



land for wildlife case study

▶▶▶ Wildlife and Wine – a perfect blend

As you enter Lucas Estate, the sound of birdlife welcomes you, and the sight of the vineyards nestled in amongst the native red gums and stringybarks brings a sense of harmony.

Purchased five years ago, Louise Samuel and Colin Sellers manage this 21 hectare property as an active vineyard, winery and cellar door, incorporating their delight in the natural values of their property into the business enterprise.



The property contains seven hectares of the endangered Blakely's Red Gum (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*) and New England Stringybark (*E. caliginosa*) woodland (regional ecosystem 13.12.9). This vegetation community is believed to be essential habitat for the vulnerable Black Grevillea (*Grevillea scortechinii* ssp. *scortechinii*), and Lucas Estate, along with one or two neighbours, are some of the remaining properties left that still retain remnants of this community.

Louise explained that having the remnant was advantageous to the vineyard for a number of reasons, besides just loving their patch of bush, and the wildlife that lives in it. "The bush brings a different suite of birds to the property and we don't have the Starling problem that our neighbouring, cleared vineyards do," she said. The pest control values that the Lucas Estate vegetation has provided extends beyond the Starlings, too, which are major pests for vineyards, often decimating crops. Native inhabitants, Butcher birds, Magpies and a variety of lizard species provide pesticide services, eating insects off the grape vines.

"It's all about balance," Colin said. While some of the local birds provide important pest control, others will eat the grapes, if given half a chance. "We live in their environment, so we can't expect them not to eat our crops," said Colin. "We know it is our responsibility to net the vines to keep the birds out."



The property also contains patches and strips of regenerating vegetation, interspersed with the different grape variety crops. Louise and Colin are planning to rehabilitate an area in the north-east corner of the property adjacent to a dam. This will buffer existing vegetation and provide more habitat for wallabies, kangaroos and other wildlife. It will be replanted with local species with the help of Landcare.





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“Over time, there will be natural regeneration, but we want to hasten the process,” Louise said. In some areas ‘scrubby bush’ regrowth has established, which has been good habitat for small birds such as wrens, and wallabies. “We love having wallabies on the property, and they have the added advantage of chasing the deer away,” said Louise.

Keen naturalists, Louise and Colin have observed a wide variety of wildlife on the property, including sugar gliders, ringtail and brushtail possums, echidnas, variegated wrens, tawny frogmouths, barn owls, black cockatoos, eastern bearded dragons, three varieties of wallaby (whiptail, redneck and swamp) and kangaroos. The rare death adder was sited in 2004, not far from the remnant vegetation, and quolls, although they haven’t been seen on the property, are known to be in the area. The latest siting on the property has been a white ringtail possum.

“The wildlife on the property really changed our focus. When we bought the vineyard and cellar door, it was going to be about the wine and an art gallery. Now, it’s Wine, Music and Wildlife,” said Louise.

Louise and Colin have developed and trademarked two wine blends and marketed them with a wildlife theme, Whiptail White and Ringtail Red, both named after animals that inhabit the property. Whiptail wine has a photo of a young whiptail wallaby living on the property, and a text about the Land for Wildlife program and the value of wallabies. “It is an educational opportunity, and a message that they take away with them,” said Louise. Louise also produces her own e-newsletter on behalf of the winery, which includes a section on the wildlife that occurs on the property.



Lucas Estate was registered under the Land for Wildlife program in 2006, as it tied in well with the Lucas Estate ethos. “Land for Wildlife plays an important roll in the impression we give to people. It’s good to make a statement and let people know that farmers like wildlife, and that farmers can live with wildlife,” Louise said. “If people are going to buy a product, they respond to the fact that you are a responsible person, environmentally.”

“Land for Wildlife has been a great way to get more information about wildlife issues and the program is certainly a talking point with tourists that visit the winery,” Louise said.

In remembrance of Colin



Colin Sellers passed away on 23 June, 2008 after a long and courageous battle with cancer. Together Colin and Louise had a tremendous passion for their business and the wildlife of the area. Our thoughts are with Louise and family and we offer them sincere sympathy.

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