



Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves

Connecting threatened species and their habitat



Travelling Stock Route © Cecile Van der Burgh

In the 1830s it was a common sight to see Drovers walking stock between properties or to market along the many stock routes throughout New South Wales and Queensland. These stock routes are collectively known now as Australia's Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves network or TSRs.

The Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves network connects over 3.6 million hectares of land and is complemented by road reserves. The stock routes are strips of land that have created important wildlife corridors and seed banks within an otherwise fragmented landscape. The network contains a range of threatened species and ecosystems and provides protection to Aboriginal and settler cultural values. Such an extensive network of corridors does not exist anywhere else in the world and provides avenues for many unique and endemic species to move between areas of natural vegetation. It is vital this network is protected for the future.

Threats

Road transport has replaced the need for stock routes in most cases. However, there is growing recognition that they are still highly valuable to the grazing industry, and may provide an important alternative as road transport becomes increasingly expensive.

Stock routes face a variety of threats including intensive grazing, commercial logging, firewood collection, illegal tree-felling and weed invasion. Private leasing of stock route lands and inappropriate management threatens to undermine the conservation value and potential benefits for biodiversity under climate change.

Future management options are currently being considered in Queensland and New South Wales. There is a push for economic rationalisation and some stock routes have already been sold by the New South Wales government.

Assisting threatened species to adapt to climate change

The stock route network provides corridors of native vegetation for native species to travel across the landscape. Many native species will require a shift in their natural range in order to adapt to a changing climate. A large and well-connected network of protected areas is the key to increasing the resilience of our ecosystems to climate change. It is also one of the most cost effective means to protect biodiversity.

The stock routes provide a vast network across both New South Wales and Queensland, allowing north-south and east-west movement for many native species. The ability of species to shift ranges depends on the extent to which natural pathways like natural vegetation or 'stepping stones', such as close patches of habitat for birds,

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are available through the landscape. The network, therefore, provides a unique and cost-effective opportunity to assist native species across the eastern states to adapt to climate change and the consequent shifts in available habitat.

Conservation action

The intermittent grazing by travelling stock is not only compatible with conservation but is often essential to maintain biodiversity. It has therefore contributed to the valuable condition of the network today. For these conservation values to be maintained into the future, stock routes must be given long-term protection and suitable day-to-day management. It is essential that they are not sold or privately leased for exploitative purposes. These corridors of high conservation value habitat can play a key role in helping our threatened and other native species to adapt to a changing climate. As a result, their protection will be fundamental in ensuring that many of our species and ecosystems survive and thrive in this challenging time of change.



Swift parrot © Chris Tzaros

Did you know?

Box-gum grassy woodlands once dominated the western slopes of New South Wales. Today, less than five per cent remains in good condition and is mostly found in isolated strips along stock routes, on private land or roadsides. The grassy woodlands are dominated by white box (*Eucalyptus albens*), yellow box (*Eucalyptus meliodora*) and Blakely's red gum (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*) and are listed as a critically endangered ecological community by the Australian Government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act)*. The woodlands are home to thousands of native plants and animals including around 100 threatened species.

The box woodlands found along stock routes provide essential habitat for threatened woodland birds including the swift parrot and regent honeyeater. Both are endangered largely due to the loss of habitat across their natural range.

Every winter swift parrots migrate from breeding grounds in Tasmania to feed in flowering forests and woodlands on Australian's east coast. The regent honeyeater can also be found nesting and feeding here.

True to its name, the squirrel glider glides from tree to tree rarely touching the ground, where there is a greater danger from predators. The stock routes provide essential connectivity of its woodland habitat, which is often absent within agricultural landscapes.



Travelling Stock Route habitat © Cecile Van der Burgh

For more information on the Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves network contact the Threatened Species Network Coordinator at WWF-Australia, tsnsw@wwf.org.au, 1800 032 551.