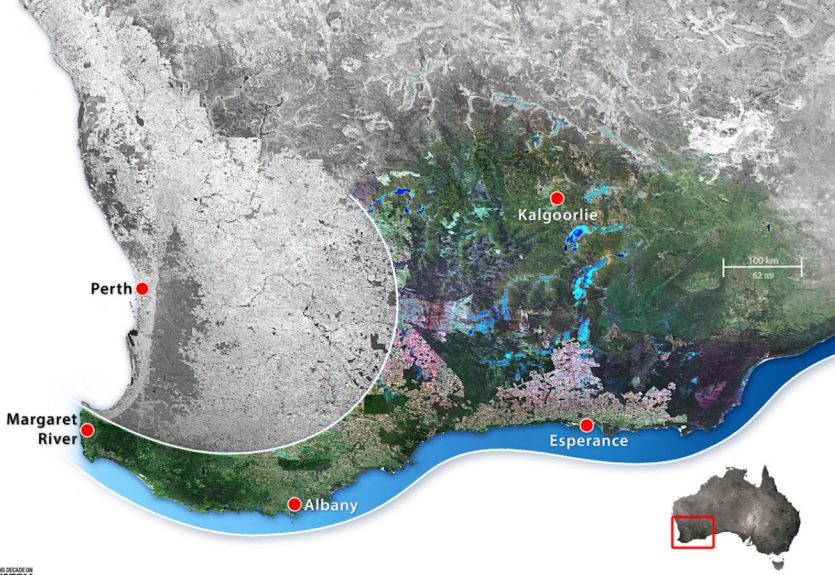


# GONDWANA LINK'S 1,000 KILOMETRES OF HOPE

Gondwana Link is a not-for-profit organisation operating through a small team based in Albany to support a cohesive program involving over 50 groups, businesses, and individuals. Gondwana Link works in a range of projects from Margaret River on the west coast through to the woodlands bordering the Nullarbor Plain. The organization's aim is to achieve the level of transformative change that enables natural ecosystems to have the health and resilience needed to thrive in the face of global climate change.

While Gondwana Link focuses on changing land-use in strategic areas to support biodiversity and ecological function, it is also involved in a wider range of efforts, including support for Noongar and Ngadju colleagues, eco-art events, and the development of environmentally responsible tourism. The South Coast Alliance area includes much of Gondwana Link's central zone where the bulk of the work is to reduce fragmentation of the remaining wildlife habitats through large-scale strategically placed ecological restoration



**Gondwana Link**  
connecting people...connecting nature

A #Founding50 project for #GenerationRestoration

## BACKGROUND

South-western Australia is now recognized as one of the world's most significant biodiversity hotspots, with levels of biological richness only comparable with tropical rainforests. Extensive areas of the Great Southern were cleared for agriculture after WW2, which fragmented the habitats and broke the long-standing evolutionary pathway. This pathway extended from the wet forests to the semi-arid inland ecosystems and was pivotal in the evolution of much of this richness. The current Gondwana Link program was formed in 2002 with a focus on restoring the core of the evolutionary pathway and giving the ecosystems a better chance of adapting to the local stresses as well as the global climate change that is now upon it. Under all current climate change scenarios, as south-western Australia gets hotter and dryer, species and genetic material will tend to move south. Gondwana Link's programs cover the area, which is as far south as they can go, without swimming, so ensuring it is a healthy, resilient, and connected ecosystem is of paramount importance.

## CHALLENGE

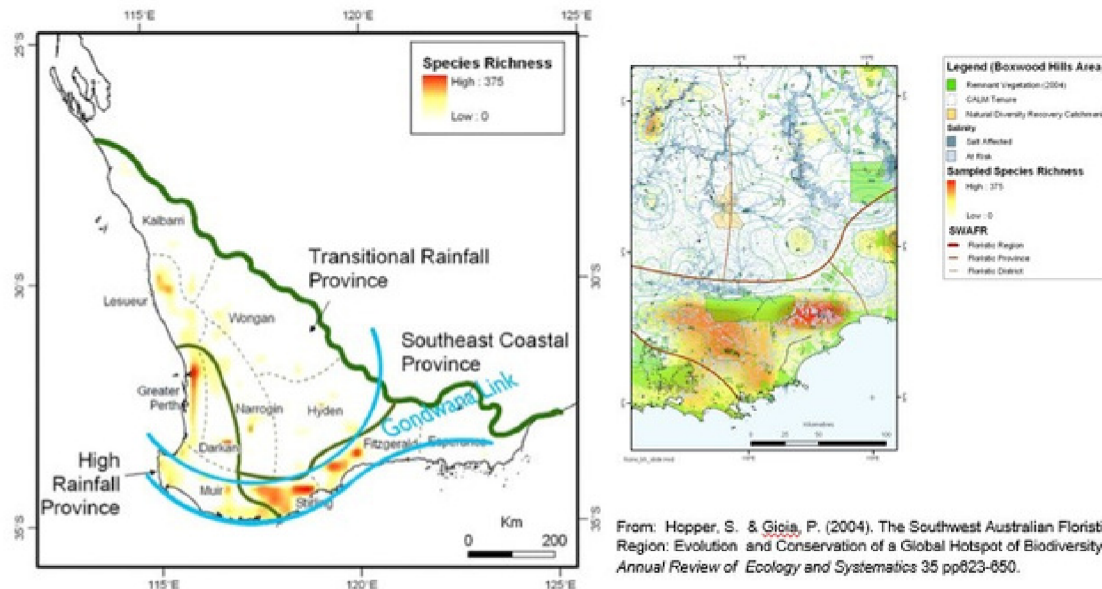
Most of Gondwana Link's 1000km program is intact habitat, with the key habitat gaps, of less than 90kms all up, being in the South Coast Alliance council and adjoining council areas. Here the focus has been on working with groups, businesses, and individuals to secure strategically placed land with important remaining habitat or where quality restoration can strengthen populations of key plant and wildlife species. This involves numerous challenges from meeting the financial costs of the program through to ensuring the work also strengthens the community fabric in areas where the farmer population is already falling. Gondwana Link also works, where it can, to strengthen the Noongar presence and management ability on their traditional lands, which brings a range of social, cultural, and environmental benefits.

## SOLUTION

For Gondwana Link, the way forward has been to throw itself on the goodwill of the national and global community, working to attract substantial private funding for their core tasks. Additionally, instead of detailed scientific planning that takes years, Gondwana Link established a very succinct, and strategic, four-point strategy and made the first 'no regrets' moves on the clearly obvious steps forward, effectively creating the momentum that builds further momentum. The underlying policy is that every step forward must be worthwhile in itself while also contributing to the larger change the organisation is seeking. As expected, to a fair extent, this 'sets the pace,' attracting others to undertake additional science at little cost to the core effort while also encouraging Australian not-for-profit groups to be more ambitious, which was one of the outcomes sought by an early major funder.



## Gondwana Link covers much of the botanically richest areas in south-western Australia



## IMPLEMENTATION

The first stage saw a number of marginal farming properties, most of which are at least half existing habitat, secured for conservation ownership and the cleared areas replanted. Property selection is guided by a very basic set of criteria but also by the properties available, most of which have been on the market for several years. As the program matures, Gondwana Link works across the various groups and areas to establish core Conservation Action Plans that provide strategic overviews for a range of actions.

It is important, of course, to work in parallel with and where possible strengthen local groups and their ongoing projects. Additionally, wise use of private funding enables some of the government funding coming to the region to be deployed far more usefully than might otherwise have been the case.

Gondwana Link continues to facilitate, and where necessary, operate the overall program through a small core group, which keeps overheads to an absolute minimum and frees up funding for on-ground works. Despite the success of this approach, Gondwana Link is committed to reviewing processes for ongoing organisational sustainability.

Having attracted some of the larger non-government groups to the program and assisted in building their fundraising capacity, in recent years the focus has shifted more to impact investment funding – groups and people seeking to get a reasonable rate of return on their funding while also achieving significant ecological, cultural, and social benefits. The payments possible through carbon sequestration are a main element here, and Gondwana Link is very conscious that while we largely use carbon payments as an enabler, not a commercial end in itself, the program makes some very significant contributions to the amount of atmospheric carbon sequestered across the region.

In recent years, Gondwana Link has also broadened the profile of the program to reach a much wider audience, locally, nationally, and beyond through a range of mediums, including film, sculptures, narratives, restoration tourism, and the performing arts.



Chapter 3 The Stars Descend, Porongurup by Annette Carmichael Project. Photo by Nic Duncan



Chapter 3 The Stars Descend, Porongurup by Annette Carmichael Project. Photo by Nic Duncan



# RESULTS

Given the urgency of biodiversity loss and climate change impacts in south-western Australia, Gondwana Link acknowledges that more could have been achieved by now. However, the organization feels it is well on the way to having connected habitats in place across the 1000kms of the Link, along with improved environmental management in many of the main habitat areas. There is, however, a deep concern about the increasing impact of key stresses in parts of the Link, particularly the heightened incidence of fire.

Gondwana Link, though not privy to all the details of funds raised and various arrangements made by groups contributing to achieving the Link, is aware of over \$100 million in private funding raised and spent on various projects since 2002. This substantial funding has resulted in the securing of some 23,000 hectares of private land for conservation. Among these, over 10,000 hectares are existing habitat, while around 13,000 hectares are earmarked for planting back using solid ecological standards. Most of this land is located in or adjoining the South Coast Alliance shires. While not all land is as strategically located as Gondwana Link would prefer due to the vagaries of purchasing on the open market, the majority is land that, by modern standards, would not have been allocated to agriculture. It includes some very ecologically significant habitats, vast rocky areas, breakaways, sodic soils, salt lakes, and even a substantial waterfall in one instance. The planting of these properties contributes significantly to achieving sustainable land-use across these areas.

Evidence indicates the successful return of wildlife to ecologically restored areas, and spatial analysis across the habitat gaps in the Link suggests Gondwana Link has already improved ecological connectivity by over 30%. These achievements have not only had environmental impacts but have also rejuvenated the social fabric in many areas. Notable examples include the Nowanup property in Jerramungup Shire, serving as the base for a range of cultural camps and courses, averaging almost a thousand visitors per year since 2005. Other properties with significant scientific and visitor activity include Chingarrup Sanctuary, Red Moort, Twin Creeks, Tootenallup, and now Eungedup.



*Tag-along Tour Chingarrup Sanctuary. Photo by Carol Duncan*

The Gondwana Link program has generated over 110 scientific papers, featured in four books, and inspired one feature film. A display at the WA Museum Boola Bardip showcases short videos of the work across Gondwana Link. In 2023, a series of five community-developed contemporary dance performances across Gondwana Link delivered the message to its booked-out audiences that climate change can be tackled in positive ways – there is hope in community action. Gondwana Link Ltd's popular Heartland Journeys website is attracting and informing visitors to the region about both the natural wonders and the impressive human stories of ecological achievement in a time of climate change.



*Yarrabee ute April 2019. Photo by Blair Parsons*

Momentum continues to grow across the Link. In the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Financial Years, the core team leveraged some \$30 of project funding for every \$1 of private funding spent on their core program. Moreover, 2021-2030 has been declared the United Nations Environment Program's Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, working in conjunction with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization. Gondwana Link was honoured to be selected as one of the #founding50 implementers of the Decade, the only Australian program so chosen.



*Chapter 3 The Stars Descend, Porongurup by Annette Carmichael Project. Photo by Nic Duncan*