

Conservation, research and Christian faith:
points of connection

Andrew Bennett



Scientist (coined ~1830s)

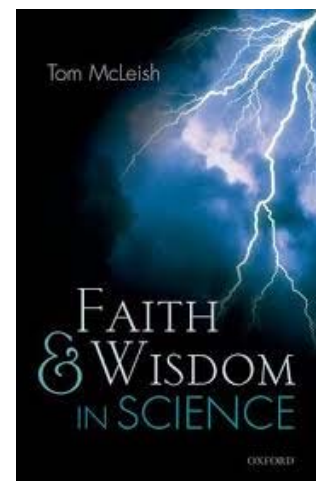
scio 'I know'

Natural philosopher

philia 'love'

sophia 'wisdom'

'love of wisdom of natural things'



Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket? Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food?

Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? Do you know the months till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth? ...

Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high? He dwells on a cliff and stays there at night; a rocky crag is his stronghold. (Job Ch 39)



Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? ...

When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world. I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary ... (Prov 8)

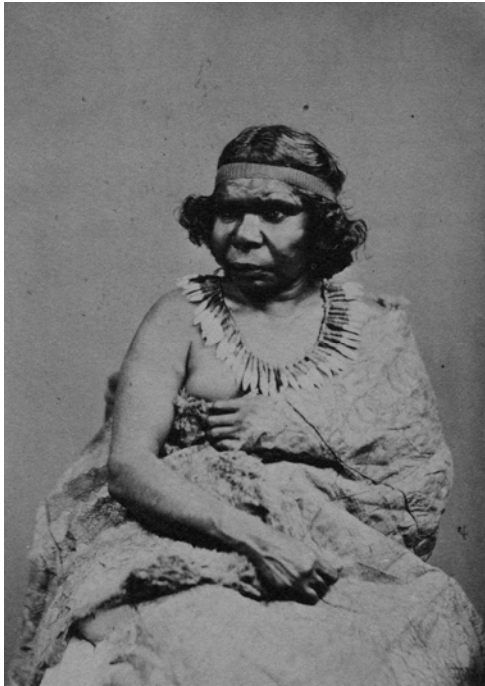




Woolsthorpe,
western Victoria,
(approx. 2002)



Woolsthorpe in 1866



YARRUUN PARPUR TARNEEN
(Victorious)

'Chiefess of the Morporr tribe'

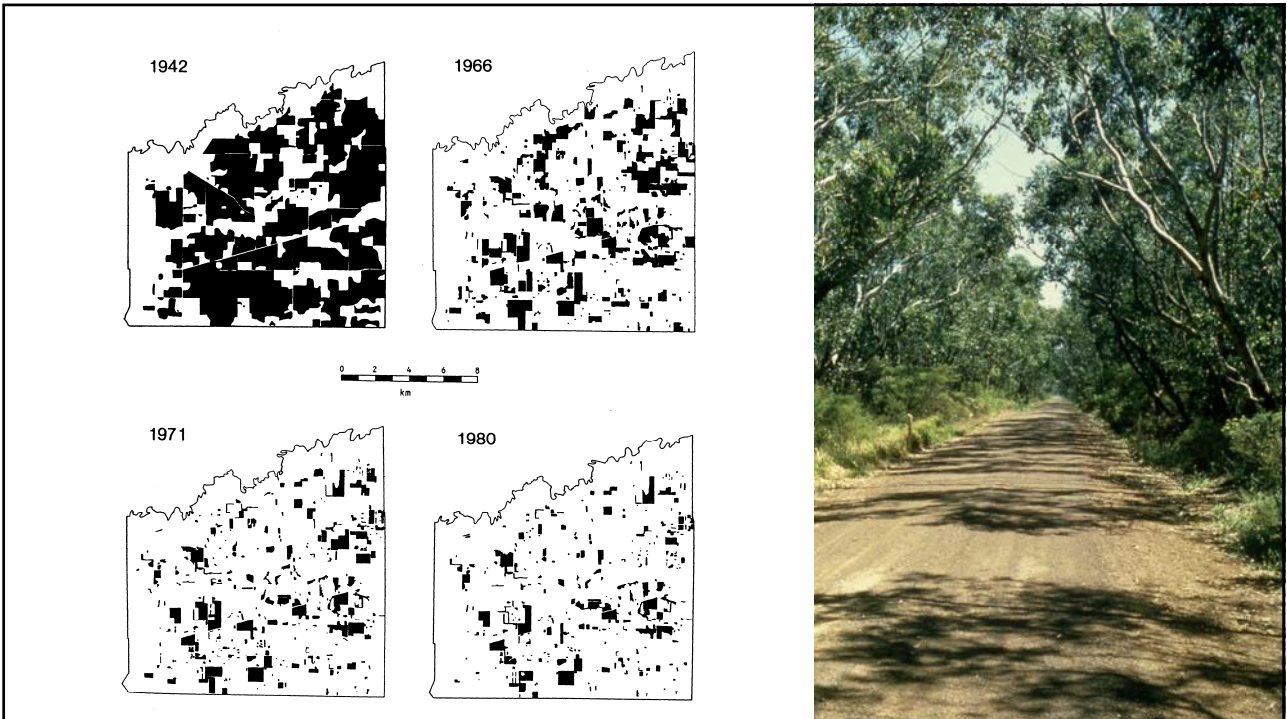
James Dawson 1861



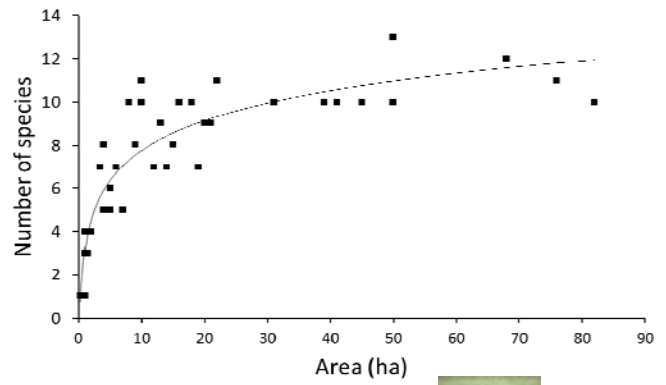


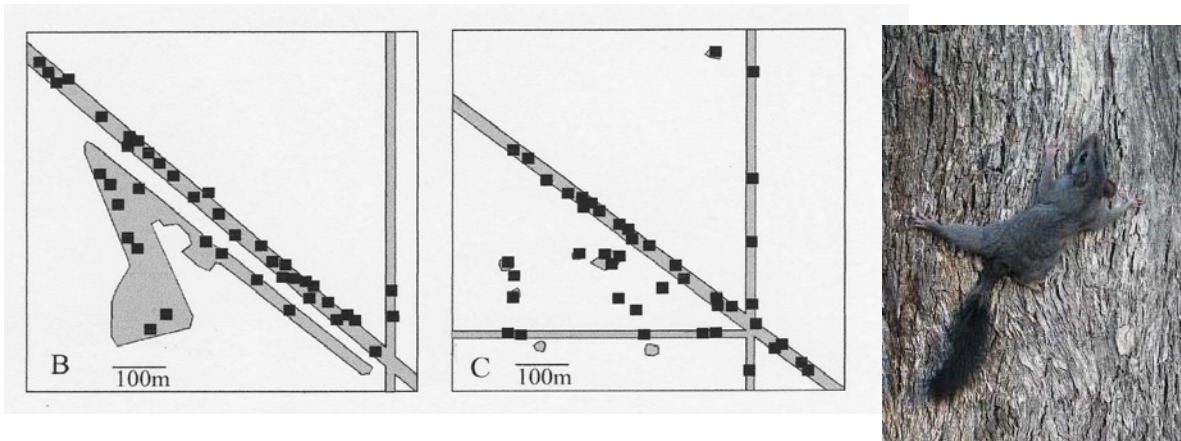
A veteran Grey Box

Landscape
change in the
lifetime of a
single tree



Native mammals and fragments of forest in farmland





Home ranges of female Brush-tailed Phascogales in a linear network at Euroa, Victoria (mean 5.0 ha cf ~40 ha in forest) (van der Ree et al. 2001)



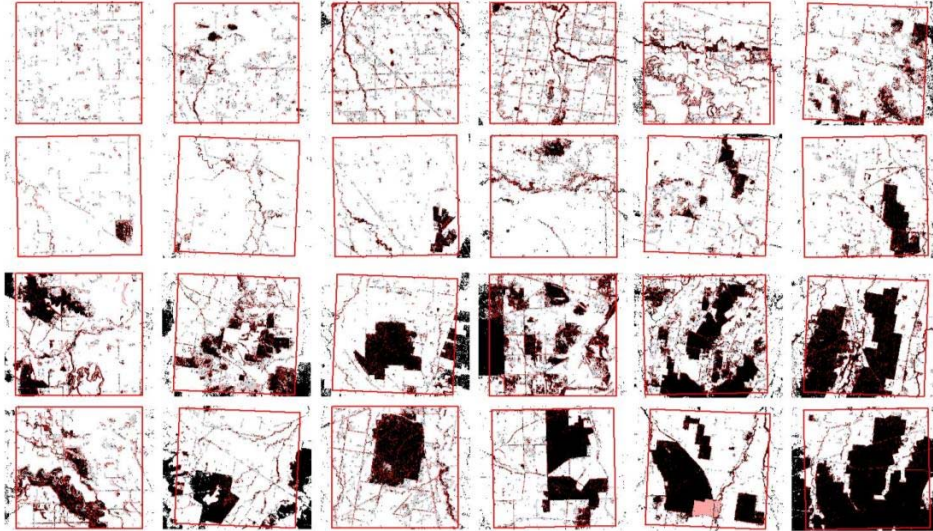
Landscapes are mosaics

How might the properties of 'whole mosaics' affect their value for conservation?

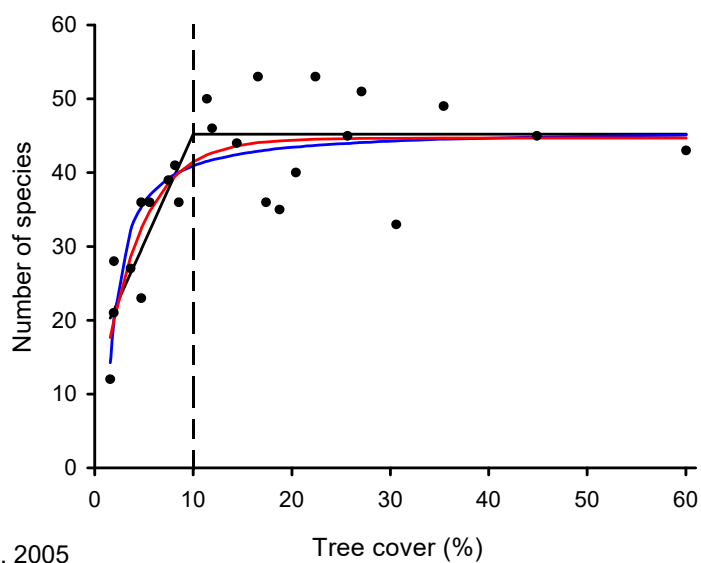
Are there particularly important components?



Tree cover in 'whole' landscapes (10 x 10 km)



Species richness of woodland birds vs landscape tree cover



Radford et al. 2005



Streamside vegetation – disproportionate value

Distinctive species of birds

Greater richness / site

Disproportionate contribution to the overall bird community in low-cover landscapes



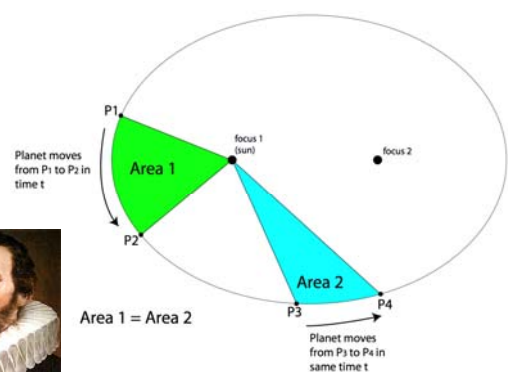
Some points of connection:
a personal perspective



1. Thinking, learning, striving to understand the world around us, is part of the way we love and serve God

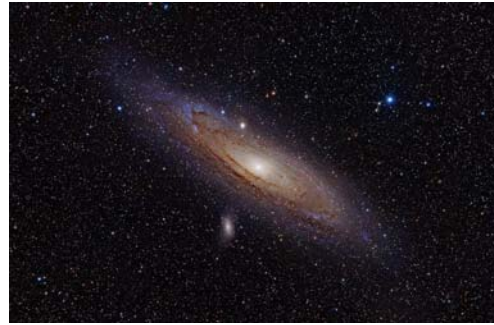
“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” (Luke 10: 27)

“I was merely thinking God's thoughts after him”.
(Johannes Kepler)



2. A sense of awe and wonder

“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? Psalm 8:3-4

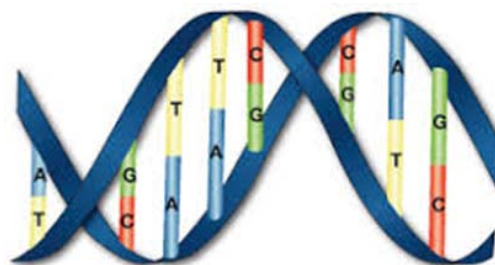


Andromeda Galaxy
24,000,000,000,000,000 kms away
1,000,000,000,000 stars!



Lesser Long-eared Bat

DNA double helix and
base pairs
(humans – 3 billion)



Thymine (Yellow) = T Guanine (Green) = G
Adenine (Blue) = A Cytosine (Red) = C

3. God as creator of all



“Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith.” (Luke 12: 27-28)

“For you created my inmost being: you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made ... My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139)



‘Creation’ is ongoing – not a ‘once off’
- God sustains and upholds all of life

Hold in tension ‘God as creator’ and scientific capacity to explain different phenomena

- a) different explanations for the same phenomena
- b) beware of ‘God of the gaps’ arguments

Creation is not all ‘beautiful’ and ‘lovely’

4. Stewardship and responsibility

‘The Earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it; ... (Psalm 24)

- how we perceive and interpret change
- responsibility for how we use science
- the role of science in restoration





5. A message of hope

How we approach life (and science)

- there is meaning and purpose
- live out Christian values (grace, love for neighbour, humility, servanthood etc)
- be careful of doom and gloom (extinctions, pollution)
- a message of hope that the world can be a better place



Your thoughts

What are the points of connection between science and Christian faith for you?

What does it mean for you to 'love God with all your mind'?

What gives you a sense of awe?

How do you think of God as 'creator'?

What responsibility do we have to God for how we use the earth?

What are 'signs of hope' for the world?

