

# ripe for renewal

Two communities in regional Victoria have turned unloved acreage into flourishing public spaces – and won awards for their efforts, writes **SALLY FELDMAN**



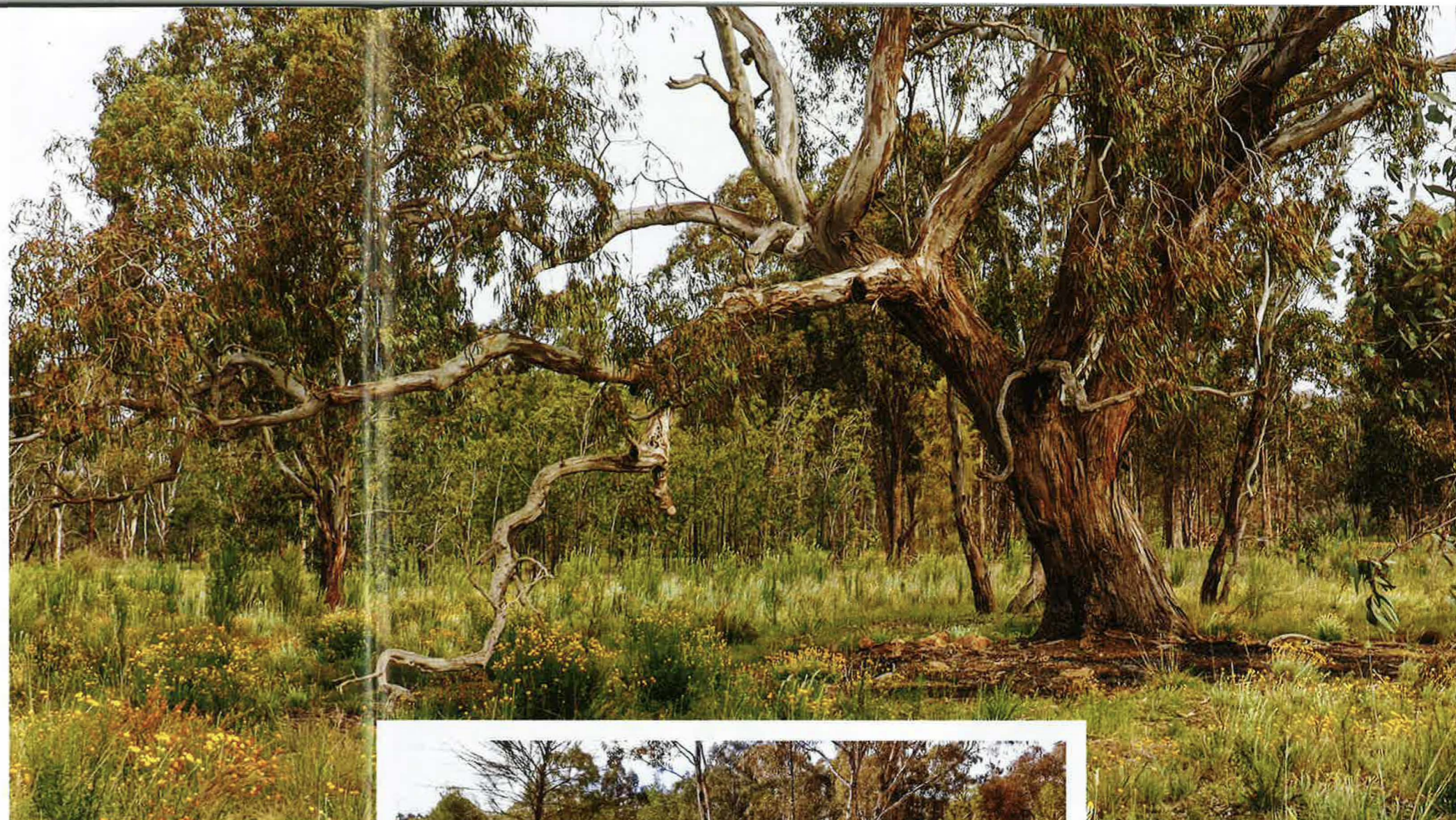
## EUROA ARBORETUM

**These former sheep paddocks have been slowly restored to create a place of learning, growth and recreation**

The prestigious Premier's Sustainability Awards, an annual awards program held in Victoria, showcased an extraordinary range of initiatives this year. Among them was the Euroa Arboretum, which took out the title of Community Champion in the Thriving Environment category. It also received one

of the highest honours of the ceremony, the Premier's Regional Recognition Award.

It's a shining example of what can be achieved by dedicated volunteers working hand in hand with Traditional Owners. What was once 27ha of weed-infested, degraded former sheep paddocks (and a VicRoads depot while the Hume Freeway bypass was being constructed) has been restored over 20-odd years to its pre-colonial state as a thriving grassy woodland ecosystem.



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT** Euroa Arboretum's grassy woodland is thriving as a result of restoration work; old trees provide homes for wildlife; the wetlands area; red-anther wallaby grass.

The first task was to learn from the Taungurung Traditional Owners how to manage the site, working with them to control the weeds. Also, volunteers used a century-old Furphy spike roller (found by executive officer, Cathy Olive) to recreate the pitted soil environment caused by the native animals that originally inhabited the landscape, so seeds could be dispersed more effectively. "The spiker has been superseded by a more modern aerator," says Cathy, "but it was very effective."

Scraping and disturbing the topsoil, compounded with weed suppression, also helped to germinate ancient pea species such as Euroa guinea flower, which had long been dormant in the seedbank. "We could be seeing plants that may have been subsumed for 100 years," says Cathy.



Other plants were added by hand and through seeding – some 60 species of daisies, grasses, lilies and peas – slowly returning the grassland to its original diversity and structure. With them came fauna, including an increasing number of diamond firetail finches, eastern bearded dragons, skinks and all manner of insects and other reptiles. Nest boxes and old trees have now become home to sugar gliders and squirrel gliders.

Euroa Arboretum has also become an educational hub and meeting place for the community, with Bush Kinder groups of five-year-olds collecting seeds or looking for animal prints, and gardening clubs and Landcare groups helping to harvest seed and sow the grasslands. The collaboration between the land's Taungurung custodians and volunteers ensures the grassland's restoration will be managed and expanded long term. The plant nursery is open from



April to November, selling about 60,000 indigenous plants, from grasses and sedges to trees, for revegetation across the region – expanding the horizons of this invaluable enterprise into the future. [euroaarboretum.com.au](http://euroaarboretum.com.au) ►

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STEVE PROTHERO, EUROA ARBORETUM