

# Goal 3 Conserving our wildlife species

Protect and value Queensland's native plants and animals across the landscape and seascape.

## Why is this important?

QPWS leads the management of native wildlife in Queensland, but most wildlife lives outside protected areas. Survival of native plants and animals is up to people across the entire landscape and seascape, especially those living and working near wildlife populations and those who manage lands and waters.

Some of the strategies used to conserve and manage wildlife in Queensland include the following:

**Legislation:** especially the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, which protects wildlife from being deliberately killed or interfered with except under permits issued for very specific purposes.

**Research and monitoring:** to understand wildlife habitat requirements, threats, lifecycles and ecological interactions.

**Habitat protection and restoration:** in areas set aside by councils, Indigenous groups and private organisations, individual land holders and community groups as well as formal protected areas.

**Threat reduction:** such as feral animal control, prevention of habitat degradation, fire management, regulation of urban development to manage habitat

impacts on koalas, and minimisation of harmful human impacts on wildlife. Through the Back on Track species prioritisation framework, QPWS works with stakeholders to develop lists of priority species for action in each region, and to identify key threats and actions for their conservation.

**Indigenous conservation initiatives:** where Traditional Owners care for their land and sea country, including traditional use agreements which ensure traditional use of certain important species remains sustainable.

**Community education and promotion:** which increases awareness and conveys specific messages about how people might alter their behaviour to avoid harm and protect wildlife.

**Partnerships with the community:** including with organisations such as regional NRM groups, Traditional Owners, non-government organisations (NGOs), conservation groups, naturalist groups, industry, local governments, universities and other research institutions.

**Specific interventions where essential:** such as the establishment of new 'insurance' populations of threatened species within their previous range.

Living close to wildlife brings special joys and responsibilities, and if Queensland's native wildlife is to be protected people need to co-exist with it. Queensland's native animals play an important role in keeping the environment healthy. For example, flying foxes pollinate native forests, keeping them healthy. In turn these forests provide clean air, clean water, they store carbon and are an essential part of the tourism industry.

Animals sometimes live in close proximity with people, particularly where urban and rural development occurs adjacent to natural areas. Even in major cities, watching native wildlife brings a lot of pleasure to many people. Community support for managing wildlife in such areas is critical—important contributions are made by people who plant native trees and shrubs, maintain habitat on their own lands, and volunteer to rehabilitate local creeks and bushland.

However, there are legitimate concerns in communities about potential impacts of wildlife on people. QPWS works closely with communities to encourage sustainable relationships with wildlife, recognising the need to protect and conserve species while balancing the social and economic needs of the community.

An increasingly urbanised landscape including domestic pets, motorways and loss of bushland inevitably means that wildlife are injured. In Queensland the care and rehabilitation of wildlife is undertaken by volunteer wildlife carers licensed under the Department of Environment and Resource Management's Code of Practice For Care of Orphaned, Sick or Injured Protected Animals in Queensland (the Code).

The primary objective of native wildlife care and rehabilitation of sick, injured and orphaned wildlife is to achieve a conservation outcome by returning healthy native animals back to the wild.

The purpose of the Code, is to provide information, recommendations, minimum standards and guidelines to ensure that all parties involved do so in an appropriate manner. In administering the Code, QPWS will work in partnership with key stakeholders to ensure that the activities of wildlife rehabilitators in Queensland result in the best possible conservation and animal welfare outcomes for rehabilitated animals and the wild populations to which they are returned.

Management of Queensland's marine wildlife is built on sharing responsibilities across agencies. Partnerships between Traditional Owner groups, government and the research community can help protect populations of significant species such as the green sea turtle and dugong.



Andrew McDougall, DERM



Andrew McDougall, DERM

Queensland's coastal, island and marine environments are the seasonal home for many Australian and international bird species. Birds arrive from as far away as the Arctic and Antarctic regions, Asia, New Zealand and further offshore in the Pacific region. The integrity and resilience of Queensland's coastal and marine habitats is critical, as these areas provide sufficient feeding opportunities for species embarking on their long migrations—often over 10 000 kilometres.

Protected areas and marine parks in Queensland help protect the integrity and resilience of these important coastal habitats. Management actions, such as marine park zoning and seasonal closures of important areas, help ensure birds can find safe places to feed, roost, recuperate and breed. Conserving coastal bird habitat and managing recreational opportunities along the coastal zone also provides opportunities for education about the importance of Queensland's marine and island ecosystems in hosting many internationally significant populations of migratory birds.

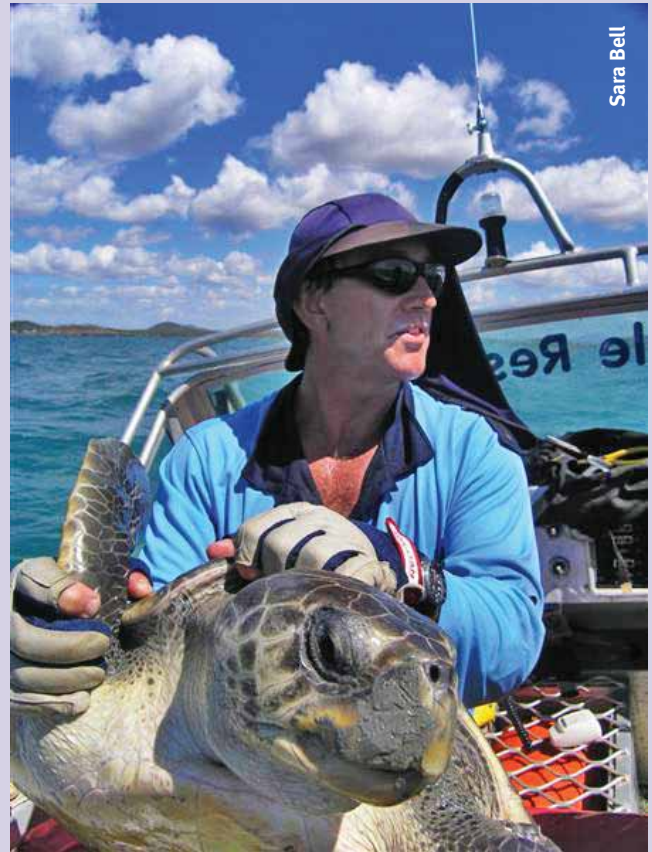
- ▲ The Pacific golden plover *Pluvialis fulva* breeds in western Alaska and central and eastern Siberia. This is one of two birds in the *Pluvialis* genus regularly seen in Queensland.
- ▲ Northern giant-petrel *Macronectes halli*—sightings of this species are uncommon in Queensland, but many seabirds from sub-Antarctic areas can be seen in Queensland waters.

## Indigenous engagement in sea country management

For the past decade, QPWS and the Gudjuda people of Edgcombe Bay, near Bowen, have been working together to study the local population of green turtles. The project began as Traditional Owners were concerned that the green turtle population was declining. The hunting and sharing of traditional food, such as green turtles, is an important part of Gudjuda culture and loss of the turtle would end an important part of their customary practice.

The research project was established to identify a sustainable level of harvest of green turtles in Edgcombe Bay. To answer this question, rangers and Traditional Owners are investigating the population size and characteristics (such as the gender and age structure), and whether the population is increasing or decreasing over time.

The project team uses special turtle-catch boats to search for turtles in feeding habitat areas. When a turtle is found trained 'turtle catchers' jump from the boat to safely restrain it. The turtle is then tagged, measured, assessed for health, and then released. By 2011, more than 700 turtles were tagged within the bay.



The results of this project will inform conservation management decisions for a viable green turtle population in Edgcombe Bay. The management decisions will be made in partnership between Traditional Owners and government agencies including QPWS and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The Gudjuda people are keen to continue the study, and training and support by QPWS will provide the community with the necessary skills to take sole responsibility for collecting data in the future.

- ▲ Ian Bell with an Olive Ridley sea turtle in Edgcombe Bay.
- DERM Cultural Heritage officer and Traditional Custodian Jim Gaston with a green turtle in Edgcombe Bay.
- ◀ Traditional Custodian James Gaston with DERM turtle biologist Ian Bell, tagging a juvenile green turtle in Edgcombe Bay.

# What is our approach?

Natural populations of all Queensland's native animals and plants will be given the best possible chance of survival into the future. QPWS will:

- use an integrated, holistic and cooperative approach to protect habitat and reduce threats, including regulation, information, research and communication.
- conserve threatened and iconic species through effectively targeted conservation actions and innovative management approaches.
- keep common species common through early detection of declines and intervention to restore healthy populations.
- encourage positive human-wildlife experiences and promote community awareness and appreciation of native biodiversity.
- minimise negative interactions between people and wildlife through education and partnerships.
- support the care and rehabilitation of wildlife where it achieves a positive outcome for conservation.



Rebecca Williams, DERM



Melissa Mayhew, DERM

^ QPWS has been working with partners Ed and Gabi Underwood, landholders at Richard Underwood Nature Refuge, and Xstrata which is a mining company providing sponsorship, to establish a second colony of northern hairy-nosed wombats. When the project began there was only one remaining population in Epping Forest National Park (Scientific). This population had a high risk of extinction as just one natural event, such as fire or flood, could wipe out the entire species.

The project has so far been very successful. In March 2011 it was confirmed that one of the female wombats was carrying a joey in her pouch. This was followed by news in April 2011 of a second female carrying a joey. These births are significant milestones, and indicate that the reintroduction project has achieved the right conditions at Richard Underwood Nature Refuge to allow the wombats to breed.

^ Radio-tracking northern hairy-nosed wombats.

## Back on Track

The Back on Track species prioritisation framework is an initiative that helps strategically focus effort and investment on the protection and recovery of species. Through the prioritisation process the status of species and the key threats to their survival are examined. The actions needed to reduce negative pressures can then be assessed, and this information helps inform which actions might achieve particularly positive results for multiple species. This encourages a multi-species or landscape approach to conservation as well as opportunities for cross regional projects.

# What we will do: priorities for 2020

## 3.1 Conserve priority threatened and iconic species through targeted conservation action and innovative management approaches.

- a) Finalise and implement the review and amendment of legislation relating to marine mammals in Queensland under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, including a supporting marine mammal management program\*.
- b) Engage NRM bodies and other stakeholders to regularly review information used for the Back on Track species prioritisation framework.
- c) Work towards implementation and regular updating of the Back on Track Actions for Biodiversity. Encourage volunteer and naturalist groups to be involved in this work.
- d) Monitor threatened and iconic species populations and review and implement recovery actions.
- e) Continue work to establish three viable populations of the northern hairy-nosed wombat.
- f) Contribute to a net gain in mature or actively regenerating koala bushland by purchasing and rehabilitating priority koala habitat.
- g) Enhance understanding of koala populations in South East Queensland by carrying out a survey at least once between 2011 and 2016 in each of the seven South East Queensland coastal local government areas to which State Planning Policy 2/10 applies.
- h) Develop a prospectus of potential investment opportunities for 'flagship' projects to attract corporate and philanthropic investment. These projects will target cost-effective on-ground actions for threatened species habitat protection and threat reduction\*.

\* Actions and targets from Queensland's draft biodiversity strategy Building Nature's Resilience.

▶ The musky rat kangaroo is the smallest of the kangaroo family. It is found in the rainforests of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area of Queensland.

### Targets

- By 2020, improve the resilience of at least five of Queensland's iconic species by establishing a minimum of three viable populations\*.
- By 2020, contribute to a net gain in either mature or actively regenerating koala bushland habitat in South East Queensland.
- By 2020, the resilience of at least 10 priority species identified through the Back on Track process is improved.

## 3.3 Keep common species common.

- a) Identify which common species should be monitored, either because they are indicators of change or play a key role in ecology. In partnership with other institutions and community groups, establish baseline data and an assessment framework to determine the vulnerability of these species to potential future declines\*.
- b) Develop a response strategy where required to respond to identified negative changes in populations of monitored species\*.

### Targets

- By 2012, a framework is developed to identify those common species which need to be monitored and monitoring of those species has commenced.



Wet Tropics World Heritage Management Authority

### 3.4 Reduce threats to all wildlife.

- a) Work with partners to identify possible impacts of climate change on wildlife; develop and implement appropriate management or adaptation strategies.
- b) Encourage local authorities, other agencies, industry and individuals to reduce inadvertent threats to wildlife through strategies such as wildlife crossings on roads, reduced lighting in turtle nesting areas, and better design of fishing equipment. Encourage builders, landscapers and developers to incorporate wildlife-friendly features into the design of Queensland's built environment.
- c) Encourage and promote innovative methods to manage impacts by native animals on agricultural, aquaculture and pastoral industries so that effects on animals in the wild are minimised.
- d) Minimise the effects of invasive plants and animals on native wildlife in protected areas and forests, and encourage control of environmental pests across all tenures.
- e) Manage fire on protected areas and forests to protect species and habitat to the greatest possible extent\*, subject to the over-riding priority for human life and property. Promote information about wildlife-friendly fire management across all environments.

### 3.5 Promote the values and conservation of Queensland's wildlife and encourage positive human-wildlife experiences.

- a) Encourage appreciation, awareness and understanding of biodiversity through strategic information, education and interpretation (see Goal 7). Continue to raise awareness of the need to conserve native wildlife.
- b) Provide advice about making backyards wildlife-friendly and safe ways to control household, garden and agricultural pests without harming native wildlife.
- c) Encourage landholders to keep and rehabilitate habitat for wildlife; encourage people to plant native shrubs and trees in their backyards to attract birds and butterflies.
- d) Use communication as a key part of all wildlife-related projects including research and management.



Robert Ashdown, DERM

▲ An estuarine crocodile. QPWS works with partners to ensure people are croc wise around crocodile habitat.

### 3.6 Minimise negative encounters with potentially dangerous wildlife such as dingoes and crocodiles.

- a) Continue to provide high-standard, innovative and regularly reviewed programs to promote safe behaviour in relation to potentially dangerous wildlife.
- b) Develop partnerships with communities to establish responsive management of wildlife interactions.
- c) Implement the Nature Conservation (Estuarine Crocodile) Conservation Plan 2007 and Management Program 2007–2017.
- d) Continue to review and implement strategic actions to promote visitor safety on protected areas with dingo populations, especially Fraser Island. Evaluate the effectiveness of the dingo-safe education program. Continue research and monitoring of the Fraser Island dingo population.
- e) Regularly review the implementation success of the Crocwise Program.

#### Target

- 100 per cent of Fraser Island visitors are aware of how to be dingo-safe.