



**Queensland Women:
Inspiring stories from Environmental Champions**

*“Acknowledging and Celebrating the contribution that
Women of the Darling Downs have made to
Protecting and Conserving the Environment”*

2023 Women’s Week project



*An initiative of Householders’ Options to Protect the
Environment (HOPE) Inc.*



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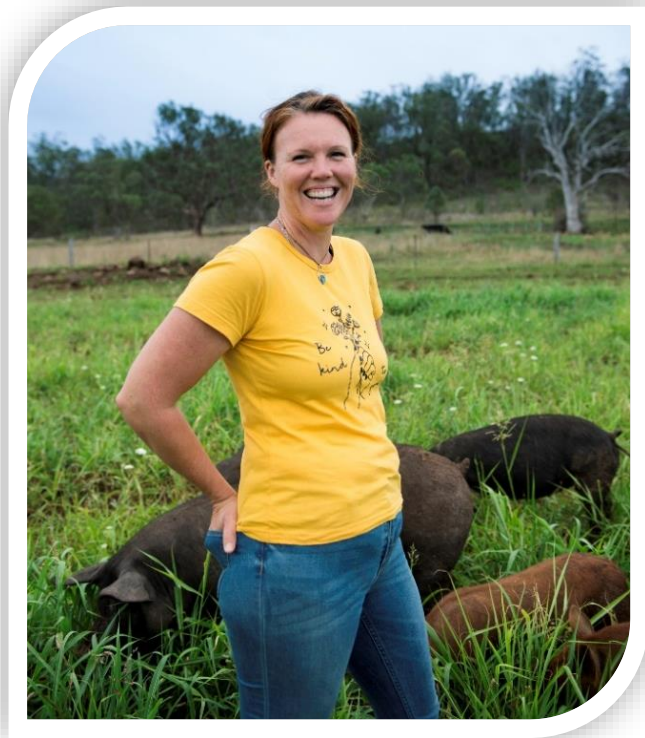




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Juanita Breen



Juanita Breen, along with her husband Randal and their children Bridey and Eli, makes up the team at Echo Valley Farm: in the Goomburra Valley, Southeast Queensland.

For the past eight years they have been operating a stacked, integrated, multispecies, holistic farm, raising pastured poultry, pastured pork, grass fed beef, and a Brangus cattle stud. This approach is rooted in their ‘4 Goods’ values—*Good for the Animal, Good for the Land, Good for the Farmer & Good for the You (the consumer)*. The 4 Goods and a focus on a circular economy are key to their small farm’s viability and success.

Here we are:
<https://www.echovalley.com.au/>



Juanita has a background in horticulture and grew up on a wholesale plant nursery. Consequently, the connection with the environment and plants was always there. This evolved when they purchased and moved to their first small property at Coleyville in the Scenic Rim Region of Southeast Queensland.

The inspiration for my work, Juanita says, comes from many places, but my partner Randal, who has an incredible drive for research and understanding in the regenerative and agro-ecological farming systems is a great inspiration, along with some of the amazing forbearers like Charles Massey and Bruce Pascoe. Their knowledge, understanding and wonderful storytelling abilities inspire me to continue the journey of working with nature and producing ethical food. I became involved in environmental conservation through our farming journey over the last eight years. As first-generation farmers, with a background in community development and the social sciences, the only type of farming that aligned with our value set was one that at its core was responsible and regenerative to the environment, conserving and respecting of nature and the environment.

There is an ever-constant realisation that the environment is not static, and we are still growing in our understanding of how to partner with it and be responsible, as well as produce

food for our community. We have a strong and wonderful community around us, who are continually thanking and encouraging us on our journey of regeneration and agro-ecological farming.

In our short eight or so years of farming we have experienced the worst drought on record, fires, floods, a mouse plague, an introduced disease, and a pandemic. There is no doubt in my mind that the increasing impact we have on our world and natural environment will continue to make these events more common and more intense. The only way we see to overcome them or be more resilient to them is to work in partnership with our landscape. Observe what it is trying to tell us, be responsible with the management of it, and most importantly advocate and share the story of what is happening and what we are trying to achieve.

Agriculture, and more specifically regenerative agriculture, is a challenging industry, but despite this, there is a satisfaction in working with the animals, in the landscape and with the soil. That connection to country and the earth is grounding and gives a deep sense of belonging. So, despite the long hours, and the multiple curve ball challenges, I absolutely feel a sense of fulfilment and purpose in working with nature.

We are achieving our goals and setting new ones. For example, diverting five tonnes of waste stream into animal and landscape feed each week. We feed more than one hundred families per week with food that has been grown agro-ecologically and in an environmentally responsible way. We are increasing our organic matter in our soils from 1.2% to over 3%—and this is just the beginning; this whilst battling the worst drought on record for four of the eight years we have been farming.

We have exciting projects happening now. We are in the process of constructing an on-farm boning and packing room, to further vertically integrate and responsibly manage our food production and distribution. We are also building a workshop space on farm where we will have a greater ability to share our systems, our story, and our experience with others in the industry and engaged in our food system.



My advice to women wanting to step up in farming, conservation, wildlife protection or other environmental areas is to just do it. Women, I believe, will be integral in the restoration and reconnection with environment. Our society and our communities have become so disconnected with our natural environment and women need to be brave, step up and start engaging and sharing in that reconnection

and storytelling. Agriculture has been such a male dominated industry, but it needs women, and they bring such a unique and valuable perspective that we need for the regeneration of our environment.

Mary-Lou Gittins



Educator and irrigator from Goomburra Valley in the Upper Condamine catchment, Mary-Lou has a strong background community participation and representation. For over thirty years she has represented Agriculture, Landcare, and Natural Resource Management (NRM) groups at a local, regional, state and commonwealth level. She has supported Landcare organisations in Southeast Queensland and now Darling Downs, planted thousands of trees and facilitated Waterwatch and Landcare education for children and adults. Mary-Lou won an individual State Landcare Award in 2003, then an OAM in 2019 for service to conservation and the environment.

Currently Mary-Lou is the Chair of Queensland Water and Land Carers and secretary to Australia Citizen Science Association. Locally secretary to the Condamine Catchment Management Association, Allora Medical Support Group, and chair of Goomburra Town Hall (116 years young).



I think my passion for the environment began with my family, said Mary-Lou. I grew up in Cunnamulla and as a child our father gave us a bush education regarding our environment. Then in 1989 Shane (my husband) was the inaugural secretary to the Brisbane Valley Kilcoy Landcare Group. Thus, Landcare became the fifth child in our family.



Apart from my husband there have been many people who have inspired me along the Landcare pathway. I suppose Jock Douglas was the main instigator on the direction of this pathway. Also, I married a dairy farmer, and we saw the improvement of our physical assets—land and water as necessary to a sustainable business. Landcare was a tool we used in our business.

I saw I had skills such as consultation and persuasion that could widen the influence of Landcare within our local area. Whilst I was engaged for five years as a Water-watch Coordinator, the other years were as a volunteer striving to educate and trigger community involvement in Landcare orientated projects with a team of other likeminded individuals. This involvement led to me representing farming and landcare on different local, regional, state, and national bodies over the last 30 years.

I know that my work has had an impact in protecting and restoring the environment. I became involved in the Landcare/natural resource management movement early in the scene, so I saw the development of NRM in the agri-business such as the Dairy and Beef industry.

The Brisbane Valley Kilcoy (BVK) Landcare had capacity to employ Landcare project officers over the years who are now still in the NRM field, and it is great to see their accomplishments and to reflect on how I was part of their careers.

On a physical side tree plantings and signage on storm water points are a living reminder of my involvement.

We always face challenges in any new development but as a volunteer in this field, I do not see myself having a career as such. Opportunities to become involved in Landcare/NRM events at a local, regional, state, and national level have presented themselves. The main challenge is the practicality of sustainability. To enhance our environment what we do has to be doable—on-ground and liveable.

Whatever I have given to the environment has returned to me four-fold in terms of satisfaction. As a volunteer working with others in the same area as a team is a gift. The buzz being with like-minded people working towards a common goal gives me strength to forge ahead striving for a balance between nature and human activity.

The pathway life has directed me on has been one of education and limited on-ground works. As a Waterwatch coordinator part of my charter as to educate students in the health of our waterways and water usage. With BVK Landcare I developed two main projects—Urban and Rural Links which was an exchange between two schools one rural and one urban. It was great to be able to give these students an experience to share each other’s waterways. We also sampled the Upper Brisbane River and other local creeks. Within this role I had the honour of having a stage in the Queen Street mall with a sand pit which I used to educate the bystanders on catchment management. I also chaired the Qld Waterwatch Committee for some time.

In 2002 I chaired the steering committee that formed the current state body for nature volunteering groups: Queensland Water and Land Carers (QW&LC), which I also had the privilege of naming. This organisation has grown from the membership of 250 Landcare groups to current 460 members that range from Landcare to Wildlife Carer groups. This totals something like 36,000 volunteers.

On our farms over the past 40 years, we have implemented on-ground changes to enhance our suitability with land and water.

My current projects are not physical but educational and community driven. Locally with the Condamine Catchment Management Committee, we meet quarterly and offer an opportunity for likeminded groups to network at a regional level. Organising these events (with CCMA Management Committee Team) that include a guest speaker gives me a feeling of accomplishment and comradeship.



State level with QW&LC we will be rolling our workshops to educate member groups on how to keep their volunteers safe. Webinars will be reintroduced in 2023 which will be monthly discussing relevant topics for volunteer groups involved in enhancing our Qld environment.

My advice to women who wish to be involved in the conservation movement is of a general nature. Being part of a team will enhance any individual’s capacity to have influence. Small steps make way for larger accomplishments. Be true to yourself and those around you as this will maintain your energy and focus. It does not have to be a big issue; we could strive for maintenance and improvement. Each of us have a role in our everyday life to practice what we believe therefore lead by example.

Barbara George



Barbara George-Jaeggli grew up in a small rural town in Switzerland. She studied biology with a specialisation in agricultural ecology. After meeting her Australian husband, Peter George, the pair moved to a small farm near the Condamine River Gorge in Killarney in 1996. They raised two boys on that farm and are looking forward to soon teaching their grandchildren about nature and farm life. While Barbara works as an agricultural researcher, Peter grows their food on the farm and maintains a small

beef herd. Apart from protecting the remnant vegetation and the wildlife on the farm, the pair have also planted some paddocks back to hoop pines and other local tree species and have fenced off waterways. Barbara is particularly fascinated by the platypus that still call the Upper Condamine home but is genuinely concerned for their future. Increasing pressures from 4WD traffic through the Condamine Gorge on top of the threat from climate change could well mean that they could disappear from these refuge areas as well. To raise awareness, Barbara has been working with Tamielle Brunt from Wildlife Queensland and the community to undertake regular platypus surveys in the Upper Condamine. They have now collected important data on current numbers and their preferred breeding spots, and they are hoping to apply for funding to undertake projects to improve their habitat. Barbara has also been lobbying the Southern Downs Regional Council (sadly to no avail so far) to find ways to control the traffic through this ecologically sensitive area and refrain from engineering solutions to the natural river crossings that impacted by hundreds of vehicles on busy weekends.



My passion for the environment started from an early age. I loved exploring the forests and fields around my hometown in Switzerland and later joined a local bird conservation club. I not only learnt to identify the distinct species, but also their habitat requirements and how they were affected by human activity.

My earliest mentors were the old bird club members who taught me about the importance of conservation. My bird club installed nesting boxes and I was responsible for the regular checking and cleaning of many of them. We also used to establish and maintain hedges and

planted trees to create more habitat. As a young girl, I financially supported nature conservation organisations, such as WWF and followed their different campaigns.

It takes time for your work to have an impact in protecting and restoring the environment. Before departing Switzerland to move to Australia, I used to assist farmers with the establishment of hedges and nature strips, as well as the re-introduction of historical weeds that had become rare in their production fields, such as poppies. This work was decried at first, but when I returned a few years later to visit family in Switzerland, these nature strips criss-crossed the entire countryside and the hedges and tree plantings that I helped establish had grown into mature habitat for birds and other wildlife. This made me realise that change for the better can happen and landscapes can be restored within a lifetime.

One always faces challenges in any worthwhile endeavour. As indicated earlier, my early conservation work in Switzerland was met with some resistance, but I did not let that deter me or change my conviction that if the species around us suffer, we suffer ourselves. My experience in Switzerland taught me that eventually more people realise that, and societal values change. A good example of that is recently, human-induced climate change was a dirty word in Australia, but now there is so much emphasis on finding solutions to reduce our emissions and adapting to climate change and research in this area has become a priority.

I could not imagine to be doing work that does not align with my values and I have been fortunate to be able to earn a living doing something as fundamental as finding ways to produce food more sustainably, while also being involved in conserving our fauna and flora and the resources agriculture relies on. Being so aware of the state of our environment and what might be ahead of us with biodiversity loss and climate change can have negative effects on our well-being though and it is important to find some way of remaining hopeful.

My biggest achievements are the nature strips and poppy-strewn fields that dot the landscape all over Switzerland, but also the tree plantings my husband and I did when we first moved to our farm in Australia. Some of those hoop pines are now as tall as a multi-story house.



I am currently establishing baseline data of the platypus populations in our area so that we can lobby council and other environmental organisations to protect the Upper Condamine River, which is the head of the Murray Darling Basin and an important refuge for many threatened or near-threatened species. I am hoping to attract funding for habitat restoration and further research on this uniquely Australian species that surprisingly we do not really know much about.

Women are natural carers for our environment because they instinctively know that we all depend on natural resources and that without a healthy environment we have no future. This makes us perfect conservationists and I would encourage any woman or girl to follow their passion to work in conservation or wildlife protection.

Clare Gover



Sometimes someone comes into your life and changes it forever—the late Clare Gover of [Return to the Wild](https://www.klaws.org.au/) was that person to KLAWS (Koala Land and Wildlife Support): <https://www.klaws.org.au/>

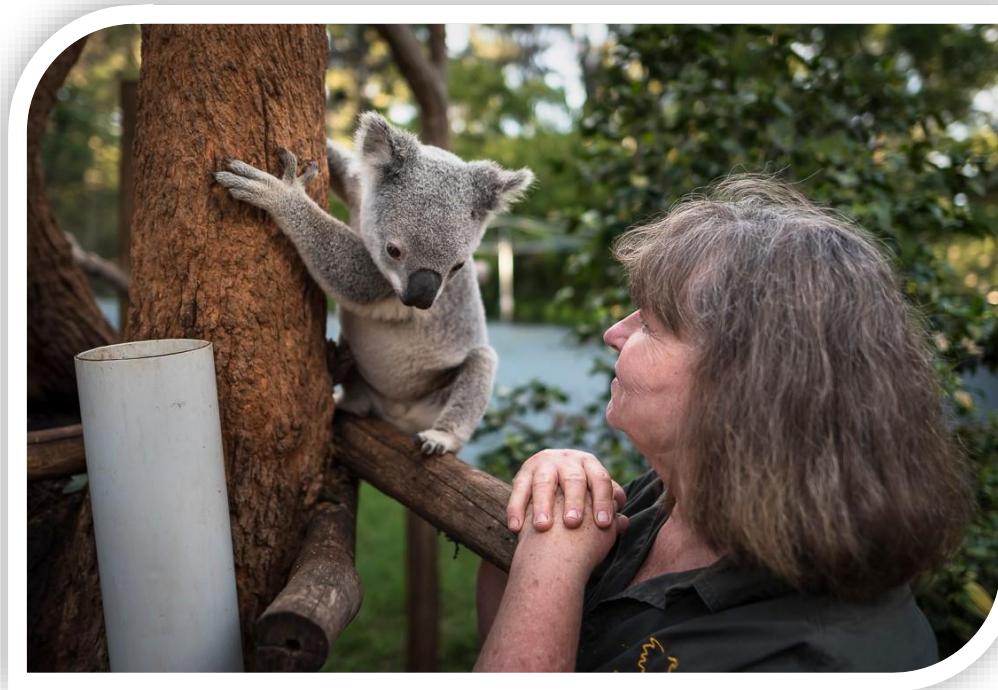


Clare grew up in Zimbabwe and was rescuing wildlife as soon as she could walk. She said her childhood was wonderful and magical, and she roamed free to explore the hills and rock caves on horseback rescuing local wildlife and bringing them home—at one time hiding a baby antelope under her bed.



However, the tranquillity of her homeland was not to last as the political upheaval of the 1970s was so intense and dangerous that Clare and her daughter migrated to Australia—finding peace in Cabarlah. In 2002 Clare joined Australia Zoo as a wildlife rehabilitator commuting back and

forth from her home base. She said it was the best job she ever had. In 2013 Clare formed Return to the Wild where she dedicated her too short life to wildlife care—specialising in koalas, and then working with World Wildlife Fund for koala conservation.



Clare was a koala rescuer, carer, and beautiful friend. She left us in 2019. We, her past volunteers, and friends have celebrated her distinguished life and contribution to conservation, but miss her wisdom, vast knowledge and total commitment to wildlife and koalas. She inspired those who crossed her path, and her passing was the catalyst for KLAWS foundation. It is KLAWS mission to continue her amazing legacy for koala conservation by fundraising to save the koala hospital and rehab centre set up by herself at Geham before she passed.

In the last 2 years KLAWS has rescued and cared for over 100 koalas, many macropods, gliders, possums and 90 birds. In that period, we have received grants and donations totalling over \$150,000 and this was all within the terrible Covid years. We also collaborate with landowners to encourage retaining and replanting koala corridor areas for wildlife connectivity and engage in community education on the issue of endangered koalas.

Clare would be proud of what KLAWS has achieved.

Jean Gundry



Jean Gundry is a child of the “50’s. She grew up on a dairy farm near Toowoomba and rode a horse to the one-teacher school at Gowrie Junction. She is married, with three children and two grandchildren. Jean and her husband Ben have worked as teachers and lived in Mareeba and Harvey (WA), Townsville, Cape York Peninsular and Laidley. The couple moved back to Toowoomba and purchased their Regent Vale home in 1999. Their shared interest in nature has underpinned their enjoyment of living on the farm, where they raise grass-fed beef. When Jean and Ben are not at home on the farm they enjoy travelling, hiking, birdwatching, and photography



My passion for the environment began at a young age, said Jean, as I grew up on a farm It was common practice for my father, who had a deep interest in the flora and fauna of his “patch” to bring home, after a day of working on the farm, sprays of plants with berries or flowers to show us, as well as making pets of dingos, koalas, wedge tailed eagles, falcons, hares and wallabies. As a child, I was free to explore every part of the farm, including the ferny gully lined with Silky Oaks and the dry vine scrub which lies along the ridge tops. My interest in this “patch” has developed year by year since it has become my turn to be its custodian.

My father inspired me to become interested in caring for the environment. However, others have been role models and mentors along the way as well. I pay tribute to Flora McKenzie, who lectured in botany at DDIAE (UniSQ), who, as a member of the Toowoomba Field Naturalist Club, to which my parents belonged, assisted my father in identifying 250 plant

species. He then had these formally identified and classified by the QLD Herbarium. He labelled these plants and learnt their Latin names. Other role models who have inspired me to learn as much as possible about the plants of this region include Patricia Gardiner, whose book “Toowoomba Plants” has assisted in helping me to identify trees and shrubs native to this region. Without a doubt, the person who has shared my interest in the environment and who has shared the journey has been my husband, Ben. His abiding interest in the natural world, particularly in birds and wildlife has made the lifestyle we have chosen a rich and rewarding one. His determination to leave an exceedingly small footprint, to wage war on weeds with simple hand tools and sheer demanding work is inspiring.

My interest in environmental conservation has developed throughout a lifetime of experiencing and enjoying the beauty and diversity of the natural world. We have been fortunate to have worked and travelled in a variety of geographically diverse regions of Australia and other parts of the world. Our abiding interest has always gravitated towards the natural environment and towards the importance of working with the environment rather than trying to change it. Our involvement in environmental conservation has been an inherent part of our role as custodians of this farm since the 1970’s. This approach has been nurtured by our long-standing membership of Toowoomba Field Naturalist Club, which has always had an eclectic mix of people with wide and varied interests and expertise in various aspects of natural history and the environment. Our membership with Landcare has also given us the opportunity to gain experience from like-minded farmers and other conservationists who are seeing the benefits of working with and preserving the natural assets of their properties.



One of the pivotal moments for me in seeing the benefits of protecting and restoring the environment was when I was able to participate in a “cool burn” on our “patch”. This came about because my parents handed back part of our property to the Traditional Owners. Since then, we have been privileged to be able to experience firsthand the restorative practices implemented by Indigenous caretakers, including participating in several cool burns.

There is much more to come in my journey regarding recognising and implementing Indigenous practices in environmental conservation.

Challenges faced in environmental conservation have reduced in part due to the support given by Landcare. Women in the Landcare movement in this region including Glenys Bowtell and Mary-Lou Gittins have been great role models, with many local communities and individual landholders having benefited from the support given by Landcare through the administration provided by these and other women. In our case, Landcare has assisted in funding grants for fencing to protect riparian areas, areas for tree plantings for koalas, patches of virgin bottle

tree vine scrub /wildlife corridors and the like, and funding to help eradicate invasive weeds. Decades ago, when building our home, which won a HIA award for sustainable housing, I did find it a challenge to navigate the existing protocols around the building industry and other ground works including building roads and dams. These were male-dominated industries at the time, and I would sometimes feel out of my depth. I am sure I have learnt much from that experience and would feel more confident doing so today.

The environment we are privileged to live in has impacted our well-being for the better. Caring for this “patch” has been a journey of discovery. It has been a daily dose of good medicine being able to get to know and to care for the diverse variety of plants and animals which form part of the ecosystem in this area. The effects of drought and the effects of peri urbanisation of Highfields and Toowoomba creeping ever closer has led to the realisation that caring for and preserving this little property into the future is going to be a challenge. Whether what we have done has been effective is for others to judge; however, living amongst this biodiversity has certainly changed our attitudes towards and our appreciation of the challenges faced by those who see the necessity for environmental conservation. An interest in botanical art has taught me to be observant and present in the moment.

Some of my own environmental achievements include designing and owning an environmentally friendly home (HIA award-winner in 1999), which incorporates passive solar heating and cooling, stand-alone solar power, and many other features that work with natural elements to create a comfortable, affordable, and sustainable living environment. We have also created organically grown fruit and vegetable gardens; created a micro-climate around the house with a native and indigenous ornamental garden.

In addition, we have:

- Photographed and documented the flora and fauna on our “patch” over a 25-year period.
- Become a Land for Wildlife property
- Created and enhanced wildlife corridors
- Planted koala-friendly trees on the farm
- Fenced to keep stock out of gullies and other sensitive areas
- Collaborated with our neighbours at Gummingurru.
- Hosted Landcare, TFNC and Land for Wildlife events
- Helped a local Landcare group to host a “Focus on Farms” photo competition.

Currently, I am planning to restore a wetland area on our “patch” with the assistance of Gummingurru Indigenous rangers. We are also researching the best way of ensuring that our property remains as a Nature Reserve into the future.

In conclusion let me say that my advice for other women is to follow their interests with support from all available environmental groups and organisations in their area. Pursue studies which will enhance those interests and know that young women today are stepping up to the mark and making an impact in all areas of environmental conservation at local, regional, and state and federal levels.

Rebecca (Bec) Kirby



Rebecca Kirby is truly a local woman, growing up in Darling Downs, Bec went to Pittsworth State High School and is now a Millmerran Landcare coordinator. She is passionate about all things natural and about encouraging others to care about the natural world.



My passion for the environment started the day I was born really, said Bec. I never really learned from anyone but always had a great passion for the land and wildlife. I have had to educate my family. People ask how long I have been in the job, and I say that I've been paid for 11 years but have been doing it my entire life!

There is no one person that has inspired me. I am fortunate enough to work with some incredible people who are great in their various fields, from scientists and extension officers to farmers. They all inspire and mentor me in some way, even if they don't realise it.

My involvement with environmental conservation took a path less travelled. I originally intended to get into a national parks and wildlife career when I left school but went travelling for a while instead and then life got busy with husband and kids, so I never got around to studying the enviro stuff. I moved to Millmerran 15 years ago and kept going into Landcare to help and then applied for the coordinator job when it became available. I am super lucky to be paid for doing something that I am extremely enthusiastic about!!

A friend once asked me if I thought I was having a win with the enviro stuff. I said that if I inspire one person to make a positive change then that is a win, and that one drop will create a ripple effect. Every day my work is encouraging others to carry out works on their own places that is restoring and protecting the environment. I like to show people that small steps are all it takes to achieve greatness.

I also love the lightbulb moments that you get to share with landholders when they realise that by having a healthy environmental landscape, they automatically increase their production. I love proving that environment and production are not separate!

The biggest challenge with working with Landcare is not knowing if you will still have a job going forward as funding is very sporadic. To help overcome this challenge I am always looking for opportunities of funded projects, but I also make sure any dollars I do get are spread everywhere. As we see, there is always a negative environmental issue happening somewhere, but I choose to focus on the positives, as positivity creates positivity. This gets more done.

People say that more meaningful work gives a greater sense of fulfilment and wellbeing. I absolutely agree with that. I always feel at home and happiest when I am out in the bush or on the land helping others to improve things

Some things that we have been working towards to improve the environment are getting a good recycling and garden program into local schools. Educating kids on sustainability. We participate in bushfire mitigation and wildlife and habitat protection, and soil and land health improvements. I think anything that is improving our landscape is exciting, whether that be recycling and enviro lessons with kids or conducting land preparation and cultural burns to improve land health. I am doing both of those things continuously.

Women have a key role to play in conservation and environmental issues. Celebrate every small achievement as they all add up to a great result. Do not let negativity drag you down. ***There is always better than bad.*** Follow your passion!

Patricia LeeHong



Patricia is an Adjunct Lecturer at The University of Queensland. She is also a PhD Candidate, at The School of Agriculture and Food Sciences, The University of Queensland: Gatton Campus

She is a founding member of the [Wildlife Rescue, Rehabilitation and Education Association Inc.](#)

Wildlife Rescue, Rehabilitation and Education Association (WRREA) is a non-profit organisation with members from diverse backgrounds united in a common goal to provide resources for the rescue and rehabilitation of Australian Fauna and the volunteers providing education about our wildlife within the community. WRREA formed in February 2010 to support the work of our principal carer, Trish, and others who work actively for our wildlife.



My passion for the environment started when I had not long moved out to western Queensland, and someone rescued hatching emus that were at risk as the male looking after his chicks had died. I was not a wildlife carer at the time as most people looking after wildlife in the outback were not but nonetheless helping where they could. Jumping in at the deep end to save the chicks I soon realised they were a species where little was known on care and raising of orphans. After many fruitless calls to government departments, facilities, and carers I tuned to a local sheep farmer who told me what he saw them eating and said, “just get some meat and insects and shove it down their throat”. Well, I did so and was successful in raising them. Word got round and soon I was a member of the local care group located 600k away, learning how to care for other species as they landed on my doorstep.

There are people have inspired me over the years in this work, for example, David Attenborough for lifelong dedication to the natural world. Also, those that have worked tirelessly in the wildlife industry without accolades or gain. There are the unspoken heroes. We all know someone who deserves recognition.



My initial formal involvement in environmental conservation began when I built a wildlife park in 1994. It was a small outback venture operating on guided tour only, whether a bus load or just one person. I had limited knowledge of conservation then but a rapport with the animals within the environment. My interest in environmental conservation followed as I left the venture, moved to regional living, and became involved in community groups when I studied at university.

I am never sure what impact my work is having in protecting or restoring the environment. But I have always felt that if, in my talks with young people, just one from a tour group went away and did something for the environment I would have achieved my goal to pass on knowledge and interest in the environment. From memory, around 2015, an American girl went home and set up a small business in her school to raise money to donate to my wildlife venture and others. She then went onto dedicating her time volunteering in conservation. There have been others since and letters of praise and thanks from people for my efforts. So, when I remember instances like this, I am aware that my work is having an impact, which is immensely satisfying.

Working in wildlife conservation is always a challenge and it can be quite heart breaking. I just put one foot in front of the other. I am always working long hours, always poor, putting everything into wildlife. It is a privilege to be able devote your time and life to wildlife. Life itself is a challenge. But it has given me a sense of fulfillment and has impacted my sense of wellbeing. I have known some tough times, but I am happy with my lifestyle in dedicating my life to animals. It is that simple. I have done things I never thought I could do or make possible; things other people take for granted I have worked hard to achieve. The wildlife I have rehabilitated and set free it is an amazing feeling.

As I said I have achieved many things but building a wildlife park, operating a small wildlife consulting business, convening an animal welfare charity, and building a grass roots wildlife centre are some of the things I am proud of achieving. Being nominated and awarded the IFAW Action Award 2011 and the Australian Wildlife Society Serventy Conservation Award 2022 from those who felt my work worthy of recognition, a very humbling experience.

Currently I am devoting time to koala rehabilitation and building an in-house facility to achieve increased outcomes in reducing stressors of long-distance travel to professional care for koala and other wildlife in our care.

My advice to any women wanting to step up in conservation, wildlife protection or other environmental issues is to follow your passion and see where it leads, nothing comes without sacrifice.

Helen Lewis



Helen Lewis—Founder of Decision Design Hub. Helen is an accredited Professional Educator in Holistic Management with the Savory Institute. Since 2003, Helen has been training organisations, groups, and families in Holistic Decision Making, Holistic Profit Planning and Holistic Planned Grazing. Helen, her husband and their two children live on Picots Farm, west of Warwick, implementing holistic grazing with their growing Brangus herd. Helen has a wealth of experience in training groups in Holistic Management and has a passion for Holistic values-based decision making, helping people to have clarity, confidence, and a sense of calm with every decision. The Holistic Management process enables people to solve the root

causes of problems, be true to their values and consider the people in their life, the environment (on which we depend for a living and life) and our longer-term prosperity with every decision. Here we are: <https://decisiondesignhub.com.au/>



I think my passion for the environment started when I was young in the veggie garden where I grew up and realising that ‘no farmers’ meant ‘no food’. We now need to ensure we support ‘good’ farmers who produce food that is ‘good’ for us—chemical free and their practices enhance the environment.

Some of the people who have inspired me in this work are Allan Savory, Dick Richardson, and Bruce Maynard, winner of the 2022 Bob Hawke Landcare award.

I became involved in environmental issues through Holistic Management training and an awareness about policy, solving the root cause or issues so that sustainable solutions exist.

I became aware that my work was having an impact because of the feedback I was getting. Every day I train people in holistic management. On our farm too, water is running clear off our place, slowly.



Similarly, one of the challenges that I face is that of continually training people who then don't make a change; life gets in the way, which is understandable. But also, I must accept that people need to be ready to hear the innovative approach/idea and take the action.

I do meaningful work and it has an impact on my own wellbeing. It is so good knowing we can fix environmental problems by addressing the root cause- I feel uplifted and enthusiastic. One of the exciting projects I am currently working on is offering decision design for personal use, farmers, policy makers and decision makers in organisations—so every decision considers people, environment, and prosperity.

My advice for women wanting to step up in conservation, wildlife protection or other environmental issue is to just do it!

Inez Rosser



Inez Lavina Rosser was born on 23 August 1926, at Biggenden, North Burnett Region. She died on 10 May 2010 aged 83 years. She married to David Rosser for sixty years.

After retiring from teaching English, French and German at Warwick High school for thirty years Inez became a primary producer in the Warwick shire. During the 1990s Inez was a member of the Condamine Uplands Landcare Group. With her husband David, she was also highly active in the Warwick Society for Growing Australian Plants (SGAP). In 2003 she was formally recognised for her contribution to the Condamine Catchment Management Association.



Inez's engagement with the environment began in childhood. Inez grew up on a dairy farm in Coalstoun Lakes, 'near the craters of Mt Le Brun, which is now a national park'. As a child she said, she 'loved being on the farm and observing the natural resources ... the Leichhardt Bean (*Cassia brewsteri*) was my favourite tree'.

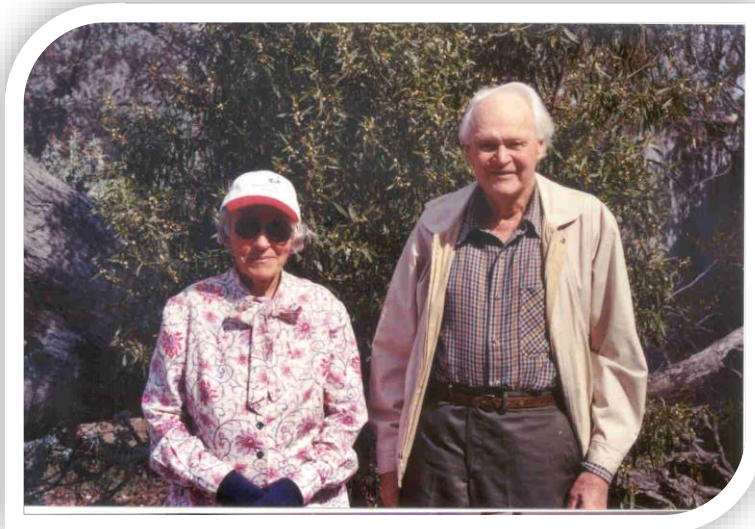
However, it was not until she was approaching retirement that she decided she wanted to purchase land for agricultural and conservation reasons. 'I have always had an interest in rural production... (and) I think most rural people have a love of the natural environment', she said.

Inez and David initially bought the 320-acre property located at The Falls in 1968, ‘because it was wild country with a bit of bush’ and they were looking for a site that they ‘could preserve and possibly retire to’. Although she knew the area was habitat for the Albert’s lyrebirds, Inez considers the actual presence of the rare birds on the property as a ‘lucky coincidence’.

In 1998 at the encouragement of Sid Curtis, a leading expert on lyrebird song, they established *Carabeen*, the first nature refuge on private land in the Condamine catchment. They saw the status of nature refuge as ‘a way of protecting the place, including the Albert’s lyrebird ... (the property) is a convenient spot to come and (conduct) research’. Inez says that she ‘was also concerned with the ultimate fate of the vegetation on the property ... as it feeds the lyrebird’.

The property is named after Yellow Carabeen (*Sloanea woollsii*), a sub-tropical rainforest species native to the area. The nature refuge supports remnant Notophyll vine forest and is part of an area that has been nominated for World Heritage listing. In addition to the Albert’s lyrebird the area is also home to a diverse array of wildlife species, although Inez admitted that her main reason for establishing the nature refuge was for ‘the conservation of the birds and their habitat.’

A further feature of the Carabeen Nature Reserve is that it is an excellent example of a conservation partnership between State Government agencies and a private landholder. Though managed as a single nature refuge, *Carabeen* is composed of two legal partnerships and encompasses both private and public land. One partnership is between Inez and the



Environmental Protection Agency, and the other between the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Main Roads. Inez was instrumental in the establishment of the nature refuge between the two government departments and insisted upon it as a condition of signing her own conservation agreement, because it was necessary to provide a movement

corridor for lyrebirds and other wildlife as they moved east to feed and water along Spring Creek. Carabeen Nature Reserve continues to be an inspiration to Shire residents and visitors alike, and to like minded people wanting to establish similar relationships in their areas.

Albert's lyrebird

The Albert's lyrebird *Menura alberti* is a threatened species both in Queensland (where it is classified as Near Threatened) and New South Wales (where it is classified as Vulnerable). This unique forest dweller is restricted to the mountainous ranges of the Queensland/New South Wales border.

The public knows little about the habits of the Albert's lyrebird, as it is more often heard than seen. Lyrebirds can mimic a large diversity of forest sounds including the calls of bowerbirds, whipbirds, and rosellas. During the wintertime, the male birds use their vocal abilities to impress potential mates. Inez enthused 'They are amazing birds... They are the only birds that can play their own accompaniment to the music of their calls!'

Threats to Albert's lyrebird include unsuitable forest management practices, predation by introduced predators such as the fox, and clearing and fragmentation of habitat.

A lifelong appreciation for the environment was Inez's main reason for purchasing land for agricultural and conservation purposes. She said that 'growing up I was interested in animals... I thrived on cattle work... I did the things I was competent at and enjoyed doing.'

She also appreciated the social benefits of being involved in community groups such as the Warwick SGAP, adding that 'it is intellectually stimulating, and there are interesting people to talk to'.

In addition to knowing that the nature refuge and consequently the Albert lyrebird population are going to be protected on their property for the future, Inez had found the access to technical knowledge provided by the Nature Refuge program to be helpful.

Inez and David also bought a 550-acre property in Killarney, which includes a small 10-acre endangered dry vine scrub ecosystem. Primarily it ran Inez's herd of Santa Gertrudis bullocks but was purchased in 1978 as a place to retire to after concluding that the property at The

Falls was too wet for them. Even here she discussed with her neighbours and the Environmental Protection Agency the possibility of extending a wildlife corridor outside the boundaries of the property.

She has urged Federal, State and Local governments to make refuge agreements which included the payment of rates by Government rather than landholders. Inez said, 'we need more nature refuges. I am enthusiastic about the birds in rainforests (an in all endangered places).

Inez believed that she developed her skills to debate from her days in a university debating team. More recently she put these skills to use through her involvement in the SEQ Eastlink and Dan Pork Piggery campaigns.



Eastlink was a \$1.2 billion project between the Queensland, New South Wales, and Federal governments to link the New South Wales and Queensland electricity grids with 1500 kilometres of high voltage power line, some of which would run through farming lands. Inez shared community concerns about the project, which related to three key issues:

- the potential threat to the Scenic Rim wilderness area,
- the extra electricity needed because of the significant loss incurred when it is moved over long distances, and
- the potential health risks associated with electromagnetic radiation.

She said, 'I do not approve of long powerlines ... they were going to upset my mountains', and 'I think communities should be self-sufficient (with respect to their) electricity supply. (These are prophetic words given the push to locally supplied solar power now.)

In protest to this proposal, Inez authored articles to the media and attended meetings held by Southeast Queensland Against Eastlink. She lobbied local politicians and participated in public demonstrations and rallies.

In 2001 Dan Pork a Danish Indonesian conglomerate wanted to construct an integrated piggery and meat processing plant at Pratten near Warwick right on the Condamine River.

Scepticism about the benefits it would bring to the local economy combined with environmental concerns over effluent management, the high-water requirements to run the piggery and the repercussions that this would have on other water users created a large amount of opposition within the community. She said that initially participation in the campaign felt like an obligation as it was only fair to help neighbours right in the line of Dan Pork as they had helped us the SEQ Eastlink debate. But Inez quickly became impassioned about the issue. 'I was extremely annoyed that the Warwick Council were giving away our water supply when we didn't think we had enough water to begin with ... it was completely unjust to smaller farmers downstream ... and the site (for the piggery) was grossly unsuitable' she said.

Inez can be truly proud of her achievements to conserve the natural values of the mountain ranges she loves so dearly. Carabeen Nature Refuge will remain as a tribute to one person's determination to be effective in a landscape, which has endured generations of change and extensive development. Her willingness to campaign on issues about which she was enthusiastic is an inspiration to all women engaged in conservation and environmental movements.

Louise Skidmore



Louise has been an ACO certified organic/biodynamic beef producer since 1990 with partner, Randolf, on the Darling Downs, Queensland and in Hernani, NSW, where biodynamic practice guides the environmental management system and farm management, they engage in.

Various not-for-profit board positions include the regional Natural Resource Management body, Biological Farmers of Australia (now ACO), Organic Federation of Australia, and Central Downs Landcare. She has been for more than 30 years a member of Clifton Landcare and presently, treasurer, and Company

Secretary for Biodynamic Agriculture Australia Ltd: <https://biodynamics.net.au/>

Louise has completed a Diploma in Conservation and Land Management and the Australian Institute of Company Directors New Directors course. Louise is a General Aviation and RAA pilot, owning a small aircraft for inter-farm commutes.



My Australian partner and I moved to our Darling Downs property in 1986, said Louise. I came as a Canadian from a maritime environment, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, where I had worked in community development with fisher groups and bilingual education. Joining the newly formed local Landcare group turned out to be an effective way to learn about the different climate and environment of the Darling Downs.

There are two people who influenced me. The late Keith Bange, a foundation member of Clifton Landcare, had a profound influence on me, while our families were poles apart in our farming methodologies, he was a great listener, storyteller and had the ability to bring volunteers together on various projects. I would include Robyn Leahy too, coordinator for Central Downs Landcare (an umbrella group which included Clifton Landcare) during the Natural Heritage Trust grant years in the 90s. From her I learned how to write, cost and

present successful grant applications and coordinate their delivery. Subsequently numerous Clifton landholders benefitted through grants that I wrote, and which were administered through Clifton Landcare.

I got involved in environmental conservation through membership in Clifton Landcare, where the focus was, and to a great extent still is, on soils, erosion control and feral pest and weed management. Shortly after arriving in Clifton in 1986 my family decided to abandon conventional farming and started our organic certification which we attained in 1990 and have since added biodynamic methodologies to our farm management. As well as producing beef for the domestic market, our focus has been on floodplain management and reducing the impact of fast destructive incoming flows (entirely man-made) to slow overland flow, increase infiltration, catch silt, and deliver water downstream in an orderly, non-erosive manner.

There was no one moment in time when I realised what impact my work was having in protecting or restoring the environment. No, it does not happen overnight. We gradually realised that what we were doing to improve the farm's soil, water-holding capacity, minimise erosion, ground cover and the like was reflected in stock health, improving carbon and organic matter in our soil tests and successful certification audits.

We have certainly faced challenges and they continue. Initially we faced criticism. In the 1980s “organic” was associated locally with long hair and dope. We ignored it. For over 30 years we have been practicing what the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) now endorses as recommended floodplain management, which was not the case in our early days. This work was, and still is, physically achieved by my partner, although we planned it together.



A lot of country on the Downs is still riddled with man-made devices and drains which concentrate and speed up overland flow causing erosion, instead of spreading it out and maximising infiltration.

Hopefully, that might change with a new generation of landholders; there are those who are too long in the tooth and reluctant to change their ways or visualise the benefits of a distinct, new perspective.

I do feel that we are doing meaningful work and it certainly impacts our sense of wellbeing. It is hard to answer just how that happens, but I suppose it is on two fronts. I am pleased that over the years I've been able to help a lot of local landholders make improvements to their land, including them in projects and writing grants which subsidised their own work which otherwise would not have been done at all. I am pleased to have been the driver and organised Clifton Landcare's Bulloak Butterfly Control Site project—with some funding assistance from TRC—where we fenced an important breeding site under the guidance of Dr Don Sands, retired CSIRO entomologist. In 2021 this butterfly was included on the critically endangered list.



1Job done – installing sign on habitat control site August 2020

Recently, I am very pleased to have obtained partial funding for Clifton Landcare for releases of several species of dung beetle colonies on eight grazing properties and to have organised John Feehan, dung beetle expert, to give a fascinating presentation here in Clifton.

To be working with our Landcare chair, Clive Strong, to promote the use within the community of our Landcare equipment—MFS planter, seed

spreader, potti-putkis, wombat digger, trailer mounted Quikspray, black light cameras, and recently acquired remote controlled pig traps has given me satisfaction. As has organising various workshops and field days, most recently, Dr Terry McCosker in 2022.

My environmental achievements for Clifton Landcare have been participation in the Clifton-Nobby Road tree planting over many years. Also, the application and coordination of six successfully acquitted Envirofund grants benefitting landholders in the local area. There have been numerous grant applications for equipment needed for feral pest control. As treasurer, it takes some energy to manage financials, insurances, policies, grant funds, bank accounts, investments, tax, and audits. But I take great satisfaction that we are very financial!

On the farm front, our organic/biodynamic farm management has brought immense improvement to the land we farm, as well as the bottom line. It has been gradual, but certainly fulfilling. On the farm with my partner, Randolph Olsen, managing our land to leave it in a far better condition that when we bought it is something we aim for. We are running a 95% enclosed system—we have never imported feed, even during droughts. We do bring in certified organic lick blocks for our stock, available to them on demand.

The current projects that I am working on this year are preparing for display of equipment at the Clifton Show in February. We are also planning a community bus trip to raise awareness of Clifton Landcare's past projects and attract new members. I am organising Clifton Landcare's purchase through QAS and donation of a defibrillator for placement in the community where it will be available to anyone as a first response.

My advice for women wanting to step up in conservation, wildlife protection or other environmental issues is three-fold. First, volunteer in the area you think you might enjoy—get firsthand experience—is it as you imagined? Secondly, evaluate whether what you are doing will be fulfilling as a career—a lot of life is spent at work, be sure you are going to enjoy it. This is way more important than what you might earn. Finally, get an education—these days a formal qualification will accelerate your progress.

Julia Spicer



Julia Spicer OAM is a vibrant rural entrepreneur and a catalyst for change. Founder of three regional businesses based in Goondiwindi, Qld—Engage & Create Consulting, The Goondiwindi Business Hub and the recently sold House4390.

Julia has grown the activity and impact of innovation into the farming and business communities across the state. Julia has a particular gift for engaging woman and indigenous businesses in her work. Julia assists entrepreneurs and business owners with the work of business plan writing, designing value propositions and attracting grant and investment funds.

Julia's mission is to contribute to the vibrancy and viability of rural and regional Australia by helping businesses grow. Through strategic planning, coaching and online courses; Julia does just that.

You can find Julia online at <https://engageandcreateconsulting.com.au/>



Julia Spicer founded her business, Engage & Create Consulting in December 2012, from Goondiwindi, Southwest Queensland. The focus of Engage & Create Consulting is to support the viability and vibrancy of businesses and community organisations across regional Australia. With two decades of experience in agricultural extension, Landcare, and catchment management she now works with regional communities and industry across the country on a range of projects, with the focus on identifying needs in business and implementing creative solutions to address them.

She also founded The Goondiwindi Business Hub, ([The Hub—Goondiwindi Business Hub \(gdibushub.com\)](#)) a venture she entered with business partners in November 2013. The Hub is home to eight businesses who have long-term tenancy, as well as providing hot desking and short-term accommodation for other businesses, at The Spot ([The Spot—Goondiwindi Business Hub \(gdibushub.com\)](#)).

In May 2021, Julia and her husband Tony opened The House4390, ([The House—Goondiwindi Business Hub \(gdibushub.com\)](#)). Goondiwindi's newest and most exciting

retail hub! The House is home to five female-led homewares and service businesses, which were home-based prior to The House existing. This has been a valuable addition to the Goondiwindi business community.

Along the way she has collected some impressive gongs! For example, her achievements include:

- 2022 – OAM for service to regional business and organisations
- 2018 – Australian Financial Review 100 Women of Influence; Queensland Government 100 Faces of Small Business
- 2017 – Queensland Rural, Regional and Remote business owner of the year
- 2014 – 100 Women in Australian Agribusiness

Julia has completed the AICD Company Directors Course and has board leadership roles. Currently she is a board member on the Queensland Government Innovation Advisory Council Innovation Advisory Council (IAC) (chiefentrepreneur.qld.gov.au) and Global Entrepreneur Network Australia (Australia | Global Entrepreneurship Network (genglobal.org)) and Motherland (Home – Motherland Australia).

Past board roles include Regional Development Australia for Darling Downs Southwest Queensland (www.rda.gov.au), the Queensland Government Small Business Advisory Council, YWCA Qld, and the Australian Land Management Group.