

Bush Heritage Australia - *Protecting and restoring Australia's bush - forever*

Written by Akshara THEEMPANAL RAJENDRAN - HOPE researcher (Vic)

AT A GLANCE

Organisation: Bush Heritage Australia (public name: Bush Heritage)

Started: 1991, as the Australian Bush Heritage Fund

Founder: Dr Bob Brown

Vision: "Healthy Country, protected forever"

Registered: Charity with the ACNC - ABN 78 053 639 115

Online: www.bushheritage.org.au



Australian bush - one of the many landscapes Bush Heritage works to protect.
(<https://unsplash.com/s/photos/australian-bushland>)

Australia is home to an amazing variety of plants and animals, from dry inland plains and grassy woodlands to wetlands, forests and fields of wildflowers. But keeping all this life safe takes more than just fencing land off. It needs steady, long-term care: looking after the land, working with Traditional Custodians and farmers, keeping track of wildlife, repairing damage and getting the community involved. Bush Heritage Australia does all of these things. It's a not-for-profit charity with a simple goal - "Healthy Country, protected forever" and a plan to bring the bush back to good health.

From two Tasmanian blocks to a national movement

Bush Heritage started in 1991 in Tasmania's Liffey Valley. Environmentalist Bob Brown heard that two patches of forest near his home were for sale and about to be logged. To save them, he bought them using prize money from his Goldman Environmental Prize as a deposit and raising the rest. That effort became the Australian Bush Heritage Fund. Today those first blocks are part of the Liffey River and Dry's Bluff reserves.

■ ***I thought about what might happen if someone didn't protect that land.*** - Bob Brown, founder

More than 30 years later, the group works on a much bigger scale. It doesn't rely on just one method. Bush Heritage buys and looks after its own reserves, works in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and teams up with farmers, other landowners and researchers. This means its work can stretch well beyond the edges of each reserve and help join up whole landscapes. Two moments show how far it has come. After the Night Parrot, a bird once thought extinct, was found again in western Queensland in 2013, Bush Heritage set up Pullen Pullen Reserve in 2016 to protect it (it became Queensland's first Special Wildlife Reserve in 2020). And in 2024, the huge Evelyn Downs property in South Australia about 235,000 hectares became its largest reserve.

How Bush Heritage works

Bush Heritage focuses on the places that matter most - areas rich in wildlife, close to other protected land, or where good partnerships are possible. On the ground, its teams pull out weeds, control feral animals, manage fire and grazing, repair bushland and creeks and stop erosion. Science guides everything: staff keep track of what's changing and check whether their work is making a difference.

Cultural knowledge matters just as much. Bush Heritage works with Traditional Custodians in a “right-way” approach, so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, hopes and connections to Country shape how the land is cared for. And because so much of Australia is farmland, it also works with farmers helping them protect nature while keeping their land productive.

Impact at a glance

Bush Heritage’s 2024-25 Impact Report shows just how much ground this covers. Across its own reserves and partner areas, it now helps protect about 22.5 million hectares. More than 9,000 native species have been recorded there, hundreds of them threatened.

1.46M ha Reserve network	10.4M ha First Nations partners	10.7M ha Agricultural partners	9,268 Native species recorded
------------------------------------	---	--	---

In that same year it also ran 94 research projects, replanted 273 hectares, worked with 39 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners and clocked up more than 47,000 volunteer hours. It also supported 62 young conservationists through internships and placements.

A big win in 2026: Wanarra

One of Bush Heritage’s biggest recent steps was buying Wanarra, in Western Australia’s Mid-West. In July 2026 it announced it had secured the 107,000-hectare property, right next to its Charles Darwin Reserve. Bush Heritage says the purchase links up more than a million hectares of protected land, creating one of the region’s largest unbroken conservation areas. Wanarra sits on the lands of the Badimia people and Widi Mob of the Yamatji Nation, where the Western Australian Wheatbelt meets the drier inland.

Its southern half lies inside the Southwest Australia Biodiversity Hotspot, one of the richest and most threatened places for nature on Earth. Bush Heritage says it holds rare eucalypt woodlands and homes for animals like the Mallee fowl and the Western Spiny-tailed Skink, both threatened. Sheep and goats had already been removed from the old station more than ten years earlier, so the land had begun to recover on its own and now careful management can build on that. Wanarra also shows a key idea in modern conservation: connection. Joining protected areas together gives wildlife more room to move and helps nature cope as the climate changes.

Looking ahead to 2030

Bush Heritage has a bold plan for 2030: to double its impact and help protect, restore and heal 30 million hectares of land - an area larger than Victoria. To get there, it aims to double the land it owns and manages (from 1.2 to 2.4 million hectares), build stronger partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, try new conservation ideas and work with farmers across more than 10 million hectares. The plan is a response to growing threats like climate change, feral animals, bushfires and land clearing. The idea behind it is simple: protecting nature can’t just happen inside reserves - it has to happen right across the land.

Get involved and the free newsletter

There are lots of ways to help: donate, leave a gift in your will, volunteer on a reserve, join a guided visit, or follow Bush Heritage’s stories, webinars and events. If you’d just like to keep in touch, you can sign up for Bushtracks - its free quarterly magazine and get regular email updates from the landscapes it protects. It’s free to join at www.bushheritage.org.au/news/subscribe.

Subscribe, volunteer or donate: www.bushheritage.org.au

References

1. Material for this article sourced from Bush Heritage Australia’s website
2. Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) - Bush Heritage Australia charity register (ABN 78 053 639 115). <https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/charities/54ae8ce0-2daf-e811-a961-000d3ad24182/profile>
3. Queensland Government - Third Special Wildlife Reserve declared (Pilungah, April 2026). <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/104956>