

Nature's workforce



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Terry & Linda Phelps – valuing, enjoying and sharing bird life on their farm.

Terry and Linda Phelps have been part of the cotton industry in Wee Waa since it started in the mid 1960's nearly 40 years ago. They have a love for their natural surroundings and the birds that live in their garden and on their farm.



Terry Phelps admiring his regenerated floodway on the cotton farm "Belapais",
Photo: Guy Roth

Biodiversity- Value It! Enjoy It! Share It!

Helpful Hints

- Take the time to walk through your bush and listen to the birds.
- Invite your friends and family to a picnic by the river.
- Plant some native flowering shrubs in your garden to attract birds.

Benefits to the Farmer

It's special – enjoy it!

Am I making a difference?

- Record traces of fauna on your farm like: tracks, diggings, footprints; scats under trees or on tracks; chewed bark; signs of wear or hair around tree hollows or scratched up trunks. Also note nests, webs and insects. Listen for frog, bird and other animal calls.

What have they done?

Terry and Linda Phelps live west of Wee Waa on the cotton farm "Belapais" run by their son Geoffrey Phelps. On the farm, the tail-water return system is linked into a natural floodway for about two kilometres. Along the floodway, Terry has retained some original trees and allowed natural vegetation to regenerate in a strip of varying width of about 150m to 75m. Coolibah, River Red Gum, Creek Willow and occasional Lignum have grown and continue to establish along the floodway. In the undisturbed conditions, native grasses and forbs compete well and displace noxious weeds such as Noogura and Bathurst Burrs.



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What are the biodiversity benefits?

Evan Cleland, from Birds Australia is surveying the floodway as part of a bird survey of cotton farms west of Wee Waa. Evan has observed 48 species, nearly one third of the birds in his study. The site is frequented by woodland and water birds attracted by both water and vegetation. Evan says "this is a simple and effective way to encourage birds onto farms and into gardens. 30 of the birds occur here only because of the vegetation, 14 because of the water and good feeding conditions of the drain and vegetated banks. At least 11 species have chosen the site to breed".

What are the benefits to Terry and Linda?

Terry and Linda planted the trees in their garden in 1991. The garden runs into the floodway and provides immense enjoyment to them with many beautiful birds living in and visiting their garden. The trees in the garden include Red Gums, Ironbark, Bottle Brush and native tea trees as well as ornamental trees such as jacarandas and conifers which provide a tremendous foodsource and attracts a wide variety of birds in the spring.

Terry has recorded 54 species of birds in the garden including



Redwinged Parrot. Photo Jan Prewett

Eagles, Rosellas, Parrots, Wrens and Cockatoos. The Phelps's are particularly fond of the Eastern Rosellas, "their crimson wings are beautiful" says Terry. In

the summer time when the farm storages are full they are more likely to see water birds including swamp hens, stilts, ibis, egrets and ducks. "One day there were 1000 pelicans on the storage which looked amazing" says Terry. Of particular interest are the Blue Wrens which move about the area the lone Major Mitchell Cockatoo, a rare species in NSW, which Terry sighted

last year. Terry and Linda say there are far more birds in their garden than the surrounding areas, including the floodway. Terry says "there's no doubt about it there are beautiful birds around and I have great



Terry and Linda Phelps in their garden Photo: Yvette Cunningham

fun with them, learning new calls and seeing what comes in in response" and demonstrates a few well practised bird calls from the garden.

For more information:

Web pages

<http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au>

http://www.threatenedspecies.environment.nsw.gov.au/tsprofile/home_species.aspx

<http://live.greeningaustralia.org.au/nativevegetation/pages/page70.html>

Scientific Publications

Cotton CRC project (In progress). Identifying habitat requirements for birds on cotton farms in the lower Namoi. Birds Australia.

Identification Guides

Ford, G. & Thompson, N. (2006) Birds on Cotton Farms. Cotton Catchment Communities CRC.



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