

EIGHT STEPS TO CONSERVE DIVERSE UNDERSTOREYS IN GRASSY WOODLANDS

Ian D. Lunt, Suzanne M. Prober and Kevin R. Thiele

1. Prevent further losses: so little temperate woodland remains in most regions that all remnants must be conserved and degrading processes avoided.
2. Promote diverse solutions: diverse policy and management approaches are needed to capture the wide mix of woodland conditions, land tenures and management objectives.
3. Protect small patches: all else being equal, bigger patches are better, but small remnants are critical, as remnants containing high quality understoreys are typically small.
4. Adopt ecological management: many woodlands on productive soils require regular burning, crash grazing or slashing to promote plant diversity.
5. Restore degraded woodlands: degraded woodlands need to be revegetated and restored to promote plant diversity, control weeds and achieve sustainable woodland landscapes.
6. Reduce soil nutrients: a continuing restoration challenge is to develop techniques to reduce elevated soil nutrient levels, as weeds out-compete native plants on disturbed and fertilised soils.
7. Manage for climate change: conserve networks of diverse patches, especially interconnected, little-disturbed remnants on unfertilised soils, as these have the greatest potential to support native plants and resist exotic invasion.
8. Coordinate and support individual efforts: this vision must be coordinated and supported through a national system of management networks and stewardship schemes.

Introduction

For over 20 years we have been fortunate to work in some of Australia's most beautiful ecosystems: remnant grassy woodlands and grasslands in the wheat–sheep belt. Our research has focused on one of the most sensitive components of woodland biodiversity – the native