

Headline: One tree at a time: Melville Rotary helps locals offset climate change with mass tree plantings

Melville Rotary is helping budding young conservationists learn the importance of caring for the environment to offset climate change, funding a local group that has planted nearly 500,000 seedlings across Western Australia.

Led by Trees Australia Landcare Consultant Bruce Ivers and supported by the Rotary Club of Melville, the innovative project has recruited local children in one of the largest school-based tree planting programs in Australia.

As well as organising mass tree planting events, Trees Australia initiates research, farm and sanctuary visits, camps, guided bushwalks and the sharing of cultural knowledge by Noongar educators.

Bruce, a former farmer from Kojonup in the Great Southern region, has worked with schools, farmers, corporations, community groups and landcare organisations to plant almost 500,000 seedlings with over 6500 school students.



The planting events span across Perth and the state's South-West from Myalup Beach near Bunbury, north to New Norcia and south-east to Pingelly and Katanning.

In the past eight years, Melville Rotary has contributed more than \$30,000 towards Bruce's tree planting projects, which have involved students from a range of schools, including Ardross Primary School, Applecross Senior High School and Santa Maria College.

The impetus of the projects started in 2008 when Bruce worked with Ardross Primary School to create a native garden. The scope of the project grew and by the time it was completed six years later, native species had been planted in 2000sqm of the school.

At the same time, Bruce and the students cultivated seedlings in the school nursery to be planted on salt-affected land in the wheatbelt. Initially, Bruce and a group of farmers planted the seedlings. But as interest grew, he trained students how to use Pottiputki-style tree planters and began mass planting excursions to wheatbelt farms.

It was after the 2016 bushfires that decimated Yarloop and Waroona, burning more than 69,000ha of land, destroying 160 homes and claiming two lives, that several Ardross Primary School children initiated a project to help locals in the area.

This included growing 1900 marri seedlings in the school nursery, which were planted at a former go-kart track near Yarloop. The following year, Bruce enlisted children from 10 Perth schools to plant 20,000 seedlings in a mass revegetation around Yarloop in shire reserves. "That was the early days of this program and with an enthusiastic group of schools wanting to help the people of Yarloop, the support of Melville Rotary funding the tree planters was vital," Bruce said.



Following the success of the Yarloop plantings, Bruce led the planting of a 900m stretch of foredunes on 40ha of shire land north of Myalup in 2018 – and since then, kids from up to six schools have taken part in the annual planting, with Bruce pivoting his farming nous to coastal vegetation.

The events have included scientific trials by the students to test a range of site management techniques to determine if any significantly increase seedling survival rates. Data from observations has been used by schools to teach statistics and scientific reporting.

In 2022, Melville Rotary won a \$20,000 environmental grant to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee. With the funding they planted 1450 banksia seedlings at Blackwall Reach Reserve, Bicton in partnership with Trees Australia, the City of Melville, the Bicton Environmental Action Group and local schools.

Santa Maria students planted the seedlings and staged a scientific trial to assess seedling survival and growth rates in different conditions.

The project is still rallying community support with locals as well as Rotary members volunteering their time on a watering and care roster.



"Melville Rotary were instrumental in the success of this program, providing the enthusiasm and energy to get it happening on a big scale," Bruce said.

He said he was incredibly grateful for the support of Melville Rotary.

"These projects don't happen individually, they aren't standalone. They happen because as one is going on, it becomes a catalyst for another, and the Rotary Club of Melville has always been a keen supporter," he said.

"Landcare work in the country is usually done at scale and I aim to bring that scale thinking to tree planting with kids so that we do a lot in a short period of time. Melville Rotary's

support has helped me put together a program so I could teach the kids the skills for planting at scale.

“Frankly, I want the kids to develop hope and confidence. That’s what this is really all about – giving the kids skills and hope that they can make a difference and the confidence to start.

“All this comes about because of Melville Rotary supporting what I do. We couldn’t have done it to the extent that we have without their support.”

