

The Apsey Survey

Paul Donatiu

Between June 2010 and June 2012, the Queensland Government took advantage of federal funding available under the National Reserve System (NRS) to purchase 12 high conservation value properties across Queensland. The primary purpose of the NRS is to provide a mechanism for the States and Territories to add National Parks. To date, none of these recent properties have been gazetted as National Park.

In late May this year, a new organisation called Protect the Bush Alliance undertook some strategic flora and fauna surveys on one of these properties just north of Inglewood in Southern Queensland. The Alliance undertakes activities which describe and advocate for the protection of high conservation areas in Queensland. The Alliance includes groups such as Birds Australia, Wildlife Queensland and the National Parks Association. It has a collective membership of over 10,000 people and is still growing.

The 8,000 hectare Apsey property is embedded in a suite of State Forests with Wondul Range National Park just to the north. It is considered a key area for connectivity, being located within one of the largest tracts of remnant vegetation within the Brigalow Belt South Bioregion (one of the most cleared parts of Queensland, and subsequently an area with few National Parks). Interestingly, Apsey is located at the confluence of two important conservation corridors - the Great Artesian Rim Corridor and an east-west link that connects this corridor with the Great Eastern Ranges.

The property also contains several valuable refugia sites - places that allow plants and animals to escape weather extremes, thereby allowing both species and their habitats to adapt to changes in climate. In addition, eight regional ecosystems are found on the property that have high to very high priority for reservation - the property is part of the Inglewood Sandstone Subregion, of which only 0.4% is enclosed in protected areas.

The history of this property is a testimony to the stewardship of the late Victor and Audrey Apsey who lived in Inglewood their whole lives. The property was never 'developed' because they 'understood that remnant forest did not need to be cleared to grow cattle and they appreciated nature for what it was'. Credit should also go to local QPWS staff which cultivated a strong relationship with the Apsey's and recognised the landowners' efforts over many years to retain intact the natural values of their land.

The intention of the survey effort was to highlight the conservation values of the property and build the case for its gazettal. The focus of the May survey was birds (especially honeyeaters) and developing a flora list for the site. During the three days:

- 217 plant species were recorded, including new populations of *Macrozamia machinii*, a rare cycad.
- 65 bird species were recorded, including the rare Turquoise Parrot and Glossy Black Cockatoo.
- A population of *Homoranthus vagans* was found, backing up the only existing record of this species. This Myrtaceous shrub is endemic to the property and it is estimated that only 250 individuals exist in the wild. Currently this species is not listed in state or federal legislation highlighting another role for the Alliance.