



FITZROY BASIN ASSOCIATION

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CONSERVING GRASSLAND

Habitat for special species



Jonathon and Carmel Tibbles have improved the management of native grasslands on their grazing property to help conserve rare habitat and species.

Grasslands on Westlyn

Jonathon and Carmel Tibbles manage *Westlyn*, approximately 30km south-east of Springsure, which they use to run a commercial beef cattle breeding herd, with offspring supplying the European Union cattle market.

Westlyn is almost entirely Bluegrass downs country. Much of it was cleared and cultivated for dryland cropping and farmed for nearly 30 years. In early 2001 the country was allowed to return to pasture, and over time much of country has returned to the natural grassland that were originally present.

Approximately 330 ha of remnant natural grasslands remain at *Westlyn*, of which almost half has been mapped by the Queensland Herbarium as essential habitat for the endangered Belyando Cobbler's Peg and near threatened Finger panic grass. The Belyando Cobblers Peg is a small perennial daisy that only grows in the Bluegrass downs and has only been found growing in four locations across the Central Highlands.

Stewardship ensures conservation

To help conserve this important habitat, Fitzroy Basin Association approached the Tibbles at the beginning of 2012 and sought to partner with them through a three year voluntary stewardship agreement that would provide incentive payments for improved management of the grasslands.

The Tibbles entered the agreement because they wanted to improve the condition of their grasslands through the use of best management principles and they were also keen to learn more about the habitat and plant species found on their property.

Jonathon Tibbles said he hoped the project would give them the skills and information needed to better manage grassland areas for their important biodiversity values.

"We are hoping to improve our natural grasslands to be in 'A' condition, we believe that this will make these areas

more resilient to drought and invasive pest plants such as Parthenium and become more productive grazing pastures," he said.

Under the stewardship the Tibbles complete annual land condition monitoring and associated training to enable them to establish monitoring sites, seasonal forage budgets and land condition assessments. Through an in-kind contribution to the project the Tibbles also established a new watering point to distribute the grazing pressure more evenly across the paddock.

Grasslands pockets of diversity

A botanical survey was also carried out over the project area by a Queensland University ph. D student that identified 12 different native grasses and 10 forbs. The rare Belyando Cobbler's Peg and Finger Panic Grass were not sighted, but the researcher agrees the area is ideal habitat for the species and plans to re-survey in future.

Carmel Tibble said she was amazed that so many different grass and forb species were found at *Westlyn*. "It is not until you walk through the pasture that you see how diverse it really is," she said.

