



PROTECTING PADDOCK TREES A WIN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY

Paddock trees on land adjoining Winton Wetlands provide environmental and productive benefits, says Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (CMA) Conservation Management Network co-ordinator Janice Mentiplay-Smith.

“These large paddock trees, mostly red gum and grey box, are important as they provide vital habitat for bats, birds, lizards and other reptiles and insects, all who play important roles in the environment.

“They eat insects, pollinate plants, and themselves are a food source for other species like the carpet python, birds of prey and goannas,” Ms Mentiplay-Smith said. “There’s also the thrill of seeing an unusual species of bird, or a nest of a white-bellied sea eagle in one of these trees, which is very rewarding.”

Chesney Vale farmer Russell Ellis leases land around the Winton Wetlands and agrees that paddock trees improve productivity; so much so he has made special guards for young saplings to protect them from stock.

“Not only do paddock trees provide shelter for stock, they are home for the birds, and it’s the birds that eat the insects and keep the whole system in balance.”

- Farmer Russell Ellis

“Looking after the saplings means there’ll be plenty of paddock trees to provide shade and shelter for the sheep,” Mr Ellis said.

We see the dead trees just as important as the living trees – birds like treecreepers will feed in the living trees and nest in the hollow limbs of the dead trees.”

Ms Mentiplay-Smith said the paddock trees on the leased land adjoining Winton Wetlands, which contains thousands of mostly dead trees, were ecologically important.

“Dead trees and old trees have hollow spaces, and animals like the carpet python rely on these for survival. Bats too will find refuge beneath the bark and in small hollows and spaces,” she said.

“The nearby paddock trees act as stepping stones across the open spaces for our wildlife. For example, a carpet python will move 500m a day over open space, but they need a safe haven to hide from predators. Many of our woodland birds are not happy to fly too far – some not more than 300m - over open spaces. Again, having a paddock tree offering a safe haven is vital for movement of these species. If a species doesn’t move and interact, it won’t gain genetic integration, and the species will eventually become locally extinct.”

Ms Mentiplay-Smith urged landholders to protect paddock trees on their properties.

“Many of us can think back and remember when there were more old trees dotted through paddocks than there are now, and a large mature 300 year old tree cannot be replaced overnight. Protecting these trees by fencing to manage the impact of stock is important, as the tree will naturally regenerate. Enabling the tree to do this naturally is a cheap and effective way of gaining new paddock trees.”

To discuss how landholders can obtain funding for protective fencing for paddock trees, contact Janice Mentiplay-Smith on 57611644 or janicem@gbcma.vic.gov.au