

Exceptional native plant diversity across the Upper Coldstream region

In 2013, grant funding was received from the Australian Government to implement environmental projects such as weed control, pest animal eradication and improved bush fire management across the nationally-significant Upper Coldstream region. As the lead project partner, the Clarence Environment Centre, coordinated by John Edwards, was instrumental in driving the development of the project, engaging over 40 landholders and planning work across over 4000 hectares of ecologically significant bushland.

The project team knew the Upper Coldstream region was significant for its vegetation connectivity, flora and fauna species and other ecological and biodiversity values, however it wasn't until systematic plant surveys commenced across the area that the true extent, diversity and significance began to be realised.

Driven by the botanical expertise of John Edwards, month by month, year by year, the species list began to expand with regular new discoveries of plants previously unknown in the area and many species being found far further north or south than the scientific community previously knew.

Of great importance was that the species lists on each property – often numbering in the hundreds – were provided to the landholders so that they could appreciate that their “bush block” was in fact much more special, unique and significant - and deserving of appropriate management to protect and enhance this biodiversity. Landholders were provided with training and mentoring in best-practice management to conserve the ecological values on their land.

As the project drew to a close in 2017, John Edwards was still targeting surveys to build our knowledge – focussing on native grass species at the right time of year that they could be identified while in seed and spending Autumn and early Winter uncovering diverse orchid populations – in some cases ten different species on a single property. Many plants uncovered were rare or endangered species.

After four years, a staggering 1030 different plant species had been identified across the project area, with more still being examined and catalogued – the result of an incredible dedication to botany as well as a great commitment to increasing the interest and awareness of landholders who have the important role of managing the land on which this amazing biodiversity occurs.



The nationally Endangered Hairy Melichrus
Melichrus hirsutus

The effort, perseverance and achievement of John Edwards in this field of botany, environmental planning and habitat restoration is exceptional and rarely matched in Australian natural resource management. The result of his work was one of the greatest achievements of the Federally-funded Upper Coldstream Biodiversity Project. This contribution is deserving of commendation and recognition of the long-term knowledge he's created and the landscape-scale conservation outcomes he has achieved.

