt. Dillon and after a short steep climb we reached the top. While Mt. Dillon is not much higher than the surrounding country, it is the highest point in the area, being only about 150 metres lower than Mt. Norman.

From the top there is a good view to the south and east but the view to the north and west is blocked by trees. Several years ago the Nats climbed Mt. Dillon and found the top to be a camping spot for goats and, it was so again, though perhaps not quite so well used. Hidden in a cleft near the top was a kid goat. The goats have eaten out any rock orchids and ferns which grew on the rocks at the summit. Further down the gorge, some mebrs of the party could smell the presence of goats in the area.

From the top of Mt. Dillon we decended quite steeply into Horan's Gorge. About a year ago the Gorge and Mt. Dillon itself had been burnt out by a hot fire which burnt off or killed most of the under-growth and blackened the trunks of trees. Going down into the Gorge, we waded through banks of ferns waist high and in other places, spear and cane grass nearly head high. After the bush fire there had been good rains and so the re-growth was good and the scrub promises to be thicker than ever before.

February Outing Report(continued)

It was interesting to note the difference in the species coming now from what had been growing there before. Wattles, which are easily killed by fire and mostly do not regrow from the base, respond quickly and these are now prominent and fairly wide spread. In other places pomaderris seedlings were coming up thickly where they did not appear to have been growing before the fire. Those schrubs whose tops are killed off by fire but sucker from the base, such as tea-trees, pomaderris and young eucalyptus were coming away vigorously - the more frequent the fires the more densely they become established in an area. In places the cyprus pines had been killed where the fire had burnt through, but in other places they had survived because the fire had been unable to burn or had burned only quitely through them. Either cyprus pines survive in areas where undergrowth is unable to grow well enough to support a hot fire or, as they grow, they discourage the growth of shrubs.

Bushfires oftern seen to change the local flora drastically, particularly the wildflowers. Where one species had been numerous before, they completely disappear or, again suddenly become prolific. Presumably the seed was lying dormant, waiting for a fire of the right intensity, the right season of the year and then followed by suitable germinating and growing conditions.One shrub which had been present before the fire but not obvious afterwrds, was rosemary or dead finish(Cassinia). As it is foreign to this country, having been introduced by camels, it may not have a fire based ecology. No doubt it will soon be re-established from seed blowing in.

Some years ago a tomato patch had been grown and abandoned in part of the valley, it was interesting to note how the bush was reclaiming the area. First blady grass and cane grass became establishe ed, next the wattles had moved back in to be followed by the eucalyptus seedlings and other shrubs.

Some time back the wider parts of the valley had been rung-barked and no doubt grazed, but now the trees have come back and are much more numerous than before.

The most noticable feature of the gorge is the patch of large paper barks(Melaleuca) growing in a wet area about half way along the floor of the gorge. They have obviously been established there for some time and were not much affected by this fire. Their thick layers of papery bark give them good protection from the heat even though the outer layer catch fire. On a couple of previous trips through this are we have disturbed a powerful owl which camps in this patch of trees. On the last occasion the owl dropped a partly eaten possum, however this time there was no disturbance but we did find balls of fur and bones on the ground which presumably had been regurgitated by this large bird.

For most of the walk down the gorge, we were accompanied by a pleasant little stream, at the begining it cascaded down over the rocks and through the ferns. Along the way it was joined by several other streams coming in from the sides, by the time the southern end of the valley was reached it was quite a sturdy liitle stream.

At the end of the walk through the gorge the party was picked by in two vehicles and returned to their cars for the return drive to their homes.

Notes from Dore McCosker on Plants seen on the February Outing

The most outstanding flowering plant seen was, without a doubt, Bursaria spinosa, more commonly known as "Prickly Mick". It is a creamy blossomed shrub and lined the roadside to Mt. Tully, as the wattles do in the springtime.

On the way up to Mt. Dillon we saw a white daisy peering out of the lush grass cover, with showy 3cm flowers, and I noticed one specimen of Olearia viscosa with its small white daisy flowers and deep green sticky leaves. The only other commonly seen white flower was that of the "wild carrot" plant Trachymene incisa. At the top of Mt. Dillon, the only plant flourishing was a Solanum or "Devil's Potato", even the goats shun it - perhaos it is toxic.

A splash of purple amongst the rocks was seen - Lobelia gracilis, and a delicate mauve and white ground cover Lobelia membranacea. The Chocolate Flower(Aneilema gramineum and fringed violet Thysanotus tuberosus were seen as well as the Golden Everlasting Helychrysum bracteatum. The common Australiab bluebell Wahlanbergia gracilis was seen including one plant with white flowers intead of the usual blue. Other flowering species seen were Trigger Plant Stylidium gramminfolium a Goodenia and a Fan Flower scaevola.

As we descended Mt. Dillom on the eastern side, we walked for some distance beside the source of the Horan's Gorge creek where conditions were most favourable for ferns. Small samples were collected in an attempt to identify them. Most abundant was a fishbone fern Blechnum nudum of which both fertile and sterile fronds were seen, we thought, at first that they were different species. Another very common one, called the Common Ground Fern or False Bracken Culcita dubia was delightful to walk through, brushing aside its soft pale green fronds which were up to 1.5m high. Beneath this fern was what I Beleive to be the Sickle Fern Pellaea falcata, which grows to only 12-60cm with dark green alternate pinnae(or leaves). It was not hard to find the Common Maidenhair Adiatum aethiopicum along the side of the watercourse and, away from the creek in the dry forest the Mulga Fern Cheilanthes seiberi whose frons are toxic to cattle in a similar manner to the Common Bracken Pteridium esculentum. A couple of interesting notes about this latter fern- bracken - although it is one of the most common plants in Australia it is almost impossible to transplant, and secondly the sticky sap from the roots provides effective pain relief from stings - as found out by Lyn after being bitten twice by a bullant!!!!

A most exciting discovery was made by Tom Archer of a strange plant in Horan's Gorge, which proved undoubtedly to be an Austral Moonwort Botrychium australe. It had one sterile frond deeply dissected, resembling a parsley leaf and branching from it, the fertile frond with its clustered sporangie resembling an erect bunch of grapes. The notes in "Australian Fern and Fern Allies" by Jones and Clemesha, from which I have obtained this information, also states that this fern grows in close association(symbiosis) with an invading fungus(a Myccorrhizal association). Only two of the five species worldwide are found in Australia, but they are rarely encounted.

Garden Observations.

By Dore McCosker

Like the Carnells I also enjoy the beauty of butterflies in my garden. There is a surprising variety considering the number of keen gardeners in town who jealously guard their blooms against the nibbles of marauding caterpillers.

The most delightful is the Blue Triangle, Graphium sarpedon choredon, also called Blue Fanny, which breeds in the camphor laurels and makes beautiful picyures as it feeds on the nectar in the pale blue salvia like flowers and the mauve buddleia or flutters about the camphor laurels that are studded, at present, with bright scarlet leaves.

So far this year there have been no big blue striped bees in the blue flowers but the blue tongue lizards continue to keep the slugs and snails in reasonable control.

Blue wrens nest in the honeysuckle at times and a rufous whistler drove us silly with its persistant call while nesting in the silkyoak.

The visitors which make me homesick are the yellow rumped thorn bills that flit through the shrubbery at intervals. Compulsive home builders, they worked each year around our garden - a cup shaped nest on top followed by a usccession of nests underneath forming quite a long column. Don Vernon from the Queensland Museum and author of Q.M. Booklet No. 5"Birds of Brisbane and environs" collected one specimen from the middle of our tall sacred bamboo(Nandina). It was about two feet long(sorry 60cm). Don would have been very excited could he have seen next year's effort in the trailing branches of the willow tree as it was over a metre long and swung gently in the breeze until one day the breeze became more like a tornado and ripped the branches apart.

Such accidents happen all the time in nature. Those thieving silver-eyes, too lazy to gather for themselves, used to steal the grass from the nests of the thornbills and the wrens to make their untidy structures.

We watched willy wagtails patiently rebuild after heavy rain destroyed an almost completed nest, then wind blew a branch across the next effort, then when the eggs were hatching a horse walked under the branch of the rose bushed and wiped off the webbing which attached the nest to the branch. I don't remember if a brood was hatched that year. Perhaps that was when they chose to build inside the shed, only a couple of feet from the tractor, the noise of which apparently was perferable to the outside elements.

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March 25th Outing.

Unfortunately the venue for the March outing has had to be changed owing to management commitments on the Severn Hills property of Dr. Taylor. Dr. Taylor now suggests that the otuing may be re-scheduled for July.

To date an alternate venue has not been finalised for March 25, though the group will still meet at Weeroona Park at 9am and be prepared to carry lunch. It is envisaged that an easy to medium walk will be arranged to take place in the local area. If possible, details will be printed in the local papers before the outing. Sorry for the inconvenience caused.

Easter Camp Out.

The Easter Camp Out has been organised by Janet and Colin Hockings and they are thanked for the provision of the necessary details and also for the accompanying leaflet on The Chinchilla District.

A camp has been organised this Easter April 13 to 16 to "Rockwood" the property of Chris and Mary Cameron.
The tentative program is as follows:-

Friday April 1 3	Arrive, set up camp, lunch at camp Tour of "Rockwood".
Saturday April 14	Visit old 'corduroy' coach road, lunch at camp. Walk to ridge, caves, wedgetail eagle nest.
Sunday April 15	Drive to Chinchilla Rifle Range to look for fossils take lunch. Visit Chinchilla Weir Evening slide program.
Monday April 16	To be decided. Pack and depart for home.

Directions Stanthorpe to Dalby via Toowoomba 239k
Take the Warrego Highway west from Dalby for 17.5km to road junction with Condamine Highway. Veer left onto Candamine Highway and set speedo to 0.

On the narrow sections of this road watch out for heavy transports, ie road trains. Be prepared to get right off the road and stop to let them through. This saves getting showered with rocks and possibly being side-swiped.

Speedo		
	74.0km	Crossroads - continue straight ahead
	86.0	Wieambilla Creek - slow down
	86.4km	"Rockwood" sign and entrance on left.
	87.6km	"Callitris" sign - turn left
	87.9km	House - Camp area to the right.

Bore water is available froma tap at the campsite. Drinking water is available and a 'coffee' dam is nearby for swimming.

If you intend participating in this camp please contact Colin and Janet Hockings by phoning 811978 by Saturday April 7.

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March 28 After Meeting program will be presented by Ruth and John Walter and is entitled "Kenya". John and Ruth are no strangers to our club and it is hoped that there will be a good roll up of members to see more of their wonderful photgraphy and listen to their comments on Kenya's geography in general.

QUEENSLAND NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

The Chinchilla District

The Cameron family – 'Rockwood'

The property

Situated in the Chinchilla district, the Cameron family's property, 'Rockwood' has been in the family since 1948 when Cec (Tiny) Cameron purchased it. Some 5 200 ha in size, initial development occurred in the 1930s, with follow-up in the 1950s and 1960s. The present owners, Chris and Mary Cameron are completing a major development program. Their aim is to achieve a balance between agricultural production and retaining habitat for wildlife.

Vegetation on the property varies from communities dominated by brigalow-belah found on brown self-mulching clay soils, through poplar box and some cypress pine on brown sandy soils, cypress found on a sandy loam, to sandstone ridges of shallow soil with ironbark. The property is run as a mixed enterprise of graingrowing and grazing. Crop production is presently grain sorghum and some forage sorghum along with barley, wheat and oats. Recent high wool prices have caused Camerons to move away from purely fat lamb production with little wool production to an enterprise with more emphasis on sheep producing fine merino wool. A small herd of cattle is also run on the property.

Initial development

The first settlers of the district in the late 1800's noted that the vegetation was then an open savannah. By the time 'Tiny' purchased the property, it had become fairly heavily timbered as a result of altered burning practices and pastoral activity. In the 1930's, narrow one chain (20 m) shelterbelts were left on parts of the property by ringbarking operations. Further ringbarking was undertaken in the early 1950's and some 500 ac (230 ha) was pulled in 1969.
However, Camerons considered one chain belts to be too narrow and have since left a minimum of five chain (100 m) shelterbelts. In the narrow shelterbelts, some of the bigger mature trees are now dying and little regeneration is occurring. Camerons are concerned about the long term survival of those narrow strips of vegetation.

After schooling, Chris returned to the property. Both he and Mary worked there after their marriage and took over the property in 1982, when they began the major development phase. Subsequent drought hampered further immediate development.

Development philosophy

Of significant advantage to them was the time spent on the property prior to the main development phase when they had taken particular trouble to become aware of the property's soils and vegetation. They also talked to locals who had developed and were developing their properties and so obtained an understanding of the many issues taken into consideration by those property owners. They were able to learn from the successes and failures of others. Both are keen naturalists and want their property to be a practical example of balanced development. They want to earn a living from the land but allow wildlife to survive, too.

The major considerations in the development were:

- clear vegetation from the best soils first to give the greatest return. The lighter soils were cleared later,
- cut all millable timber prior to clearing,
- clear vegetation on productive soils only. Natural vegetation was left on forested ridges with their shallow soils and on some watercourses,
- retain an interlinking system of timber belts during clearing. Belts were left on both the most productive and the less productive country and were continuous throughout the property,
- develop a specific approach to water course management on the property to ensure that water velocity is reduced,
- maintain a viable wildlife population for both aesthetic and practical considerations,
- preserve the natural beauty and diverse character of the property. Some areas were retained in their natural state simply because of their aesthetic appeal and the pleasure the natural surroundings gave to the family.

Developments

Homestead

The homestead had to be close to existing power and water.
They chose an existing shelterbelt of cypress pine and constructed the house there. They then planted a range of native flowering shrubs obtained from around the property to encourage birds and other wildlife and to provide a fast growing garden. Later, they planted native plant species specifically to provide food for wildlife, exotic plant species for beauty and installed a watering point for the birds. Shrubs were planted as protection for the smaller birds and the garden was designed as a series of small corridors. Because the soil was so sandy, Camerons mulched the garden; it is now productive and grows a supply of household vegetables. Over time, the garden has become shadier and a different group of native plant species has taken over from those originally present. This in turn, has resulted in changes to the species of wildlife living there. "We have finished up with a little oasis that's a joy to come home to."

Watercourses

Camerons consider retention of watercourse vegetation to be an important aspect of property development.

However practical experience on their property has caused them to review this belief. They found that timbered watercourses erode rapidly, so in order to stop soil erosion, they now 'pull' watercourses where erosion has commenced. Vegetation is pushed back into the eroded section and the whole waterway is grassed. They consider that the 'pushed' vegetation acts to catch eroding soil and slows the waterflow down. The grass that subsequently grows then stabilises the waterway. Stock management and stocking rate are important considerations in watercourse management.

Chris notes that even the headwaters of very old creeks in undisturbed country are eroding rapidly. He attributes this to the landscape and soil type which is a poplar box and cypress dominated sandy loam, known locally as 'spewy' country.
'I fear a blanket rule that watercourses should be timbered; in this type of country, leaving timber can be the cause of soil erosion. The academics have got to accept that nature is extremely variable and is always changing; things are not static. Requirements in managing the country are therefore always changing, too.'

Dams

The first dam built on the property was constructed using a bullock team and the bank was placed straight on the ground surface. A swamp has gradually developed adjacent to the dam and a variety of waterbirds and other wildlife congregate there. The dam now needs rebuilding to better catch the water which runs off the cultivation much faster than when it was grazing country. However, it will always remain a focal point for wildlife.

More recently another dam was constructed to supply house water and was deliberately sited in an existing shelterbelt. Birdlife has increased considerably and many species now breed there.

Both dams are important to wildlife on the property and are integrated into shelterbelts; one disadvantage is the shelter the shrubbery affords to feral pigs.

Forested ridges

The ridges are predominately open forest dominated by ironbark which is valuable for on-farm timber and for honey production. Camerons believe the productive potential of these areas does not warrant clearing because of the shallow soil and the potential salinity problem. The ridges are part of the interlinking system of corridors for wildlife as well as on-farm wildlife reserves.

One ridge of 45 ac (18 ha) has been retained because of its stand of smooth barked apple (cabbage gum). The species only occurs at that one location on the property and has considerable natural beauty.

Camerons consider that these natural areas are of great benefit to them personally as well as to wildlife. Not only do species of economic benefit live there, but so do many wildlife species they enjoy observing. The ridges still retain all levels of vegetation from mature and over-mature trees (with nesting hollows) through shrubs and grasses. The wildlife found there includes the wedge-tailed eagle, glossy black cockatoo, cicada bird, painted quail and scarlet honeyeater.

Shelterbelts

The original one chain (20 m) wide shelterbelts left on the property may not survive. Some of the bigger trees are now dying and little regeneration can be seen in these belts. However, there is some regeneration of brigalow and belah adjacent to them.

Because of their concern about the viability of the narrow belts, Camerons decided that a five chain width was most appropriate and planned all property developments to leave an interlinked system of belts at least that width. Sheep find shelter in the belts which also give windbreak protection to crops, allow wildlife to move from place to place and allow self perpetuation through regeneration. The shelterbelts are linked throughout the property and they serve as representative samples of the vegetation originally found over the whole property. The most productive land is not excluded from this system.

No isolated clumps and few individual trees were left on the property. They have less value for wildlife and their chances of long-term survival are less.

Wildlife

'With our interest in natural history, we didn't really want to displace anything (wildlife). We wanted to leave room for them all to live and breed. We know we did shift the wedge-tail eagle from near the woolshed; for two seasons after we pulled they remained and then shifted. They still come back with their young but I haven't found their nest.' Chris has noted that their property development caused a change in some species, such as quail, the spotted harrier and plain turkey. While these grassland species have increased in number, there has been no appreciable decrease in other wildlife species found in the timbered country. There have been some species which are out of their normal habitat range that occasionally come and then go. Even the species that need a substantial area of natural vegetation to live in, such as the cicada bird and white-throated treecreeper, are still to be seen.

'Our patch'

The Cameron family has long been interested in the study of natural history. Thus, quite apart from earning a living from their property, it is important to them to see a well managed property, a place where naturalists can study and where the family can pursue its varied interests.

The property is located where the ranges of many species of both coastal dwelling and inland dwelling wildlife overlap. A wide variety of species are therefore found on the property. The diversity of soils and vegetation found on the property is also of great interest.

The Queensland Naturalists Club and other naturalist groups regularly visit the property as do 'kindred spirits' to the Camerons. Overseas visitors also visit such as students from College of Idaho who have been visiting 'Rockwood' since 1971.

Cameron Photographics is based at 'Rockwood' and wildlife and natural landscapes are often subjects and backdrops for Chris's photography. Mary's line drawings, artwork and calligraphy depict features of 'Rockwood' and have found their way throughout Queensland. Scientific specimens and records from 'Rockwood' feature in our knowledge of Queensland's natural history.

All these aspects contribute to the lifestyle Camerons have created for themselves. Not only are they producing grain, livestock and wool from their property, they are deriving enjoyment from their photography, artwork and natural history. Wildlife features strongly in all these activities contributing not only to their enjoyment but also to the security of Queensland's wildlife heritage.

Summary

The Camerons goal is a well run property being used within its capability. An integral part of their property management is an interlinked system of shelterbelts (along with natural reserve areas) which have productive value for livestock and grain production as well as for wildlife habitat value. Wildlife is by design an important feature of 'Rockwood', contributing to its attractiveness, and in their opinion, in no way detracting from their property's productivity.