

Another Conservation Success Story...

Dawson County, Georgia

December 2008

Owners Work to Save Marsupials at Georgia's One-of-a-Kind Kangaroo Conservation Center near Dawsonville

Who would believe that located in the hills of Dawson County, there exists an 87-acre preserve created for the protection and conservation of kangaroos?

Owners, Roger and Debbie Nelson started a private exotic animal breeding facility and wildlife sanctuary in the 1980s. Just four years later, they acquired their first pair of kangaroos and became fascinated with the animals.

Kangaroos have a history of not living long in captivity and suffering numerous health problems. The Nelsons were determined to change that. In 1999, they bought a tract of land near Dawsonville and spent the next year creating a proper habitat for raising kangaroos. The kangaroos needed plenty of grass to eat, an area large enough to roam in and access to clean drinking water. Louise McPherson, soil conservationist for the USDA-



had to be graded to build the lake," said McPherson. Today the grass is plentiful and the lake area is fully grown in with grass but the center still has concerns. "That lake is man-made, but it's fed by a spring—a tremendous spring. There is also a natural stream that

crosses through our property. A number of years ago, a water quality study was done, and it was determined that the water leaving the lake was cleaner, than when it entered the lake.

"We take great pride in the fact that we house our animals in an appropriate manner, in terms of their spatial, dietary and social requirements. As the animals are extraordinarily active, they can wear paths in the common travel or rest areas, and as such, these fields will need periodic attention and repair," said Jeremy Maneyapanda, the facility manager.

Something we have to be concerned with is how this water entering our property may affect our facility as a whole. There is an enormous watershed that flows through this property. As this essentially reaches nearly our entire collection, we have no choice to be worried about the water quality and how it may affect our ani-

mals," said Maneyapanda. Kangaroos forage all day. To keep the grass growing and plentiful, the center uses rotational grazing. "The guys that we looked at in the last field, they actually live in this field. We moved them over there, got this stable and strong; in a couple of months we'll



The lake area where the NRCS helped the Kangaroo Conservation Center seed the land for grazing and helped clean the water that comes into the lake has turned into a natural wildlife area.

move them back over and repeat the process," said Maneyapanda.

He explained that they gained other benefits also from taking care of the lake and the land around it. "We originally exhibited exotic waterfowl at the lake, but we have since found it to be better suited as a natural water source for the native wildlife. We get the typical Canadian geese, mallard ducks, and great blue herons, turtles, and non-venomous snakes, but we also see some interesting non-typical life, such as belted kingfishers, wood ducks, a transient beaver, and even an unusual snow goose. It's wonderfully suited as a home for wildlife." "We take a lot of pride in making sure our animals' health, safety, and security are our priority.

"We provide an entertaining, and also very educational experience for our visitors. We want people to learn more about animals, about nature, conservation, ecology and all the critical aspects of these issues."

Jeremy Maneyapanda

These animals thrive only when certain conditions are met regarding their habitats and husbandry," said Maneyapanda. There was no specific conservation program used to help the center, according to McPherson. All of the service provided was under the conservation technical assistance that the agency provides free-of-charge. "Working together is what it takes; personal contacts and sharing," McPherson said.



NRCS State Conservationist James Tillman, (left), talks with Jeremy Maneyapanda about conservation concerns at the Kangaroo Conservation Center in Dawsonville.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was there in the beginning. "I first worked with the KCC when they started building their center to move their animals up here from Alpharetta. There were some erosion and water quality issues with trying to establish pasture and clean up the pond. I stopped in one day and introduced myself and offered our technical assistance for helping to solve them," McPherson said. She recommended starting with soil samples to determine when and what to plant to control the ero-

active, they can wear paths in the common travel or rest areas, and as such, these fields will need periodic attention and repair," said Jeremy Maneyapanda, the facility manager.

Something we have to be concerned with is how this water entering our property may affect our facility as a whole. There is an enormous watershed that flows through this property. As this essentially reaches nearly our entire collection, we have no choice to be worried about the water quality and how it may affect our ani-

Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D
706-894-1591

 **NRCS** Natural Resources
Conservation Service
706-265-2374

**Upper Chattahoochee River Soil
And Water Conservation District**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.