



# THREATENED SPECIES UPDATE

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*Phillip Island*  
**NATURE  
PARKS**

April 2019 -  
April 2020

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## Introduction

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I hope you are all keeping safe in these times which present challenges for us all - not least of which for our precious threatened species.

On Phillip Island (Morrowl) we remain committed to protecting threatened species and its habitat. We will also continue to advocate for the over 50 nationally threatened animal and plant species across Australia that have been hit hard by the recent bushfires and are being pushed to the brink. My team now values our island haven of Morrowl more highly and sees it having even a greater role to play in maintaining precious biodiversity in line with state and national plans.

I hope this update shares the passion and breadth of the projects that our team and community are currently engaged in to protect threatened species and to play our part in contributing to the nation's biodiversity.

Regards

**JESSICA MCKELSON**  
Conservation Manager  
Phillip Island Nature Parks

# Threatened Species Plan

In 2019, the Nature Parks launched the first Threatened Species Plan that complements our 5 Year Conservation Plan.

This Plan outlines the Nature Parks' approach to protecting resident threatened fauna and flora species such as Hooded plovers (*Thinornis cucullatus*), Eastern barred bandicoots (*Perameles gunnii*) and Crimson Berry (*Leptecophylla juniperina* subsp. *oxycedrus*). The Plan also details the species prioritisation process through Structured Decision Making with priority given to reintroducing regionally threatened species, including Bush stone-curlews (*Burhinus grallarius*) and Long-nosed potoroos (*Potorous tridactylus*) back to fox-free Phillip Island.

The Plan was presented to, and endorsed by, Australia's Threatened Species Commissioner, Dr Sally Box, in July 2019.



Left: L-R Jessica McKelson - Nature Parks (NP) Conservation Manager, Dr Sally Box - Threatened Species Commissioner, Dr Duncan Sutherland - NP Deputy Director of Research and Thomas Nixon - NP Threatened Species Officer at the Plans' presentation in July 2019.

Right: The Nature Parks Threatened Species Plan is currently available to Nature Parks staff and key stakeholders, with a public version being finalised.



## THREATENED SPECIES PLAN

Phillip Island  
**NATURE  
PARKS**

[penguins.org.au](http://penguins.org.au)  
Edition 1 2019

# Eastern Barred Bandicoots

(*Perameles gunnii*)

Populations of mainland Eastern barred bandicoots continue to do well on Phillip and Churchill Islands. Since January 2019, there have been 69 new animals recorded in the Summerland Peninsula population, 107 for Churchill Island and 38 new individuals recorded in Fishers Wetland on Phillip Island (adjacent to Churchill Island).

In the same time period volunteers have recorded a massive 1,270 hours assisting in this program. The Churchill Island population is stable, having reached its capacity on the island, but the Phillip Island population continues to spread and grow.

Last year marked another significant milestone in the recovery of this species, with Eastern barred bandicoots released onto neighboring French Island in a joint project with Zoos Victoria, Parks Victoria, the French Island community and Phillip Island Nature Parks.

The first release of 56 bandicoots on 11 October 2019 contained 40 individuals that were captured on Churchill Island the night before they were released onto French. This large bandicoot collection was undertaken with the invaluable assistance of Nature Parks community volunteers and French Island residents.

Subsequent monitoring of the Eastern barred bandicoots on Churchill Island, has shown the population has successfully bounced back to compensate for the removal of the 40 animals.

We now estimate that 300 Eastern barred bandicoots are living on Phillip Island after the initial release of 67 in 2017. Due to the success of this Phillip Island population, the State Government have said that for the first time in Victorian history, a species decline has been successfully reversed after previously being declared Extinct in the Wild. This is an incredible milestone in the species' recovery in Victoria and wouldn't be possible without the assistance of our staff, volunteers and project partners.



Eastern barred bandicoot release on French Island.



# Hooded Plovers (*Thinornis cucullatus*)

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This season (September 2019 to April 2020) there have been 41 breeding attempts by 19 pairs of Hooded plovers.

These pairs produced 90 eggs and 24 chicks - 9 of which successfully fledged. The chick to fledgling success was 37.5%, higher than the previous two seasons and the 10-year average. The Phillip Island population of Hooded Plovers has increased over the past 20 years and is now close to carrying capacity.

The Island population can now take on more of a regional role as a source of recruits for the Bass Coast and Mornington Peninsula.

Phillip Island Nature Parks volunteers have contributed almost 750 hours to Hooded plovers this season (compared to 450 hours last season) - especially noteworthy as COVID-19 restrictions have cut volunteering short this season.



# Fairy Terns (*Sternula nereis*)

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A colony of Fairy terns established on a Phillip Island Nature Parks managed site, Observation Point in late 2019. This is the first time the species have bred on the Island in decades!

This species is listed as Vulnerable in Victoria and the breeding colony on Phillip Island is an important population for Western Port with up to 30 fledglings recorded in February 2020 and over 60 adult birds seen around the site.

The removal of foxes from Phillip Island, ongoing feral cat control, weed removal and revegetation programs have undoubtedly contributed to the success of this colony this year.



# Threatened Flora

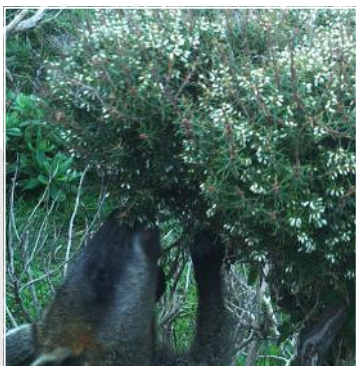
A Threatened Flora Recovery Plan is being finalised by the Conservation Department and focuses on the five flagship species presented in the Threatened Species Plan.

These action plans will outline in-depth actions for recovering our target threatened flora on Phillip Island. The focus on flagship species is intended to provide overarching protection to the habitats they represent.

## **CRIMSON BERRY** (*Leptocophylla juniperina* subsp. *oxycedrus*)

The iconic Crimson berry is known to exist at only two locations on Phillip Island; on the cliffs of Cape Woolamai and on a narrow stretch of steep coastline near YCW Beach. A study has been initiated on the population near YCW beach, aiming to establish what key threats influence the species.

Significant grazing by Swamp wallabies (*Wallabia bicolor*) was observed on camera traps - so a fence has been constructed around the plants to reduce this grazing pressure.



Left: Swamp wallabies  
browsing on the threatened  
Crimson berry bushes.



# Pest Animal Control

## FOXES

Phillip Island was declared fox-free in 2017, the culmination of a 10-year Fox Eradication Program.

This is the largest island in the world to achieve red fox eradication, and the only one with a large permanent human population.

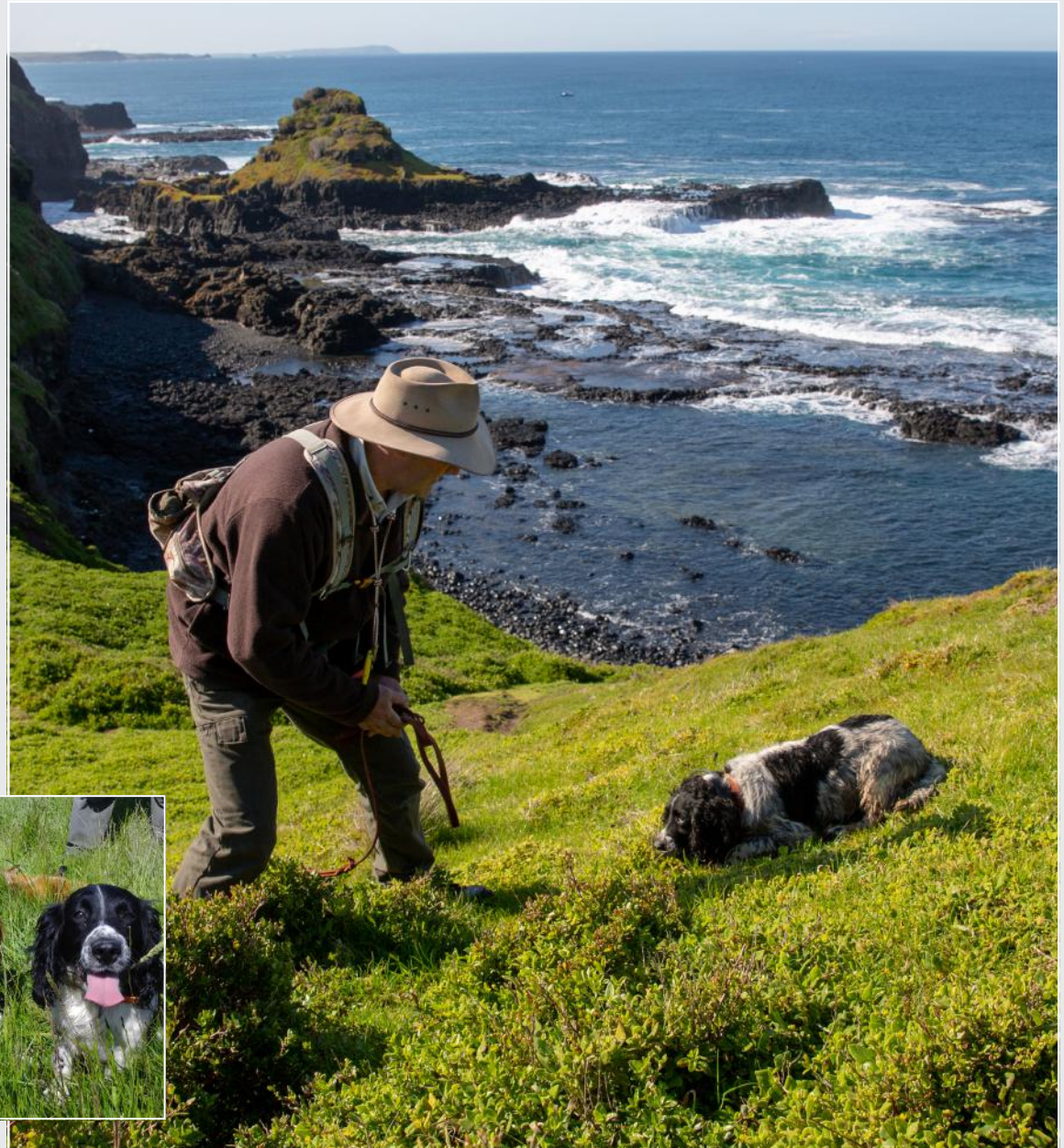
In order to maintain Phillip Island's fox-free status routine surveillance is undertaken with Fox Detection Dogs, cameras surveys and all public sightings are immediately investigated for physical evidence. To reduce the likelihood of incursions back onto Phillip Island a permanent surveillance camera is installed on the Phillip Island bridge and a buffer zone has been established on the mainland to maintain low fox densities.

Over the past 12 months the Nature Parks' Fox Detection Dogs, Sam and Jazz, have assisted with other fox control projects around Victoria. Nature Parks dog trainer, Craig Bester, and the dogs have travelled to Cape Otway to assist in quantifying the effectiveness of long term fox control in the Otway National Park with the Conservation Ecology Centre. This project involved searching for fox scats and genotyping scats found to determine home range and abundance of foxes in baited and unbaited areas.

They have also undertaken surveys at Tiverton, a fenced sister property of Mount Rothwell Biodiversity Interpretation Centre, where they are aiming to eradicate introduced predators prior to the release of small mammals including the Eastern barred bandicoot.



Pictured: Jazz and Sam are an integral part of our fox detection A team.





# Pest Animal Control

## FERAL CATS

The Nature Parks 30-Year Conservation Vision - Beyond the Horizon supports feral cat eradication. To achieve this ambitious objective, the Conservation department commenced the first feral cat tracking research project in Victoria since feral cats were declared an established pest in parts of Victoria.

Six feral cats on Cape Woolamai were collared with GPS and VHF trackers which revealed that feral cats mostly remained close to the coast in more wooded areas and have overlapping home ranges. The study will also help understand the detectability of feral cats during our regular monitoring programs. While the feral cats were being tracked, they were also being detected on camera traps. We can then compare how detectable these feral cats were against their true activity.

Our Feral Cat Detection Dogs 'Marbee' (Border Terrier) and 'Milly' (Jagd Terrier) are our latest Conservation team members and are specifically being upskilled and trained to detect feral cats in the landscape.

The addition of our feral cat detection dogs compliments our conservation dog program, where we continue to train and manage our fox detection dogs, supporting regional conservation efforts. They will be used to supplement our other monitoring tools such as infra-red cameras which will allow us to be more targeted in our control efforts and once a broadscale knock-down has been achieved to locate the last remaining feral cats. Marbee's training is progressing well with obedience training and scent training well underway. Both dogs will be field ready in 12-18 months.



Main image: Marbee the feral cat detection dog in training. Inset: Feral cat fitted with tracking collar.

# Species Reintroduction Update

## **BUSH STONE-CURLEW** (*Burhinus grallarius*)

The planned reintroduction of Bush stone-curlews to Phillip Island has been temporarily postponed until 2021 due to the Victorian Translocation Evaluation Panel expressing concerns over the genetic provenance of captive Bush stone-curlews in South-East Australia. As a result, Museums Victoria are carrying out a genetic study on multiple captive populations of Bush stone-curlews across Australia (including our proposed source populations). The outcome of this study will inform where we source individuals for our 2021 release to ensure we utilise the most diverse genetic stock available.

In the last 12 months the Conservation and Marketing and Communication teams have initiated a community engagement strategy to slowly introduce the local community to Bush stone-curlews. The Nature Parks' Threatened Species Officer visited local schools and gathered input from students on the design of the soft-release aviary for the curlews, and has spoken at various community forums about the idea of Bush stone-curlews returning to Phillip Island- we received very positive results from the community.

## **LONG-NOSED POTOROO** (*Potorous tridactylus*)

The reintroduction of Long-nosed potoroos to Phillip Island, while further away than the curlews (planned for 2022-2024), has progressed.

The Nature Parks has engaged the Conservation Planning Specialist Group (CPSG) branch of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to facilitate a conservation planning workshop with regional experts, local stakeholders and land managers. The ecological, disease, cultural, economic and social implications of a reintroduction will all be considered. This multi stakeholder approach, and starting it very early on, will ensure the translocation has the best chance of gaining community support and delivering a successful outcome for potoroos.



# Species Reintroduction Update

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## **GROWLING GRASS FROG** (*Litoria raniformis*)

Growling grass frogs, a priority species for reintroduction identified through the Structured Decision Making process, have been recorded on Phillip Island in 1991, 2001 and 2008. Before considering a reintroduction, it is important to assess whether the species might persist but be difficult to detect.

Through a combination of live surveys, call-playback and remote audio-recording equipment we surveyed 24 likely sites across the island in 2019 on public and private land over 350 survey nights and returned no records of the species. Additional surveys in 2020 also failed to find any evidence so we are confident that this species no longer persists on Phillip Island.



# Thank you



## KEY CONTACTS

**Jessica McKelson,**  
Conservation Manager  
**E:** [jmckelson@penguins.org.au](mailto:jmckelson@penguins.org.au)  
**T:** 0429 399 047



**Duncan Sutherland,**  
Deputy Director of Research  
**E:** [dsutherland@penguins.org.au](mailto:dsutherland@penguins.org.au)  
**T:** 0439 157 600



**Thomas Nixon,**  
Threatened Species Officer  
**E:** [tnixon@penguins.org.au](mailto:tnixon@penguins.org.au)  
**P:** 0438 218 202



Phillip Island  
**NATURE  
PARKS**

Phillip Island Nature Parks  
PO Box 97 Cowes, Victoria 3922 Australia  
Tel: +61 3 5951 2820 Fax: +61 3 5956 8394  
Email: [info@penguins.org.au](mailto:info@penguins.org.au)

[penguins.org.au](http://penguins.org.au)

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