



**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **Kimberley Indigenous rangers tackle bilby conservation**

Indigenous rangers from across the Kimberley will gather in Fitzroy Crossing this week in an effort to better understand and protect the iconic Australian bilby.

Bilbies were once found across 70 per cent of Australia, but their numbers have steadily declined since colonisation. They are now found mainly in the Central Desert region of Australia and in the Kimberley, in north-west WA.

The first of its kind workshop is part of the Kimberley Bilby Project – an initiative which sees WWF-Australia, Environs Kimberley, the Department of Parks and Wildlife, the Kimberley Land Council and independent ranger groups collaborating to look after and record data on bilbies.

The workshop follows the hugely successful Ninu (bilby) Festival at Kiwirrkurra in the Gibson Desert last year.

Environs Kimberley, Kimberley Nature Project Coordinator, Dr Malcolm Lindsay, said the 10 ranger groups will work with scientists to upskill, share knowledge, develop conservation plans, discuss data management and undertake field training.

“Bilbies are a highly ecologically and culturally significant species, but their numbers have been steadily declining,” Dr Lindsay said.

“We are very lucky in the Kimberley because this region is one of the few strongholds of bilby populations in Australia.

“At present there is very little data about Kimberley bilby populations and that is why the information we are now gathering and recording is so important.

“We are not exactly sure why bilbies continue to have a strong presence in the Kimberley, but we believe it may be due to fewer introduced species including foxes and rabbits, as well as the relative intactness of the region.

“Working as a team across scientific and government sectors, and maximising the knowledge and skills of our local Indigenous rangers, is vital to the success of this research and the ongoing conservation of the bilby.”

The workshop will include field trips to active bilby sites on Gooniyandi or Ngurrara country.

Ngurrara rangers Marika Rogers and Kristy Jack look after bilbies and are excited to learn more from other rangers at the workshop.

“Bilbies plays a big role in the land,” Marika said. “They move around a lot and when they leave their borrows it becomes another animal’s home.

“Our old people used to have bilbies as food to give them energy and protein to survive in the desert. Bilbies are the last of all desert mammals and that’s why it’s very important to protect the bilbies.”

Kristy said the Ngurrara rangers regularly conduct bilby conservation work on country.

“We help protect the bilbies by doing two hectare plot searches and locating the bilbies’ active habitats, and seeing if it’s been damaged by cattle or other pests,” Kristy said. “We will then build a fence to stop the cattle from hurting the bilbies.”

A public forum will be held in Broome in the near future and will provide information on research and management of bilbies across the Kimberley.

**Fast facts:**

- The bilby is listed as vulnerable in Western Australia and nationally.
- The majority of remaining bilby populations occur on Indigenous owned or managed lands, making ranger groups integral to bilby conservation.
- Bilby populations in the Kimberley are vital to the species as they are one of the last wild refugia.
- This regional partnership will result in targeted management solutions.
- Ranger groups attending include Ngurrara, Gooniyandi, Nyikina Mangala, Karajarri, Yawuru, Bardi Jawi, Bardi Jawi Oorany, Paraku, Nyul Nyul and Nyangumarta.

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