

Bush Heritage launches ambitious five-year project to bring native animals back to almost 30,000 hectares in south coast WA

National not-for-profit Bush Heritage Australia today launched an ambitious five-year project to boost numbers of native animals on Noongar country on Western Australia's south coast.

Spanning 37,000 hectares, the project is the largest integrated fauna recovery program involving private landholders in the region's history. It will be rolled out in the Fitz-Stirling: the landscape between Fitzgerald River and Stirling Range national parks.

The project is funded by Lotterywest and involves Noongar Traditional Owners, farmers and other community partners, with 17 landholders taking part in the project.

Bush Heritage Chief Executive Officer Heather Campbell said the project was a chance to make a huge difference to the future of native species in south coast WA.

"I am deeply proud that Bush Heritage is able to play a role in the largest integrated fauna recovery program involving private landholders ever seen in WA's beautiful south coast region, with the backing of Lotterywest," she said.

"This leading conservation project gives native species a fighting chance for survival, promotes the enduring land management knowledge of Noongar Traditional Owners and ultimately will bring this global biodiversity hotspot back to good health."

Bush Heritage's Healthy Landscape Manager Alex Hams said this project is unique in that it involves multiple landholders working at a landscape scale to protect native fauna.

"This project could be a model for similar projects throughout Australia addressing the threats from feral predators on native fauna populations," he said.

The goal is to significantly improve habitat conditions for native species across the global biodiversity hotspot - one of only two such hotspots in Australia and 36 worldwide. By helping the bush return to good health, the project will pave the way for existing populations to flourish and locally threatened species, like the Red-tailed Phascogale, to be reintroduced.

The habitat restoration work is supported by an integrated feral predator control program focusing on feral cats, foxes and rabbits, all of which negatively impact on native species. Due to the relationship between feral cats, foxes and rabbits, an integrated approach is essential.

Increased numbers of Black-Gloved and Tammar Wallabies, other small mammals such as the Western Pygmy and Honey Possum and reptiles will be used as measures of success, as well as fewer feral predators. Extensive ecological monitoring of these measures will be ongoing over the next five years.

The Fitz-Stirling fauna restoration project will run until 2024.