

# Foreword



Brush-tailed phascogale.

The woodlands of Australia have an important place in the economic and social development of Australia: they are the source of many images which have become popular and enduring national emblems. Woodland landscapes of gum and box trees which were embraced and painted by the likes of Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton and Hans Heysen – painters whose work shaped the way Australians viewed the landscape. For a largely urban population, these landscapes became the quintessential image of the Australian bush.

Our woodlands are also the birthplace of the Australian pastoral industry. Following European settlement the relatively fertile woodland soils quickly attracted attention and large areas were cleared for cropland and towns, or were grazed and converted to exotic pasture. The conversion of temperate eucalypt woodlands to agricultural land represents one of the most significant vegetation changes in Australian history.

Despite their iconic status, temperate eucalypt woodlands are among the most poorly conserved and threatened ecosystems in Australia, having borne the brunt of agricultural development and land degradation for well over 150 years. Australia's remaining temperate eucalypt woodlands are undoubtedly under threat across much of their range. Considering the magnitude of the problems which face many of the remaining eucalypt woodlands in temperate Australia, it is only recently that we have begun to understand how these woodlands work and how they might be conserved and restored.

Most of the big conservation efforts in Australia seem to centre on either tall forests or coral reefs. Woodlands seem to attract less attention despite their place in the national psyche. And yet the woodlands are probably more in need of urgent conservation action than either forests or reefs.

This book is a wonderful window into the world of Australia's woodlands. I hope it will inspire a generation of Australians to rediscover this world, recognise its value, and invest effort in ensuring its persistence.

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