Blackbutt Biodiversity Haven

New England Tablelands, NSW

Pat and Debi Neve bought Blackbutt Biodiversity Haven from the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust in 2021. On Anaiwan Country, the property is located west of Uralla in the New England Tablelands region of New South Wales. Over 70 per cent of the property is under a Conservation Agreement protecting threatened Box–Gum Grassy Woodland and other native habitat. Other parts of the property were historically cleared for agriculture, and one of these paddocks is being restored through a 15-hectare biodiverse carbon project under the Environmental Planting method.

PROPERTY SIZE:	580 hectares
PLANTING SIZE:	15 hectares
KEY NATURAL ASSETS:	Remnants of critically endangered Box–Gum Grassy Woodland. 411 hectares under conservation agreement with NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust. Strategic location for revegetation to support a local koala population, linking to existing remnant vegetation uphill and a large area of bushland to the south.
PROJECT FEATURES:	• Consultation with local ecologists to devise a planting plan accommodating south-facing slopes and wetter areas downhill from the dam. • Revegetation with species aligning to Western New England Blakely's Red Gum–Box Grassy Forest (PCT3363; critically endangered in NSW) and Western New England Rocky Granite Low Woodland (PCT3855). • Managing a Weed of National Significance (blackberry) and increasing the biodiversity values of land adjoining an area under conservation agreement. • Registered carbon project with 25-year permanence, part of Greening Australia and Canopy's 2024 National Reforestation Program (ERF186544). • Delivered in partnership with Nestlé and One Tree Planted as part of the Nestlé Global Reforestation Program. Supported by the NSW Government.

Greening Australia

The property is used purely for conservation and does not produce an income from farming. The area under Conservation Agreement is predominantly hilly with steep valleys and better preserved because it was harder to farm.

In the areas that were cleared for grazing in the past, Pat and Debi are focusing on controlling feral animals and weeds and removing grazing to allow the land to regenerate.

They are enjoying watching nature regenerate and seeing which new wildlife are taking up residence. Pat said: “We are largely trying to improve the habitat to encourage more biodiversity. In time we would like to see the property used for education and for local community groups.”

Pat and Debi have recently seen koalas on the property. The project aims to extend their habitat. Photo credit Pat Neve.

Greening Australia’s Ian Rayner and landholder Pat Neve with seedlings for infill planting. Photo credit Visitors from Dreams.

That paddock needs help to regenerate

A few years into owning the property, there were drought-breaking rains. Pat and Debi noticed much of the property responding well — but there were areas that didn’t.

Pat said: “I spoke to a few ecologists who said a lot of this property will regenerate naturally, but there were some areas, and particularly this one paddock, that wouldn’t regenerate for a long time.”

“So we decided to give nature a helping hand, and that’s when we turned to Greening Australia.”

Pat and Debi approached Greening Australia about planting on their property, and as part of the discussions, Greening Australia found the project could be eligible for funding as a carbon planting under the Environmental Planting method.

When asked why they decided to do a carbon project, Pat said: “The main aim was to regenerate the native habitat in what was a cleared and weed-infested paddock. Clearing the weeds, ripping, planting and the like is obviously not a cheap process. People say, why don’t you go out and do it yourself? At best I could have controlled the weeds and waited a long time for nature to do the rest. So this has been a real leg up to get the process moving more quickly. The carbon aspect will hopefully provide some income to help maintain the property in the future.”

Nature finance provides important funding to make projects like these possible. In this case, Greening Australia and its environmental markets business Canopy partnered with Nestlé and One Tree Planted to fund and register the project as part of the Nestlé Global Reforestation Program.

This Blackbutt Biodiversity Haven project has also been supported by a NSW Government High Impact Partnership grant.

Implementation and biodiversity benefits

With the paperwork in place, in 2024, Greening Australia worked with Stringybark Ecology, Armidale Tree Group and other local contractors to create a planting plan taking microclimates of the site into account. They cleared the 15-hectare paddock of blackberry (a Weed of National Significance) and planted a mix of native species that would best represent the critically endangered Box–Gum Grassy Woodland vegetation community. Under the terms of the carbon agreement, Greening Australia and the landholders will maintain the planting for at least 25 years.

The planted paddock is in a prime position to extend available habitat, by linking to remnant vegetation uphill in the conservation agreement area, as well as to large areas of bushland to the south. This regeneration effort will extend the habitat available for a variety of plants and animals, but particularly for threatened woodland birds and a local population of koalas.

With their keen interest in regeneration, Pat and Debi have camera traps and Passive Acoustic Monitoring underway, which will provide useful insights into the benefits of the project ongoing. The Biodiversity Conservation Trust also conducts vegetation surveys for the Conservation Agreement area.

Reflections on the project

Reflecting on the project so far, Pat and Debi said they've found communication with Greening Australia to be excellent and they were interested to follow the project throughout, from weed clearing and seed collection to growing the trees and planting. They have recently seen koalas on the property, which is a highlight, because it confirms that koalas move through the landscape where this habitat is being added.

The project has yet to generate carbon credits, so that side of things is still unknown for them.

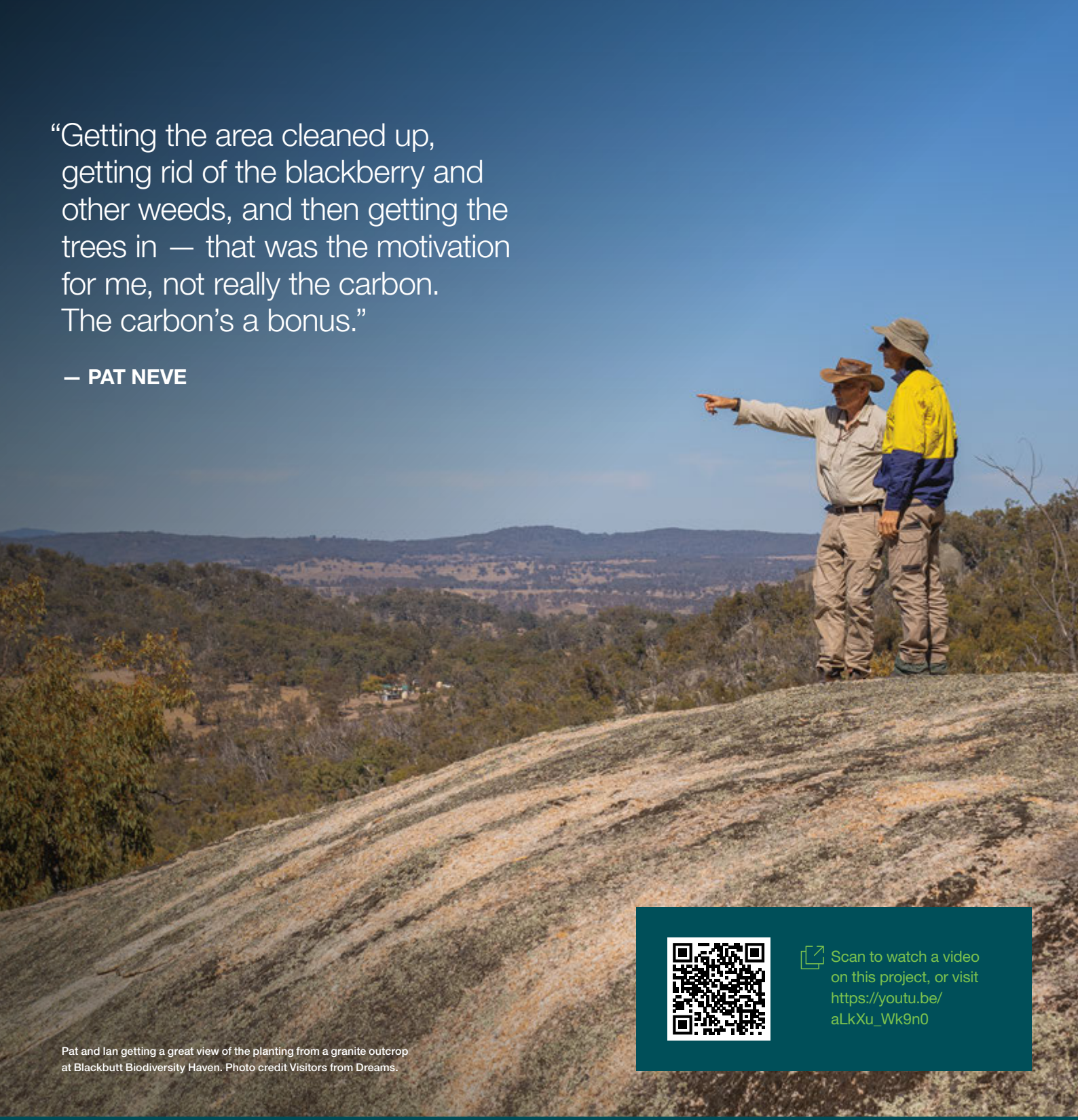
From Greening Australia's perspective, it's been good to experience delivering a carbon project that aligns with and contributes to the property's strong conservation values. Restoration Operations Lead Ian Rayner said:

> **"It's a great use of carbon funds actually, incentivising that all-in approach."**

The Greening Australia team have also been very appreciative of Pat and Debi's pragmatic, solutions-focused approach to managing and prioritising control of invasive species such as blackberry and wild goats, which has been (and will continue to be) important for the success of this planting.

While most of the site is growing well, well above average rainfall led to waterlogging in some patches. Working with nature, such variations are expected and planned for, so there has been some infill planting with species that are better adapted in affected areas.

Pat with one of the seedlings planted in 2024, now two years old.
Photo credit Visitors from Dreams.



"Getting the area cleaned up, getting rid of the blackberry and other weeds, and then getting the trees in — that was the motivation for me, not really the carbon. The carbon's a bonus."

— PAT NEVE

Pat and Ian getting a great view of the planting from a granite outcrop at Blackbutt Biodiversity Haven. Photo credit Visitors from Dreams.

Scan to watch a video on this project, or visit https://youtu.be/aLkXu_Wk9n0

For more information, contact Greening Australia | 1300 886 589 | greeningaustralia.org.au/contact

For a no-obligation chat about biodiverse carbon plantings on your land, register your interest at: greeningaustralia.org.au/landholders

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