



Phil and Fiona Murdoch  
“Raakajlim” conservation property  
31<sup>st</sup> August 2023

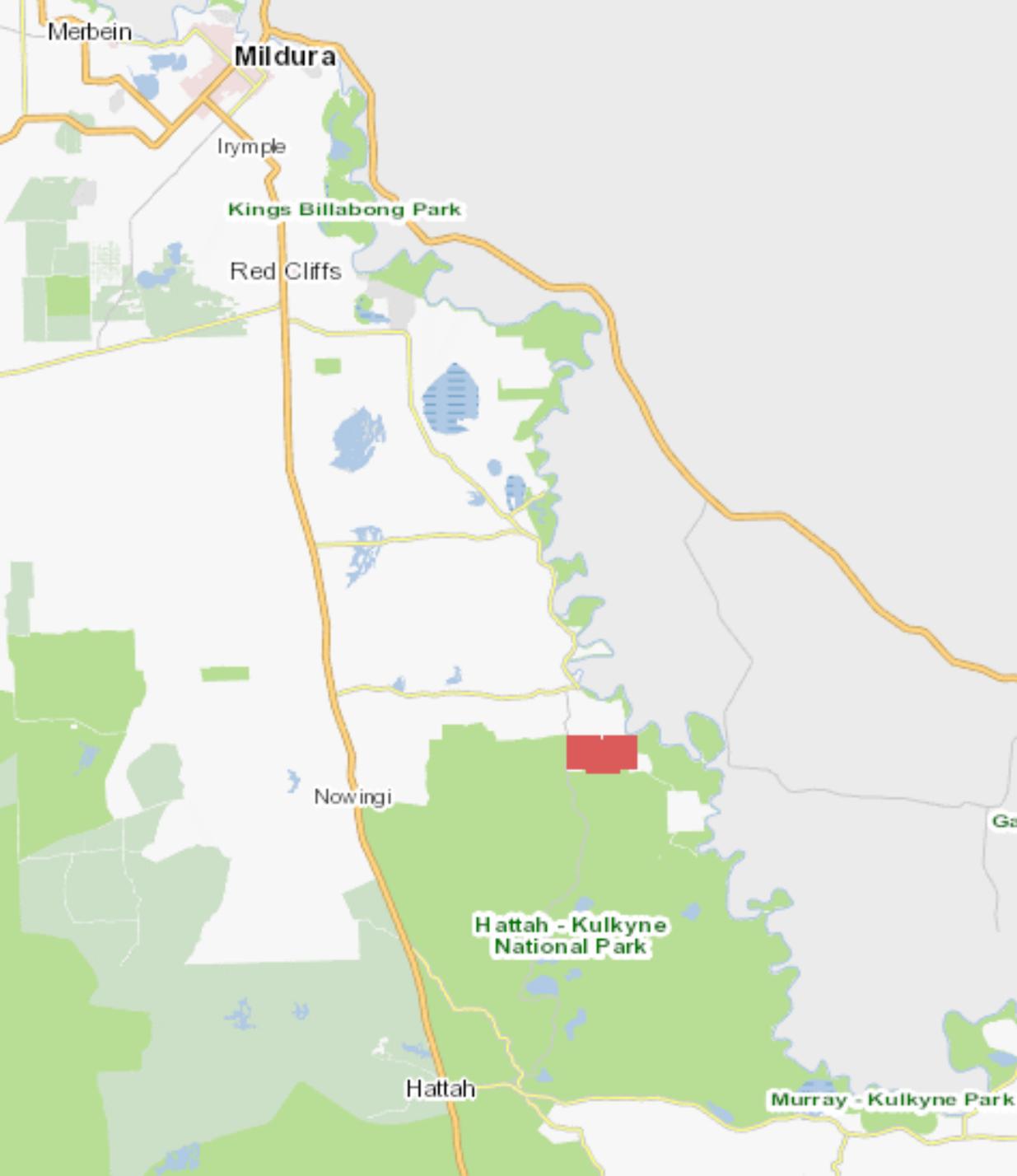




We respectfully acknowledge the Latji Latji people  
as the Traditional Custodians on whose Country  
“Raakajlim” is located.

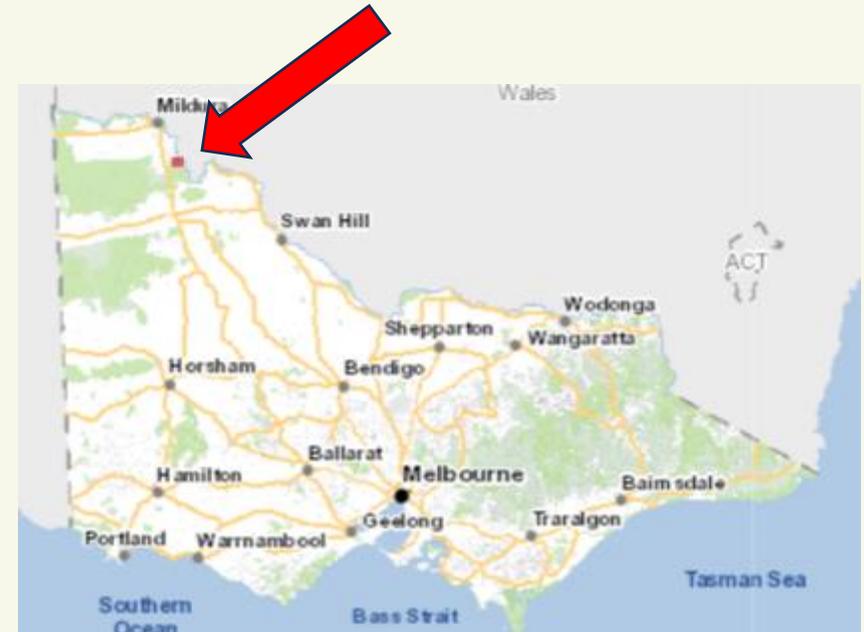
We recognise their continued connection to land,  
waters and community and we pay our respects to  
Elders past and present.



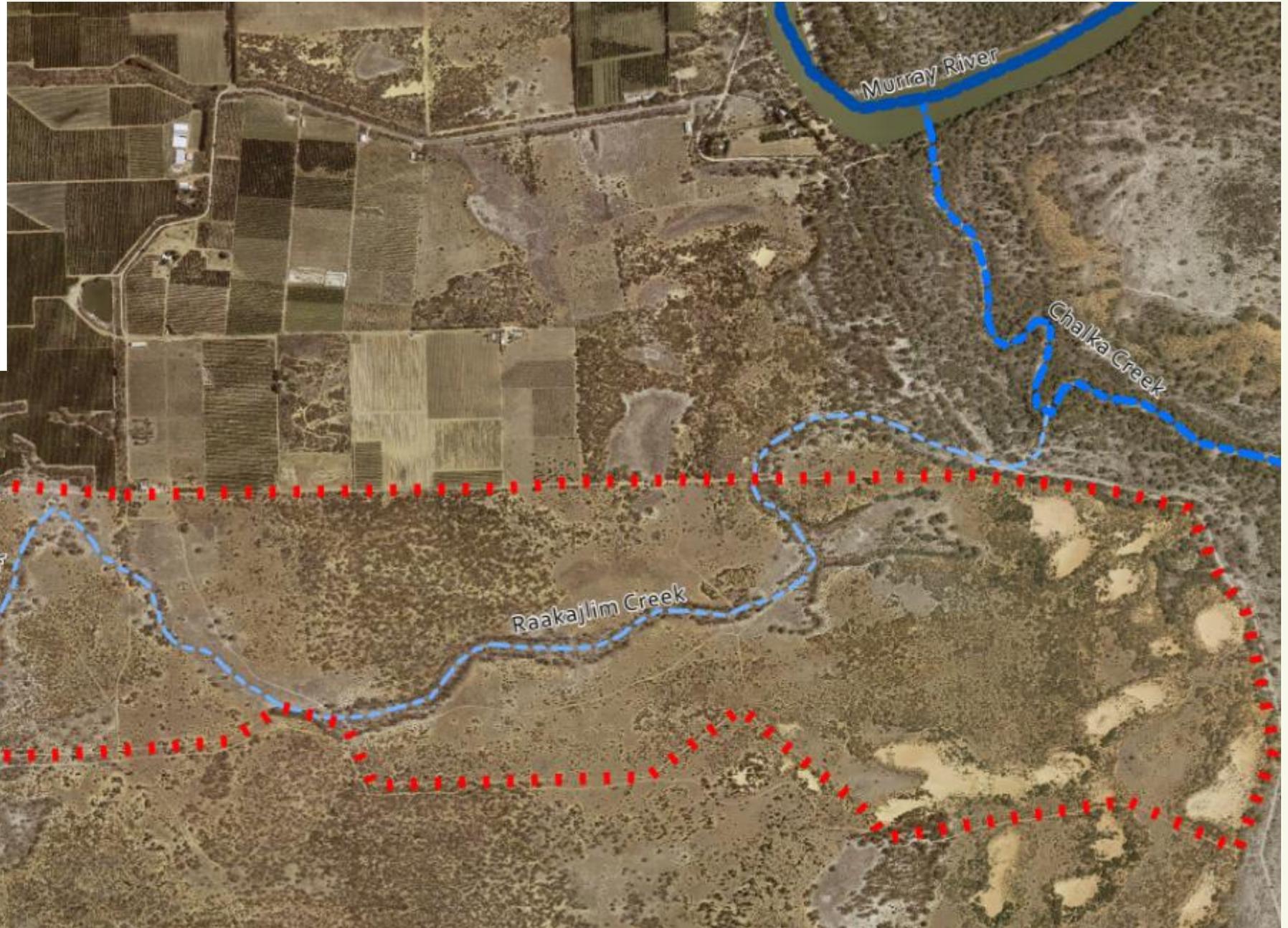


# Where's "Raakajlim"?

- In the Mallee of northwest Victoria
- 50 km south-east of Mildura
- Adjoins Hattah-Kulkyne National Park on three sides



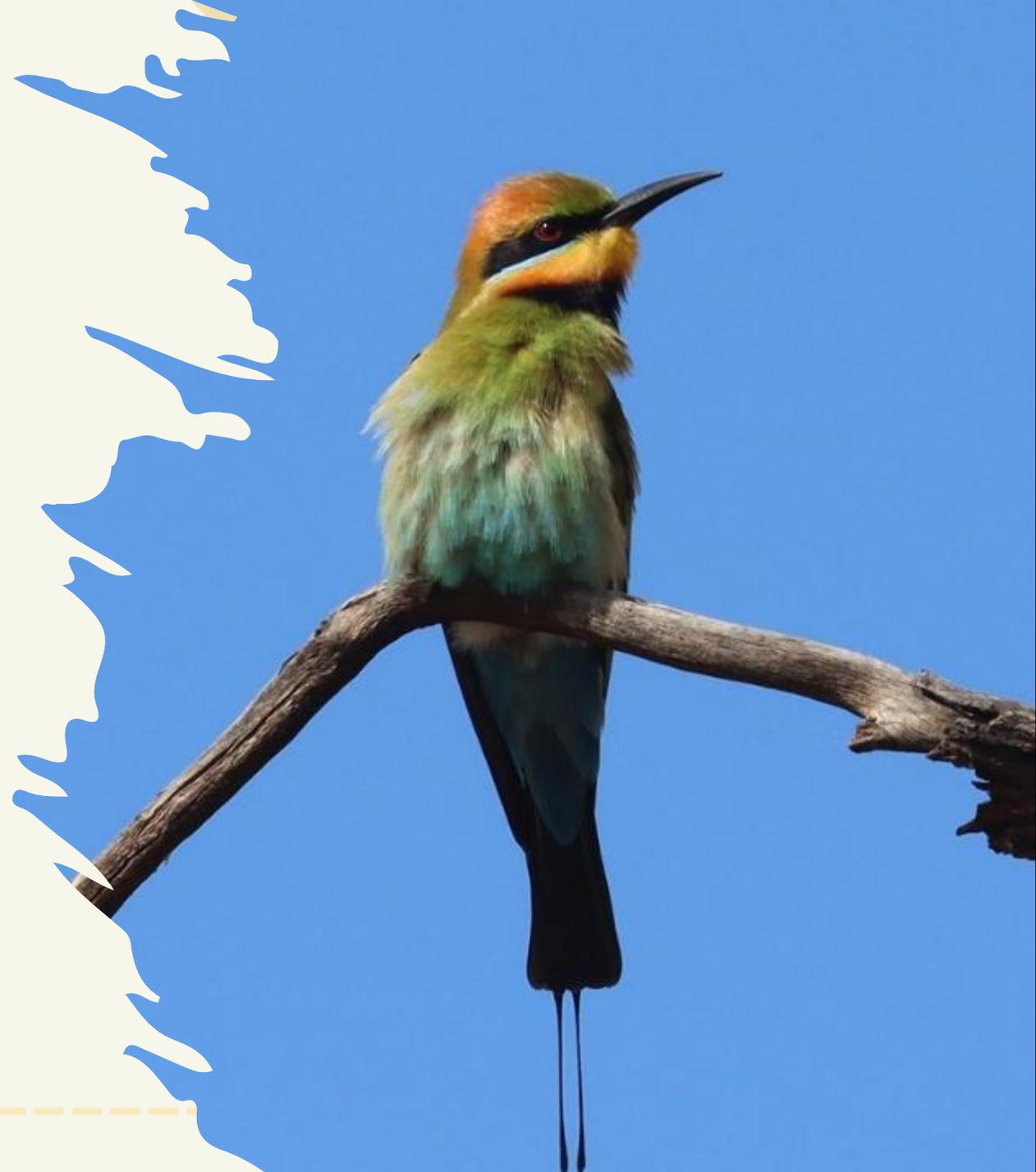
- 490 hectares
- Irrigated horticulture (citrus) to the north
- Connected to the Murray River – flooded in 2022!





# Timeline

- Purchased in two parts: 2001 & 2004
- Conservation Covenant (Trust for Nature): 2009
- 15 years of basic stewardship
- Founded Mallee Conservation 2020.
- Scale-up!



A person wearing a green beanie, a camouflage jacket, and blue cargo pants stands on a sandy path in a mallee woodland. They are holding a camera up to their eye, taking a photograph. A brown dog is standing to their left. The foreground is dominated by a large, dense bush of yellow-flowered mallee. The background shows a vast expanse of similar vegetation under a clear sky.

# Mallee woodlands

A landscape photograph of a riverine woodland. The foreground is a field of green grass with numerous small white flowers. In the middle ground, there are several large, mature trees with thick, gnarled trunks and dense green foliage. Some trees have fallen branches on the ground. The background shows a line of trees under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The text "Riverine Chenopod Woodlands (Blackbox)" is overlaid in white, sans-serif font in the center of the image.

# Riverine Chenopod Woodlands (Blackbox)

A large, gnarled tree with a thick, twisted trunk and a dense canopy of green needles stands prominently in the center of the frame. The tree is set against a clear blue sky. The surrounding landscape is a semi-arid woodland, featuring rolling hills covered in dry, yellowish-brown grass and scattered smaller green trees and shrubs. The overall scene is bright and clear, suggesting a sunny day.

# Semi-arid Woodlands

# Native grasslands



# Sand dunes



# More than 60 threatened species ...





Skeleton Fan-flower – *Scaevola depauperata*



Prickly Bottlebrush – *Callistemon brachyandrus*



Sand Sida – *Sida ammophila*



Garland Lily – *Calostemma luteum*

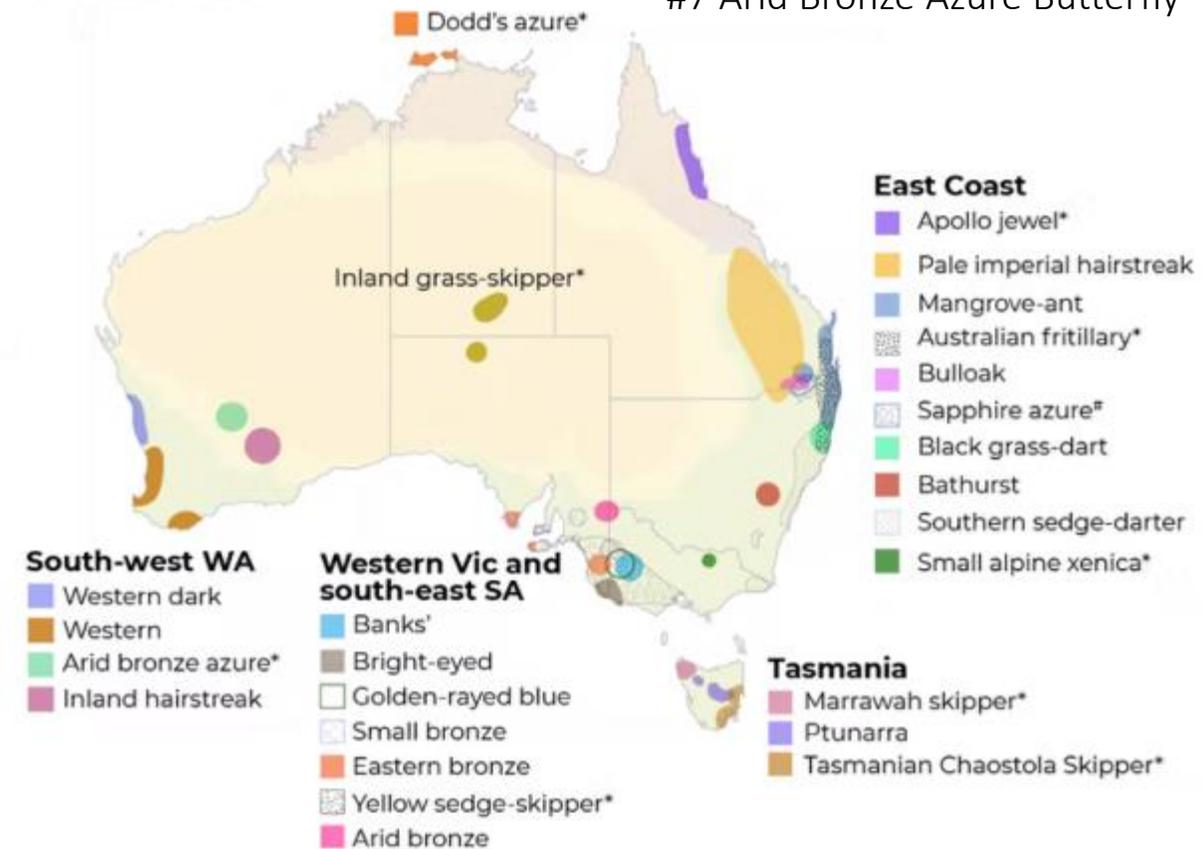
# Arid Bronze Azure butterfly

*Ogyris subterrestris subterrestris*



## The 26 Australian butterflies at greatest risk of extinction

#7 Arid Bronze Azure Butterfly



# Pink Cockatoo and Pine Woodlands



# Southern Whiteface



# Weird and unknown





# This is us

- Phil – 50 years land management
- Fiona - PhD Restoration Ecology
- Em – 17yo
- Jazz – the conservation dog



# With help from:



- Volunteers – Phil and Judy, family and friends
- Visitors from away
- Carey Baptist Grammar School
- Environmental groups
- “Friends of Mallee Conservation”





# What we do

- Rabbit and weed control
- Conservation fence to manage grazing pressure (kangaroos, goats, pigs)
- Threatened plants and animals
- Revegetation
- Drought refuge / climate adaptation
- (Visitors, volunteers, social media)





# Making it pay

- It doesn't – no income from the property
- Operating costs funded by working off-farm: \$15-\$35k per year
- Between 0.8 and 1.8 FTE labour
- “Project” works funded through grants: \$0.5M since 2006





# Our why

Because

- We love the land and didn't want to see it developed
- Land management outside of government funding cycles and labour shortages
- A PhD project that never ended

Then

- Seeing results leads to snowballing effort – it's addictive

And now

- An antidote to climate and biodiversity related anxiety





## Our why

“More and more of us now realise the cavalry isn’t coming to the rescue.

We are the cavalry.”

-Hugh Possingham-





# Biggest achievement?

## 13km-long conservation fence

- Six different grant programs - 2014, 2020, 2021 - completed March 2022



# Weston electric fence

- Plain wire electric fence
- Three hot wires
- Spacing allows small critters through
- Manages grazing pressure (kangaroos, pigs, goats)
- Learnt so much building this – happy to share!







# Exciting event?

Flooded! First time in 50 years.



Raakjlim Creek – 29<sup>th</sup> December 2022





5<sup>th</sup> November 2022



26<sup>th</sup> December 2022



18<sup>th</sup> September 2022



26<sup>th</sup> December 2022

2022-12-26





## *Hypertelis cerviana* (L.) Thulin Wire-stem Chickweed

Taxonomic status	Accepted
Occurrence status	Present
Establishment means	Native
Degree of establishment	Native

[Treatment](#) [Classification](#) [Distribution](#) [Phenology](#)

Annual, delicate herb, 4–10 cm high. Root thin. Stems often many, erecto-patent, filiform. Leaves (both basal and cauline leaves), 4–10 mm long, linear, somewhat succulent, often grey-green, apex acute to obtuse; basal leaves often soon withering; cauline leaves in whorls of 3–12. Inflorescence loose, umbellike, 3–5-flowered. Pedicel 7–13.5 mm, capillary. Petals elliptic to oblong, 1.5–2.5 mm long, medially green, margins membranous, white or off-white, persistent around ripe capsule. Stamens 3–5, shorter than petals. Capsule ovoid, enclosed in the perianth. Seeds 20–40, D-shaped, with a single low ridge on the keel, obscurely reticulate, brown, slightly shiny, ca. 0.2 mm. Throughout the year.

Widespread in southern and eastern Europe, south-western and southern Asia, and Africa.

Known from a single collection (March 2023) from Colignan (NW Victoria), where found in recently flooded *Eucalyptus largiflorens* woodland on grey clay. Elsewhere in Australia it is widespread in arid areas, but apparently uncommon.



Created by: Val Szejtő, 9 Mar 2023



- New record for Victoria!
- Wire-stem Chickweed – *Hypertelis cerviana*



But the Arid Bronze Azure butterfly...

Three populations known,  
two were flooded.

80% of egg laying sites  
impacted

Massive reduction in host  
sugar ants





# Biggest challenge? - Revegetation

- Less than 300mm rainfall
- Supplementary watering
- Soil amendments
- Direct seeding
- Seed bowls





Supplementary watering



Soil amendments





Direct seeding



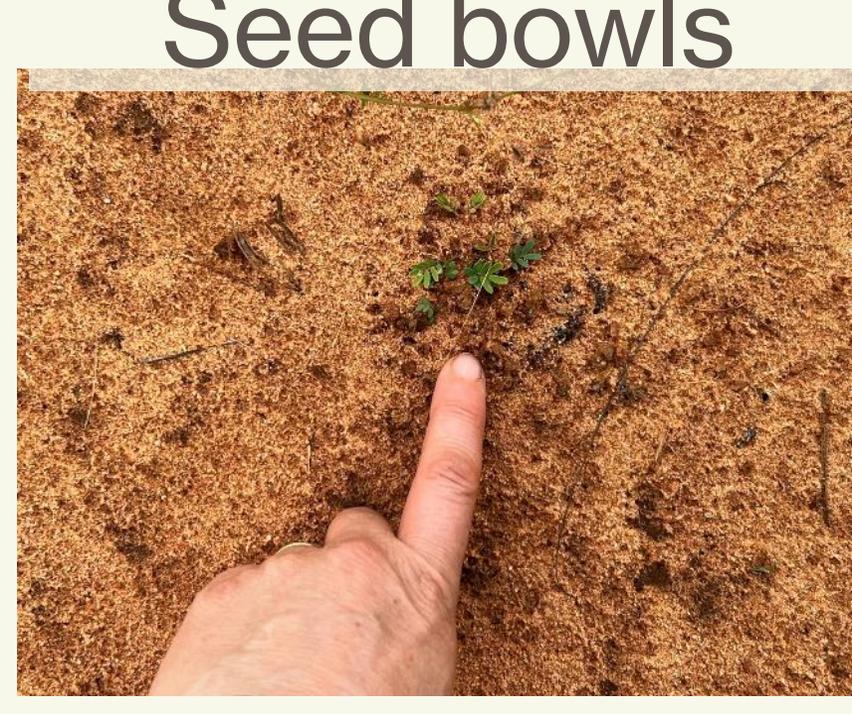


~~Seed balls~~

Seed bowls



Seed bowls





Emus – eating and pooing



# What's next?

## Succession planning

- Exploring different models of future ownership





# Let's talk ...

Phil and Fiona Murdoch



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