Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4586

Lever, Lillian

Occupation Businesswoman, Farmer

Summary

Lillian Lever was nominated for the ABC Rural Woman of the Year Award in 1995, for the Queensland district of Capricornia. She and her husband, John, established the first privately run crocodile farm in Australia, in Rockhampton, in 1980. Given that, at the time, Lillian was a C.S.I.R.O. librarian, one might say that it was an interesting career move for her! But John had become fascinated by crocodiles in Papua New Guinea when he ran wildlife research stations there in the 1970s. He offered Lillian what she describes as a package deal; marriage and the chance to move from Melbourne to start a new business in Rockhampton. Koorana Crocodile farm opened in November 1981 stocked with captured crocodiles from the wild that were proving to be a danger to people.

Details

The fact that Koorana still exists and thrives is testament to the perseverance of Lillian and John. When they first started up, there were no guidelines for them to refer to on how to start up a crocodile farm. As crocodiles are an endangered species in Australia, there was no precedent for establishing a business and, according to Lillian, the people in the Department of Primary Industry believed them both to be mad! A chance meeting with the then Premier of Queensland, Joh Bjelke-Petersen at a function opened doors for them. They got the necessary permits which enabled them to begin the back-breaking work of building the farm.

This job was no picnic. Says Lillian, ‘It was horrific at times. We couldn’t afford a tractor so we had to clear manually. We lived in a caravan with two of John’s sons from his first marriage and the heat in summer was unbelievable. We had to keep everything shut up because of the mozzies and often I’d get heatstroke while cooking – the only air conditioning we had was in the car, so John and the boys would bundle me up and take me for a drive so I could cool down enough to keep cooking! It was the shared vision of what we could create together that kept us going through that really tough start-up phase.’

Fortunately, that vision has born significant fruit, and Koorana is not only a personal success story for the Lever family, but an important local employer.

Events

1995 - 1995
Nominated for ABC Rural Woman of the Year in Queensland

Published resources

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Resource Section
Women's Business, Women's Wealth, Ellis, Amanda, 2002,
http://www.wbww.com.au/womenarch.htm

1995 ABC Rural Woman of the Year Regional Winners, ABC Radio, 1995,
http://www.abc.net.au/rural/rwoty/previous95.htm#95reg

Site Exhibition
Brilliant Ideas and Huge Visions: ABC Radio Australian Rural Women of the Year - 1994-1997, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2011,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/rwya/rwya-home.html

Author Details
Nikki Henningham

Created 29 September 2010
Last modified 12 February 2019

Digital resources



Title: Photograph of Lillian Lever
Type: Image
Date: 3 May, 2023