



## BUSH HERITAGE AUSTRALIA

### Why prevention is better than cure when it comes to conservation: Bush Heritage's five priority keystone and indicator species

Ahead of World Environment Day on Tuesday 5 June, Bush Heritage Australia is calling for better protection for keystone and indicator species – such as the greater bilby, the honey possum, spider orchids, broilgas and the brush and crest-tailed mulgara – so that hundreds of our native species can thrive.

A recent national survey of 1,000 people commissioned by Bush Heritage has revealed that more than two-thirds of Australians believe our extinction crisis will worsen.

- **Almost 70% of Australians felt that the number of native animals and plants will decrease in their lifetime.**
- However, the good news is that more than half the people surveyed also believed that **we could reverse the damage done to our environment.**

The name 'keystone species' comes from a reference to a central stone that keeps an arch from crumbling; likewise an ecosystem can crumble if you remove that particular species from the landscape. Indicator species are like a canary in the coalmine; if they disappear, we know that something is seriously wrong with that habitat's health.

Bush Heritage has identified five species around the country that are intrinsic to their landscape. By protecting and restoring their habitats, and minimising the threats they face, Bush Heritage aims to prevent hundreds of other species from edging closer to the extinction cliff.

Protecting species before they reach critical population decline is a key pillar of the organisation's 10-year Science and Research Plan 2015-2025. Dr. Rebecca Spindler, Head of Bush Heritage's Science and Conservation Unit, said this was a far smarter and more effective approach to conservation.

"When it comes to stemming the nation's extinction rate, the old healthcare adage 'prevention is better than cure' is equally applicable," said Dr. Spindler

"We shouldn't be waiting for the bellwether signal that a species is listed as endangered before acting; we need to be protecting habitat well before that stage. It will cost less money, and improve success rates if we aim to follow this strategy."

Bush Heritage Australia's Chief Executive Gerard O'Neill said Australians could help make a difference by acting now.

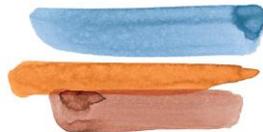
"We know Australia's threatened species list is growing, and that Australia is among seven nations carrying more than half of all global species loss," said O'Neill.

"We don't want to our children to never see a living honey possum or a bilby – we can't let them become the next Tasmanian tiger, an animal they can only read about in past tense."

#### **KEYSTONE and INDICATOR SPECIES WE MUST PROTECT:**

- ***The Greater Bilby (WA, Birriliburu partnership) KEYSTONE***  
A close relative, the Lesser Bilby was made extinct in the 1950s. The nocturnal Greater Bilby relies on a keen sense of smell to forage for bulbs, seeds, and insects, digging pits up to 25 cm deep which create fertile patches in the landscape and allows water penetration. They use strong forelimbs to build extensive tunnels, which provide shelter from the fierce heat of the day.  
**Current status: vulnerable**
- ***Red Cross Spider Orchids (VIC, Nardoo Hills Reserve) INDICATOR***  
These small, stunning flowers often go unseen and can disappear in a landscape before we





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even realise. Flowering from late September through to October, the Red Cross Spider-orchid has a spectacular crimson flower, with deep red clubs found at the end of each petal. This delicate flower is dependent on a thriving habitat and provide excellent sign that we are succeeding in mitigating threats to this landscape.

**Current status: vulnerable**

- ***Brush-tailed/Crest-tailed Mulgara* (QLD, Cravens Peak/Ethabuka Reserves) KEYSTONE**

Small carnivorous predators in arid Australia help maintain health and diversity in animal populations. As scavengers, the mulgara enjoys the remains of mammals, reptiles and occasionally birds, playing a huge role in reducing disease exposure across the landscape.

Around half of the mulgaras' diet is also made up of invertebrates including beetles, spiders, centipedes and cockroaches.

**Current status: nationally vulnerable**

- ***The Brolga* (NSW, Naree Reserve) INDICATOR**

Australia's magnificent wetland crane. With their elaborate courtship dance, brolgas are one of Australia's most iconic birds. The large, flying bird stands a metre tall with a wing span up to 2.4 metres. Relying on wetlands across Australia as refuge, feeding and breeding grounds, the presence or absence of the Brolga indicates our effectiveness in water management.

**Current status: least concern**

- ***The Honey-Possum* (WA, Chereninup Reserve) KEYSTONE + INDICATOR**

The Honey-Possum is a key pollinator for the uniquely Australian banksia flower. The only marsupial dependant on nectar, the Honey Possum needs a year-round, continuous supply of nectar to survive. Keenly dependent

on their environment, without floristic diversity in their habitat, the Honey-Possum would not survive.

**Current status: least concern**

Bush Heritage is hoping to invest over \$2.2 million over the next 12 months to protect the habitats of these species, and is calling on the public for their support and donations.

Key conservation projects that Bush Heritage will undertake this year include:

- **Fire management:** maintaining strategic fire breaks, ecological burns to promote regeneration
- **Feral control:** feral pig, fox and cat control to keep numbers of these destructive pests down
- **Revegetation:** reintroducing declining flora, replanting in cleared landscapes
- **Weed control:** removing invasive weed species that threaten native flora
- **Managing grazing pressure:** using scientific data to maintain the balance on our reserves with animals such as rabbits, kangaroos, goats and deer to avoid soil erosion and loss of habitat for other species
- **Flora and fauna surveys:** indicating the health of the bush through an abundance of species
- **Mammal trapping:** safe and ethical trapping, monitoring and releasing of mammals on our reserves to indicate health of the landscape

For more information [www.bushheritage.org.au](http://www.bushheritage.org.au)

**HIGH RES IMAGES + INFOGRAPHICS**

<https://app.box.com/s/vu86ihyl3ybntc5e9y43sif25facuztz>

