

Saving

THE EASTERN BRISTLEBIRD

The Hidden Vale Wildlife Centre acquired its first two Eastern Bristlebirds in September 2018 as part of a captive breeding program to help save this critically endangered animal.

The Eastern Bristlebird (*Dasyornis brachypterus*) is a small, brown, well-camouflaged, ground-dwelling bird. It is generally shy and cryptic, and it spends most of its time in low, dense vegetation. It rarely appears in the open or flying. The species has contracted to four genetically-isolated populations in three areas of south-eastern Australia: south-eastern Queensland/north-eastern New South Wales (northern population), the Illawarra and Jervis Bay regions of eastern New South Wales (central populations) and the New South Wales/Victorian border coastal region (southern population).

The northern population (also called the northern bristlebird) is on the Red Hot List of Australia's 20 birds most threatened with extinction, and has been identified as a priority species by Australia's Threatened Species Strategy (2016). Since monitoring began in the 1980s, the population has suffered an 80 percent decline, and today only 38 wild individuals remain.

Without urgent action, the species is likely to go extinct.

In the wild, breeding has been recorded between August to February, but in captivity they will

breed anywhere between August and April.

Bristlebirds build a domed grass nest, well hidden in dense grass tussocks 10 to 45 centimetres above ground. Birds typically lay two eggs, which are pale brown to brownish-white and marked with spots and small blotches of purplish-brown, sometimes with a reddish tinge. The markings are more profuse over the larger pole of the egg.

The female in our breeding pair is a young bird. It is her first breeding season so the probability that she would rear a clutch in her first season is low. We observed nesting and courtship behaviours in November, displayed through a series of vocalisations and allofeeding by the male. This behaviour was repeated in December and within three days the birds had constructed a nest. Our first present arrived on Christmas morning—a beautiful egg—with second egg laid two days later. The female incubated the eggs for the full 23 days but unfortunately neither hatched. We suspect that these first two eggs were unfertilised. This is not unusual for a first clutch.

Further nesting behaviour has since been observed, which suggests that

we may see a second clutch before the end of the breeding season towards the end of April.

We hope to continue to host these birds and establish a captive breeding group that can be released into the wild one day in the future.



OBSERVATIONS FROM THE

Billabong

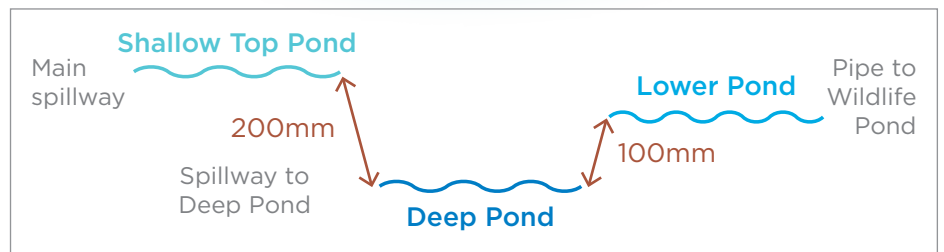
It's 8 am at Hidden Vale and the summer heat is yet to take hold. You disturb a big male eastern grey kangaroo from his bed next to the newly-completed central bird hide, and then a red-neck wallaby moves away from under the floor of the small bird watching platform.

Neither were watching the splendid wrens, the swamp hens or the egrets feeding, but they may have heard the kookaburras and the currawongs calling. That's the scene at the start of a walk around 'The Billabong', located 600 metres from the Hidden Vale Wildlife Centre.

The Billabong is developing into a wonderful place to study, observe and hear a wide range of Australian wildlife. Originally a wide, shallow farm dam, the Billabong now consists of a shallow area for wading birds and a



Water level flow - Billabong ponds



CONSERVATION TOP-UP SCHOLARSHIPS ON OFFER

The Turner Family Foundation is offering scholarships of \$7,000 per year for three years. These scholarships are open to Doctor of Philosophy candidates researching conservation topics relevant to the overarching Hidden Vale Project. Applicants must be in receipt of (or apply for and be awarded) a living allowance scholarship of at least the Research Training Program rate to be eligible to receive this top-up. More information available at: <http://bit.ly/HVTopUps> or email hvv.enquiries@uq.edu.au.



THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA

RESEARCH SUPPORT FUNDING

Current postgraduate students involved with the Hidden Vale Project can apply for funding to support their research expenses. Funding is available in quarterly rounds. For further information go to <http://bit.ly/HVResearchFunding>.

For more research news, visit <https://hiddenvalewildlife.uq.edu.au>



deep water storage area that morphs into a peninsular, with a separate wetland and island. A central walkway with bird hide divides the Billabong, with a second lower wetland area containing two islands for roosting birds to nest safely from predators, with water levels being maintained by differing spillway heights.

You can walk around the whole Billabong on a well-defined path that includes a bird watching platform, a small rustic covered sitting area near a carpark, and a pergola overlooking the top wetland area.

Extensive weeding and planting of local species has been undertaken around the Billabong following development of the islands and ponds in 2018.

Students from the University of Queensland have been undertaking bird counts in this area since 2015. In that time, 78 bird species have been spotted, with a notable increase in water birds since the Billabong has been improved. Sightings include 14 species previously not seen in the

area, such as the buff-banded rail, Australian white ibis, great egret, hardhead, hoary headed grebe and the royal spoonbill.

Students have also been involved in wildlife trapping to survey terrestrial wildlife around the Billabong. Although the cane toad has been the most abundant animal trapped, its numbers have decreased each year. Meanwhile, the number of fawn footed antechinus has increased from just two in 2015 to 35 in 2018.

Other animals trapped include the long-nosed bandicoot, the spotted marsh frog, the ornate burrowing frog, the slender tailed dunnart and one of the smallest mammals in the world, the common planigale.

While these observations are exciting, the continued presence of the cane toad and its ability to breed rapidly presents an ongoing threat to wildlife. The Hidden Vale Project will start a new research project in 2019 to remove all toad tadpoles from the Billabong. The project will use an attractant (BufoTabs) to trap and remove the tadpoles from the wetlands, as well as pitfall and light traps to capture adult toads.

All going well, removal of the cane toad will coincide with more species of birds and native animals, and in greater abundance at the Billabong.

← *Images from top to bottom: koalas resting in a nearby tree; Eastern grey kangaroos feeding around the Billabong; Water entrance to the Billabong after the restoration; Student class recording trapped animals.*

Understanding interactions

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

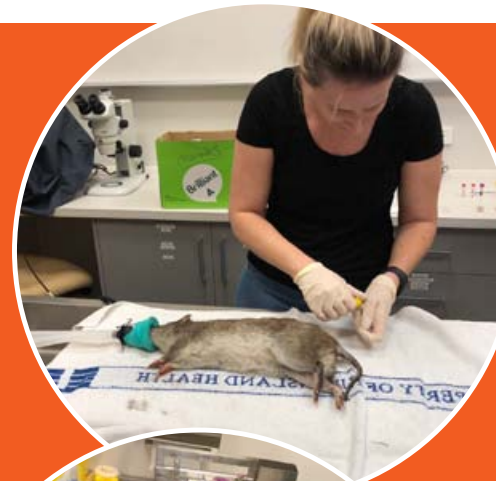
between livestock & wildlife

Hidden Vale PhD candidate Charlotte Tinsley is conducting a survey to better understand the opinions of Australian primary producers regarding livestock-wildlife interactions.

This research focuses on the potential for transmission of disease between wildlife, domestic animals and humans, which is of increasing importance as humans encroach on natural habitat.

The survey was prompted by the realisation that the attitudes of Australian primary producers towards wildlife are under-represented in scientific literature.

You can help with this research by completing a short online survey at <http://bit.ly/TinsleySurvey>. The survey takes around 10-15 minutes to complete and is open to anyone breeding or keeping livestock including small/hobby farms and equine facilities. We appreciate your help, and sharing with your networks. We look forward to reporting back with the results of this research.





Out & About

↓ Have you seen our new front room?

The next stage of the Hidden Vale Wildlife Centre Interpretation Room is taking shape, with a striking diorama at the front entrance. The area features information on introduced species and their impact on native wildlife. Further improvements to the Centre will highlight the natural history of the region and work being undertaken to protect and conserve native flora and fauna. Visitors to the Centre are welcome from 8:30am to 4pm, weekdays.



→ Researcher morning tea:

Some of our research students and staff came together at the end of 2018 for morning tea at Spicers Hidden Vale to celebrate our first year of research at the Wildlife Centre. We regularly host events for our research students so they can share their trials and tribulations and support each other to get the most out of their research journey. Interested in becoming part of this amazing supportive research team? Like the idea of regularly enjoying fantastic free coffee and scones in a five-star retreat? Contact Research Manager Julia Hoy at j.hoy@uq.edu.au for more information.



→ Honours to HDR –

It was a full house at our recent 'Honours to HDR' research information session where staff and former students provided insights into their experiences and opportunities.

The next generation of wildlife scientists will need to develop innovative ways to solve complex issues, so it was really heartening to see so many prospective researchers ready to take on that challenge.

For more information about research at Hidden Vale, contact Research Manager Julia Hoy at j.hoy@uq.edu.au



→ The Hidden Vale Wildlife Centre will play an important role in a new ecotourism experience, recently approved by the Department of Environment and Energy, and facilitated by the Queensland Government.

The Centre will be the briefing and departure point for walkers as they set off on a five-day Scenic Rim Trail experience, operated by Spicers. Construction of new track and ecocabins will soon be underway, with the first walkers expected to take to the trail later in 2019.



SIGN UP

To subscribe to *Hidden Vale Tails* or to find out more about the Hidden Vale Wildlife Centre, visit www.hiddenvalewildlife.uq.edu.au

SUPPORTING AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE

preservation



The Turner Family Foundation is a not for profit environmental organisation established by Jude and Skroo Turner, founders of the Flight Centre Group, and their children Matt and Jo. The Turners have a passion for preserving Australia's flora and fauna, and the Turner Family Foundation is their vehicle to promote positive environmental outcomes on their landholdings. Hidden Vale Tails is a quarterly newsletter that shares the work of the Turner Family Foundation, University of Queensland and the Hidden Vale Project. We trust you enjoy each issue.

HELP WANTED



Positions Available

- 1 Field-based volunteering in ecological research and/or restoration
- 2 Field Volunteer Coordinator

Contact Megan

megan.brady@gainsdale.com.au

for more info and/or register interest at

<https://hiddenvalewildlife.uq.edu.au/contact/volunteer-registration>