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Trust for Nature conservation officer Greg Ogle at the Wanderers Plain property west of Kerang.  
Picture: JENNY DENTON

# Helping hand for endangered wanderer

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LOCAL participants in a water authority-run work scheme have been playing a part in the fight to save a critically endangered species.

Gannawarra residents Warwick Hawken, Keith Crichton, Sherry Nurse and Bev Domaschensch have spent several weeks at a Trust for Nature-owned property west of Kerang removing African boxthorn and old fences from grasslands and fitting treeguards, planting seedlings, and doing weed control in the woodland areas.

Wanderers Plain – about 2000 hectares spread over several allotments – is one of several properties across Victoria's northern plains area where regeneration of native grasslands is taking place which will support the Plains-wanderer – considered one of the world's most endangered birds.

Plains-wanderers rely on short, sparse, tussocky open grasslands, where they forage for insects, seeds and leaves and build their nests at the base of tussocks.

With 95 per cent of their native grassland habitat under cultivation or lost to development there are thought to be only 250 to 1000 of the birds left in the wild.

At Wanderers Plain, where work has been going on since 2001 to remove pests and weeds and restore native grasses and other plant species, there have been several sightings recorded recently.

"We picked them up on the song meters," Trust for Nature conservation officer Greg Ogle says.

"They call out for a mate at sundown and sun-up for a few minutes.

"We've had several birds out there over the past year or so."

Mr Ogles said the work to help the Plains-wanderer would help other grassland species.

These include small reptiles like legless lizards and blue tongues and dunnarts (small, quoll-like marsupials).

"Lots of birds live in the grasslands," Mr Ogle said. "There are several species of quail, and song larks, bush larks, and skylarks, chats and pippets and lots of raptors, of course, like the falcons and harriers.

"Some of the raptors feed on the grassland birds, which is why we take the boxthorn out, because they use it for hunting perches."

The Trust for Nature's Plains for Wanderers program, which is part of Goulburn-Murray Irrigation District drought employment program, works with farmers who are willing to put covenants on parts of their land to preserve it as habitat.

Under the program more than 500 hectares has been protected by private property owners since the early 1990s.

Management involves fox and rabbit control and fencing for soil types, which enables sensitive areas to be protected and weed-prone ones grazed.

It can also involve financial incentives for landholders, with Trust for Nature and its project partners paying up to \$1000 per hectare for farmers to protect the habitat.



A female Plains-wanderer found by farmer Peter Tuohey in the barley stubble last year.  
Picture: PETER TUOHEY

"The landowners involved really enjoy it and get a lot out of it," Mr Ogle said.

"They're really proud of having the birds on their property."

Out at Wanderers Plains, Warwick Hawken and Keith Crichton were enjoying the birds and having a laugh while helping fix up their home and also learning a bit about land conservation.

The Plains for Wanderers Project is supported by the Australian Government's National Landcare Program and the North Central Catchment Management Authority.

Key partners include Trust for Nature, DELWP, Traditional Owners, the Northern Plains Conservation Management Network, Zoos Victoria and Parks Victoria.

## Rare find

LAST year Pyramid Hill farmer Peter Tuohey was surprised to come across two Plains-wanderers in a paddock of barley stubble.

"The block of land I had was right next door to the Terrick Terrick National Park grasslands and I reckon they were on their way in there," he said.

"I was a bit surprised I could walk up and catch them."

He speculated the bird's quietness was one of the reasons it is facing extinction.

"Shooters in days gone by found them very easy to target and hawks obviously did too," he said.

"I've seen them before, but not too often. I don't think there are many of them left around."

## About the Plains-wanderer

EXPERT David Baker-Gabb describes the small, quail-like bird as unique to Australia, "in a family all its own" (the Pedionomidae family) and highly distinctive.

"The females are larger and more colourful – very few birds are like that, and interestingly, they get the male to do most of the incubation and all of the chick rearing, then they set up with another boy and start another family.

"So they are really out there as far as the bird world is concerned."

Trust for Nature conservation officer Greg Ogle says the Plains-wanderer is "a bit of a dinosaur really."

"It hasn't even got any relations. It's a lonely little soul."



Left to right: Ms Krystle Metcalfe – the first MAC Clinic client when we opened, Dr Peter Barker and Midwifery Unit Manager Christine Trevena.

## New era in maternity at Cohuna District Hospital

Much-loved Cohuna District Hospital GP obstetrician Dr Peter Barker has announced he will retire from obstetric care from Saturday 1 May 2021, heralding a new era for maternity services at the health service.

Dr Barker, who will continue to serve the community as a General Practitioner and anaesthetist at Cohuna District Hospital, said it has been an honour to serve the Cohuna community over the years and is committed to working closely with the hospital to help secure a suitable replacement.

"It has been a great privilege to support Cohuna mothers through their pregnancies and share in one of life's most important events," Dr Barker said.

"My decision to retire from providing maternity care is part of my gradual pathway towards retirement and I will work closely with the hospital and the community to attract a suitable replacement.

"It's an exciting time for any obstetrician to join Cohuna District Hospital, particularly given the current activity around Service, Strategic and Master Planning for the future of the service. I'll do as much as I can to help make this happen in recruiting my successor," Dr Barker said.

In the lead up to Dr Barker's retirement from maternity care, Cohuna District Hospital will also be undertaking community engagement initiatives around maternity services, looking to further inform and enhance the services provided through the Maternity Antenatal Clinic that was opened just under 12 months ago.

Cohuna District Hospital Chief Executive Officer Ben Maw thanked Dr Peter Barker for his dedicated and highly appreciated service to the community over the years.

"I would like to thank Dr Barker for his remarkable service to the community in maternity care. We look forward to working closely with Dr Barker and the community to find an appropriate replacement to continue his legacy of outstanding care," Mr Maw said.

"We have a lot to offer as a vibrant and close-knit community, and coupled with our recent upgrades and our close connections to regional hospitals, we have many positive drawcards to find a replacement," Mr Maw said.

The transition will not impact current care and it will be business as usual for those booked at CDH. For families that will give birth after May 1st 2021, our Maternity Antenatal Clinic will work closely with regional maternity partners and referral networks to ensure quality care whilst we review our models and actively seek recruitment over the next 6 months.

Cohuna District Hospital will continue to prioritise efficient delivery and prompt maternity services to patients as they search for a replacement GP obstetrician. To find out more about our services, please visit [www.cdh.vic.gov.au](http://www.cdh.vic.gov.au) and also register your interest in supporting future service design discussions by nominating for a position on our Partnering With Consumers Committee.

### ABOUT COHUNA DISTRICT HOSPITAL

Cohuna District Hospital has 16 beds providing acute medical, surgical and obstetric for residents of Cohuna and the surrounding catchment area. It continues to provide community and home-based services such as District Nursing, Social Support Group and meals on wheels in conjunction with the Shire of Gannawarra.

For more information please contact Ben Maw, CEO on 5456 5300.



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We acknowledge and pay our respects to the traditional Aboriginal custodians of this land and to the Elders past and present

