Closing the Gap – Functional Habitat for Threatened New England Fauna

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Southern New England Landcare Ltd

- *Our mission is to lead, connect and enable our communities to meet their sustainability goals*
- Not-for-profit community network of 30 groups
- 30-year history of positive impact
- 1,000,000 ha across Armidale Regional, Uralla, Walcha and part of Tamworth Regional Councils
- 760 members and friends – rural and urban
- Policy to take a neutral stance on renewable developments

2016 – 2019 Closing the Gap: functional habitat for threatened New England fauna

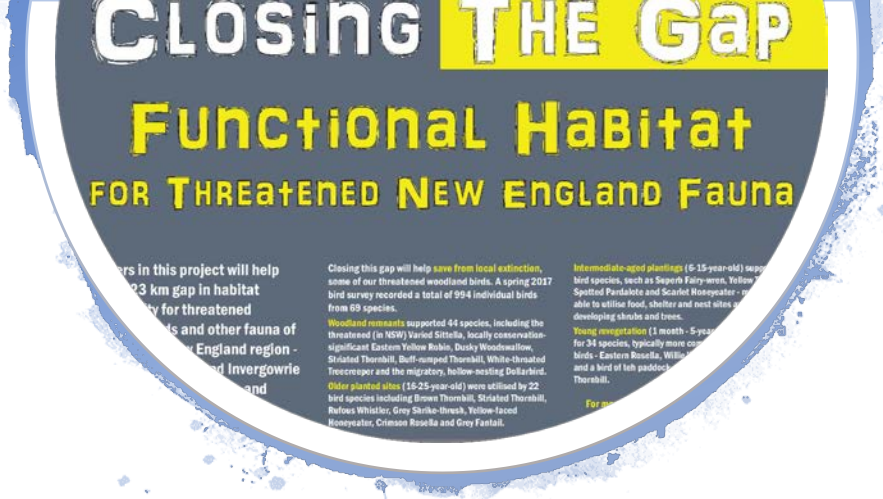
$99,998 from NSW Environmental Trust to build on previous projects and help close a key east-west gap in habitat connectivity

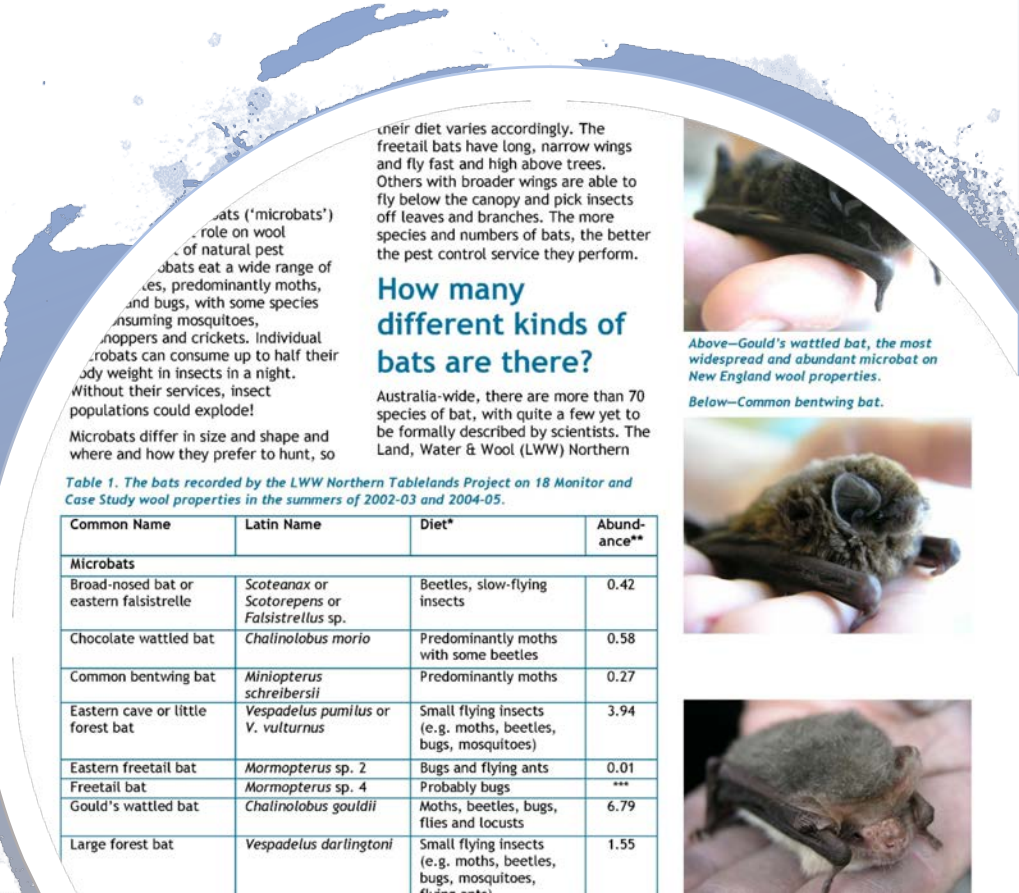
- 12 landholders protected and restored 88 ha with 14,000 native seedlings and 6.5 km fencing
- 3 field events (99 participants) to demonstrate effective on-farm habitat management
- 3 bird surveys by professional ornithologist to indicate and monitor ecological health

This project is across the development area.

Survey work

- 2006 Land, Water & Wool project – a partnership with University of New England said we were doing the right thing
- Closing the Gap Bird Surveys gave impressive results – we are still doing the right thing – birds are using planted habitat
- Handouts





Southern New England as a Hot Spot

- NSW Government recognizes Northern Tablelands as a **biodiversity** hotspot *and* a **renewable energy** hotspot
- Southern New England Landcare and UPC have fostered a relationship to discuss possible impacts and co-create mitigations
- We want dialogue to continue and produce real results, because…
- Currently 7 SSDs in our region – cumulative impacts

Southern New England Landcare

2019 – 2022 Reconnecting Thunderbolt Country

- $99,996 from NSW Environmental Trust for *Reconnecting Thunderbolt Country for threatened New England Woodland and Wetland Biodiversity*
- A similar project commencing in the midst of the Walcha Energy Solar Project proposal
- Can offsets via the Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT) be directed to project areas?

Recommendations

Require all SSDs in our region to:

1. Consider cumulative impacts of multiple projects
2. Seek to become ecologically literate and honour past work by community
3. Foster an ongoing relationship with Landcare
4. Co-create design solutions with Landcare community and build them into the project plan
5. **Increase east-west habitat connectivity across/through the 'barrier' created by the project**

And, inform/influence decision makers to direct BCT 'offsets' to the project area.