

# Birds in hand worth two shows in the bush

**PHILIPPA PERRY**

It's not only rain that West Australian farmers have been praying for recently. Lonely bush bachelors in the State's rural regions are facing a drought of a different kind — a lack of women. And three years ago, local reality TV series *Desperately Seeking Sheila* came to the rescue.

*Desperately Keeping Sheila*, a one-hour special which screens on SBS tonight, is the much-anticipated follow-up to the 2004 series which set out to match-make love-starved farmers from WA with women from Australia and Britain keen to give rural life, and love, a go.

But now that the dust has settled and the branding of cows is not quite the novelty it once was, what has become of the rural Romeos and their city Sheilas?

This is the premise of *Desperately Keeping Sheila*, which follows the fortunes of three couples who decided to go the distance, so to speak, after filming finished.

It has been a case of happily ever after for Akubra-clad Shane Kelliher, a beef cattle farmer from Wandering, and bubbly Nicky Ames, a mortgage broker from Essex. The couple, who were not paired up on the show, met at the series wrap party in October 2004. They are now married with a baby boy.

"I think in total we spent 78 days together before we got married," Nicky laughs over the phone. "But for me it was an instant attraction . . . He arrived (at the wrap party) in RM Williams jeans and a white shirt and his hair was nice and I was like 'oh wow'."

For Shane, the feeling was mutual. "There was this little blonde with this explosive personality running around everywhere who was just so friendly and lovely," he says. But it was only after Nicky spent some time on his farm that he knew he had found the one. "She embraced the farm life and had a go at anything and everything," he says. "I think she knows more people in the community now than I do!"

Nicky, who spent a difficult month in Margaret River with hotel manager and playboy Pankaj Jain during the original series, says she hasn't had any trouble adjusting to country life. "I've always been the adventurous type," she says. "I don't really think moving to the other side of the world is a big deal."

But for many women it is. London socialite Georgea Blakely, who spent a month with Shane on his farm during the original series, summed up the modern female dilemma: "Who wants to eat steak every night? It's the same with a man and marriage. Now and again you want fish and chips."



**Together: Shane and Nicky Kelliher with son David, 10 months.** Picture: Danella Bevis

The difficulties of everyday life may also have taken their toll on the seemingly indissoluble partnership of Ian Nenke, a yabby farmer from Kukerin, and Katy Leighfield, a photographer from Derbyshire.

Viewers may also remember the more mature pairing of Mike Ramirez, a deli owner from Newman, and Ali Kingsley, an administration assistant from Perth. Their slow-burning courtship evolved into a relationship but the

couple recently faced a challenging period after Ali was diagnosed with breast cancer.

While the show will undoubtedly produce the odd lump in the throat, it is the irrepressible humanity, and often hilarity, of the couples that makes *Desperately Keeping Sheila* such honest and engaging television.

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**Desperately Keeping Sheila, SBS tonight at 730**

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