Conserving woodlands

A network of reserves comprising cemeteries, stock routes, railway easements and roadside verges is being established to help manage and rehabilitate remnant patches of box woodlands in New South Wales.

The network's success will depend on the co-operation of Landcare groups, the Rural Lands Protection Board and local councils, according to CSIRO Division of Plant Industry scientist Dr Suzanne Prober.

Prober says a 'reserve' of woodland remnants can be achieved by linking sites together with the agreement of tenure-holders. The separately-owned sites can then be managed under common guidelines.

This management system has several advantages, Prober says. It will recognise high-quality sites otherwise too small to be considered for reservation; encourage integrated management; have a better chance of attracting funding; enable the future inclusion of other sites and raise awareness among local communities.

Before European settlement, grassy box woodlands covered millions of hectares between southern Queensland and northern Victoria. They featured eucalypt species such as yellow box, grey box and white box with an understorey of kangaroo grass wallaby grass, snow grass and wildflowers such as yam daisies, donkey orchids and chocolate lilies.

Scattered trees remain, but native understorey has been eliminated from most sites. Prober and her colleagues are studying the ecology and genetics of remnant grassy white box woodlands to develop a strategy for conserving threatened woodland ecosystems. They estimate that less than 50 hectares of the original woodlands remain intact.

The original composition and natural variation of white box woodlands is being pieced together by surveying quality remnants in NSW. These often have high species diversity. Prober says there is a gradual differentiation in the understorey from the south to the north of the state which would best be conserved by a geographic spread of reserves.

Bryony Bennett

A network of reserves is considered the best way of conserving remnant grassy box woodlands. Inset: The donkey orchid (*Diuris punctata*), once abundant from Queensland to Victoria.

Learning more about biodiversity

Restoring degraded habitats

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