



# THE THIN GREEN LINE

A consortium of partners and landowners enhancing a critical wildlife corridor

David Rush

In 2012, the Illawarra-Shoalhaven Great Eastern Ranges Regional Partnership identified several priority focus corridors in the region where environmental need and social and community capacity overlap. One of these corridors, on the Illawarra Escarpment east of Robertson, received a NSW Environmental Trust grant in 2016. Called Thickening the Thin Green Line of the Illawarra Escarpment (Thin Green Line for short), the project has also attracted funding from the Australian Wildlife Society.

Recently, a rare long-nosed potoroo was captured in a motion camera, indicating the importance of the Thin Green Line project and private landholder involvement in reducing feral animals and enhancing corridors for wildlife in this unique part of south-east New South Wales.

## Pinch Point

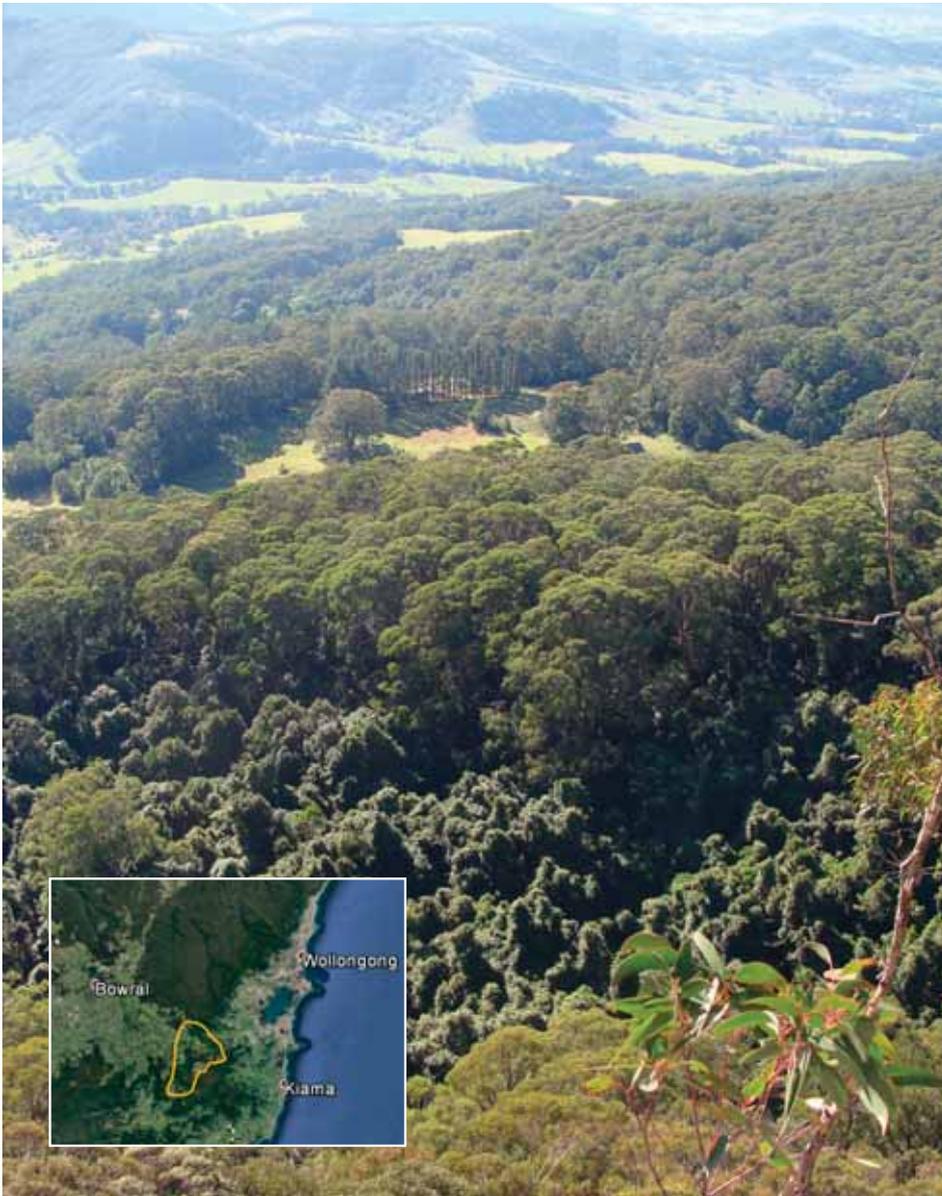
Studies on the Illawarra Escarpment, Coastal Plains and Plateau areas have identified a rich and diverse mix of native animals including 40 animal species listed as threatened with some species that are only found along the Escarpment. The rainforests and moist eucalypt forests of the escarpment are recognised high-quality habitat for the sooty owl, stuttering frog, Australian brush-turkey, logrunner, grey-headed flying fox, spotted-tailed quoll, long-nosed potoroo and Highland's forest skink, just to name a few.

Some of the forests of the Illawarra Escarpment and plateau areas are well represented in a number of formal conservation areas that provide significant refuge for native plants and animals. However, there exist significant

gaps between the conservation areas and the habitat that supports this rich biodiversity which is at its thinnest point regarding connectivity between Sydney and the Victorian border. Without connected corridors and effective pest species control, many of the rare and threatened species will become increasingly isolated, and their populations and genetic diversity will also decline.

## A partnership approach

Increasing habitat connectivity and reducing feral animal impacts is, therefore, a vital part of the strategy to 'thicken' this thin green line, particularly in the face of climate change. The project is part of the NSW Environmental Trust Bush Connect program which will run from 2016 to 2026 (the first six years are funded). It involves a consortium



Thin Green Line project location – a pinch point in the Great Eastern Escarpment.

of community, government and organisational partners including lead partner the National Parks Association of NSW (NPA), Wingecarribee Council, South East Local Land Services (SELLS), University of Wollongong, Illawarra Aboriginal Land Council, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) and landholders.

The Thin Green Line project engages landholders through workshops, training opportunities and funding assistance for stock fencing materials, tree planting and weed control. Another important component of the project is landholder education about the existence and impacts of foxes and feral cats on native animals.

### New partner

In early 2017, the Thin Green Line project attracted the attention of a new partner, the Australian Wildlife Society. The Society's board of directors approved additional funding of \$5,000 to purchase fox and feral cat traps and deliver workshops between June and September 2017. Thirty-two landholders attended the workshops which were delivered jointly by SELLS (the vertebrate pest animal component) and the NPA (the motion cameras component). We were delighted when one of the motion cameras captured a threatened long-nosed potoroo on a property north-east of Robertson. Foxes were also



The brown antechinus, also known as Stuart's antechinus and Macleay's marsupial mouse, is a species of small carnivorous marsupial of the family Dasyuridae.

captured in the majority of cameras, and this has led to a more intensive engagement of landholders in feral animal control in this area.

Many of these landholders will take up the use of traps because, for a variety of reasons, not all of them can use baits for fox or rabbit control. However, the traps will be a good option for them, and they will join other landholders who have also attended training workshops east of the Robertson area in recent years. The fox control effort will be truly landscape scale with the involvement of the SELLS Feral Fighters program and the OEH Quallidor project which is another partnership with landholders operating within and extending for a one-kilometre buffer around Budderoo National Park and Barren Grounds Nature Reserve.

### Consistent message

When considering what the project success would look like, we would see a trend of fewer feral animals across the Thin Green Line landscape with a corresponding increase in threatened species population numbers and distribution. But it is difficult to monitor threatened species because there are so few of them. One way to measure success is to monitor more common ground-dwelling native species including bush rats, brown antechinus, long-nosed bandicoots and some of the arboreal mammals such as sugar gliders and ring-tailed possums. Researchers from the University of Wollongong are involved in this. Landholder records of the number of feral animals controlled is another way to measure success. While this can be done with baiting programs, trapping and shooting records tend to be more accurate.

Given the range of different partners involved in the project, it is important that project messages are promoted and delivered consistently. To this end, people are reminded that feral animal control is every landholder's responsibility. There has never been a better time to get involved in pest animal management, and landholders are asked to choose their preferred method of feral animal control. Whatever the methods used, the important thing is to be involved and to continue to be involved seasonally for a number of years in a coordinated effort with others in the same landscape at the same time. This will provide the best results.



Cat traps are made available to private landholders.



National Parks Association and Local Land Services training local farmers how to dispose of feral cats, dogs, foxes and rabbits to save our native animals in and around Barren Grounds Nature Reserve and national parks.



The long-nosed potoroo is a species of potoroo. These small marsupials are part of the rat-kangaroo family.



Long-nosed potoroo captured by motion camera near Robertson in August 2017.



The stuttering frog is a large species of frog that inhabits temperate and subtropical rainforest and wet sclerophyll forest in Australia.

### Get involved

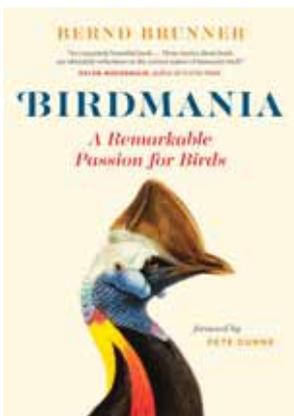
Target areas for the project are Mount Murray, Macquarie Pass, Tongarra, Robertson, St Anthonys, Bells Hill, Knapsack Hill, Pheasant Ground, Knights Hill, Jamberoo Mountain and Upper Kangaroo River Valley areas.

Landholders who would like to get involved or who would like further information are encouraged to contact project officer David Rush on 0418 977 402 or davidr@npansw.org.au.

To attend a pest animal control training course, contact Charles Signorelli on 0418 241 251 or email: charles.signorelli@lls.nsw.gov.au

**Editor's note:** David Rush started his conservation career with the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) and worked as a ranger and senior ranger with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. He has also worked with various local and state government agencies including the NSW Rural Fire Service and NSW Crown Lands, and also dabbled in environmental consultancy work for Shoalhaven Council, NPWS and private enviro companies. David has been a tour guide for BridgeClimb, enjoys growing fruit and vegetables and has been involved karate for over 20 years. He has a Bachelor of Applied Science and currently coordinates the Thin Green Line and Berry Bush Links Bush Connect projects with partnership consortiums in the Illawarra-Shoalhaven GER Region.

## Book Reviews



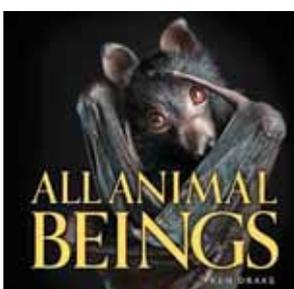
### **Birdmania: A Remarkable Passion for Birds by Bernd Brunner**

A window on the world of birders-obsessive, passionate, quirky, and always interesting.

Like bird watching itself, reading *Birdmania* is filled with surprises and a sense of discovery. But in this collection it is the watchers, not the birds, who are on display – ornithologists and bird lovers of every description, revealed in sketches and anecdotes that are quirky, intriguing, and always affectionate. Highly enjoyable. – Thor Hanson, author of *Feathers: The Evolution of a Natural Miracle*.

An exquisitely beautiful book...These stories about birds are ultimately reflections on the curious nature of humanity itself.

**Publisher: Allen & Unwin**  
**RRP: \$34.99**



### **All Animal Beings by Ken Drake**

What a gorgeous book, filled with portraits of some of the most character-filled beings! You could frame every photograph and feature them on your wall. All animal beings have their own unique personalities, they share our emotions, they share our fears, and they share our love. For many years we were taught that animals were mere automatons, driven purely by instinct. Only recently, in the last couple of decades, has science really caught up with what animal lovers have known for centuries and probably since the dawn of humanity. We forget that our raw emotions of love, lust, hate, hunger, happiness and fear are shared with each mammal and bird on the planet.

**Publisher: New Holland Publishers Australia**  
**RRP: \$49.99**