



CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT NETWORKS – NETWORKING PEOPLE, PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY VALUES

Orlando Talamo is a Whroo Goldfields Conservation Management Network (CMN) landholder and committee member actively working to ensure a future for the endangered Brush-tailed Phascogale in Heathcote and surrounding area.

An electrician by trade with an interest in nature and ecology, Orlando emigrated from Argentina 35 years ago. He bought land in the Heathcote area in 1998, built a house, and in 2009 moved from Melbourne for a tree change and to learn more about the Australian bush.

The Heathcote-Graytown National Park (NP), together with adjacent forested areas, forms the most extensive tract of Box-Ironbark forest in Victoria. They protect critical habitat for Powerful Owl, Swift Parrot, Brush-tailed Phascogale and the Bibrons Toadlet.

In the last 160 years, local forest timbers have been used for charcoal, sleepers, telegraph poles, fencing materials and firewood. Production and transport of railway sleepers, bridge and mining timbers and firewood provided employment for hundreds of men. From 1896 to 1900, an average 50,000 sleepers were harvested from forests between Rushworth and Heathcote each year.

Orlando says, “Most of the forest trees today are very young. It will take many decades before hollows start to form.

“The Whroo Goldfields CMN is installing nest boxes to provide habitat for native species where there is a lack of hollow bearing trees. It is also an opportunity to carry out surveys to find populations of threatened species in areas where they had not previously been recorded.

▲ Main Image: Orlando talking about nest boxes at a ‘Marsupial Mansions’ Field Day

“In 2009 more than 360 nest boxes were constructed and installed in the Whroo Goldfields CMN area by the Goulburn Broken CMA Drought Employment Program crew. The majority of nest boxes were installed on public land with 40 boxes on private land.





▲ Kids painting nest boxes at a 'Marsupial Mansions' Field Day

"In 2009 we recorded nine per cent occupancy. There were a few phascogales but mainly sugar gliders. In 2014 we recorded 54% active occupancy with one in five (22%) nest boxes housing phascogales."

"Our target is now 1,000 nest boxes. We have installed 600 and will reach our target within two years," says Orlando.

Orlando conducts the nest box monitoring on behalf of the Whroo Goldfields CMN every year.

"I use a minimal disturbance approach and survey once a year in April and May to avoid the breeding season. I open the lid of the nest box for about two seconds and capture an image using a camera on a stick.

"Partnerships are important to us. Local mining company Mandalay Resources gave us \$3000 which allowed us to build 30 boxes, and the City of Greater Bendigo provided \$1300 to install boxes, including seven for the Powerful Owl.

Orlando has worked hard to raise the profile of the phascogale among the Heathcote community, and he is enjoying some success.

"I feel privileged to work with such special and rare creatures in such an exciting project.

"With the support of the Goulburn Broken CMA, and in conjunction with the Heathcote Community Centre and the then Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI), we hosted two 'Marsupial Mansions' Field Days and nest box building activities.

"I prepared nest box kits for people to put together and take home. One hundred and sixteen people participated in the most recent event. The Farmers Market did the catering and local primary school students painted the nest boxes. There was also a phascogale display in a local shop.

"In February 2015 Heathcote successfully hosted its first community games event, a priority of the Heathcote and Districts Community Plan. 'Fazzi', the phascogale, is the event's official mascot," says a proud Orlando.

According to Janice Mentiplay-Smith, Goulburn Broken CMA CMN Co-ordinator, the Goulburn Broken region is home to five CMNs - Broken Boosey, Longwood Plains, Lower Goulburn, Strathbogie Ranges, and Whroo Goldfields.

"CMNs were first formed in Victoria and New South Wales in the mid-1990s. The purpose of these grassroots groups is to tackle biodiversity issues in fragmented landscapes across public and private land. They are both a network of physical sites with biodiversity values and a network of people who work together to protect and restore these sites," says Janice.

For more information on Conservation Management Networks in the Goulburn Broken CMA region, contact Janice Mentiplay-Smith on 57 647 506 or janicem@gbcma.vic.gov.au



This project is supported by the Goulburn Broken CMA through funding from the Victorian State Government.