

Great Victoria Desert Biodiversity Trust Newsletter

December 2015 Christmas Edition
Issue 2

Busy year for the Trust as projects begin



Welcome to the second edition of the Trust's newsletter. The Trust had a busy 6 months since the first newsletter came out in July. The biggest news is the commissioning of several projects in the GVD. As the first round of funding for the Trust, we wanted to make sure the best possible decision making process was utilised. This edition will focus on the successful projects and the process used to select them. We also describe the new 'Knowledge Hub' and seek your input on how we can make this user-friendly and ensure it contains useful information on the region. To end, we have a story from Jo Riley and Jeff Turpin on their recent adventures monitoring the night time activities of Sandhill Dunnart. Thanks for sharing Jo and Jeff.

Finally, I'd like to wish you all a very merry Christmas and a safe and happy Christmas break!

Kathryn Sinclair



IN THIS ISSUE

- Page 2** Successful EOI projects
- Page 4** Decision-making on projects
- Page 6** Knowledge Hub live!
- Page 7** In our region – Jo Riley and Jeff Turpin and the Sandhill Dunnart

Successful EOI projects

1. Sandhill Dunnart survey and monitoring protocols and baseline survey



Photo: Babs and Bert Wells/Parks and Wildlife.

Successful proponent: Department of Parks and Wildlife

Funds awarded: \$46,335+GST

Duration: Five months

Description

This project combined two EOIs, in a thorough, integrated approach to Sandhill Dunnart research. By combining two projects, the development of a standardised survey and monitoring protocol will inform a baseline survey for the Sandhill Dunnart. This is a foundational project and

will be key to determining future survey techniques as well as survey locations. The project will have a dedicated project officer to ensure through research, appropriate engagement with key experts and utilising the strengths of both designing survey/monitoring protocols and expertise of Parks and Wildlife staff. Department of Parks and Wildlife also have dedicated biometricians to assist in the design and development of the baseline survey.

Successful EOI projects

2. Adaptive Management Partnership



Meeting between representatives from all funded projects.

Successful proponent: Great Victoria Desert Adaptive Management Partnership consisting of Rangelands NRM, Central Desert Native Title Services, Pila Nguru Aboriginal Corporation, Greening Australia, the Department of Parks and Wildlife and Conservation Management. Additional partners may be brought into the partnership structure.

Funds Awarded: (Stage 1)
\$24,340+GST

Duration: Three years

Description

Utilising the diverse strengths of the partner organisations and their unique knowledge of the Great Victoria Desert, the Adaptive Management Partnership will develop actions and priorities for landscape scale projects to enhance biodiversity in the region.

One of the key strengths of this partnership is their strong relationship

with Traditional Owners. The Partnership intends to work closely with Traditional Owners to utilise their skills and expertise in many of the on-country activities. This will also help ensure the sustainability of activities conducted in the region.

As the first stage of the project, the Partnership has agreed to assist the Trust in the development of the Bioregional Plan. The Bioregional Plan is a requirement for the Trust under approvals from the Department of the Environment. The Bioregional Plan will capture the existing information on the region especially in terms of biodiversity and climate patterns. It is envisaged that the information captured will serve as baseline against which the Partnership can measure the outcomes of actions conducted during the three years. Additional funding will be released to the Partnership as different projects are discussed and agreed.

Successful EOI projects

3. Malleefowl Records in the GVD



Successful proponent: Department of Parks and Wildlife

Funds Awarded: \$23,000 + GST

Duration: Three months

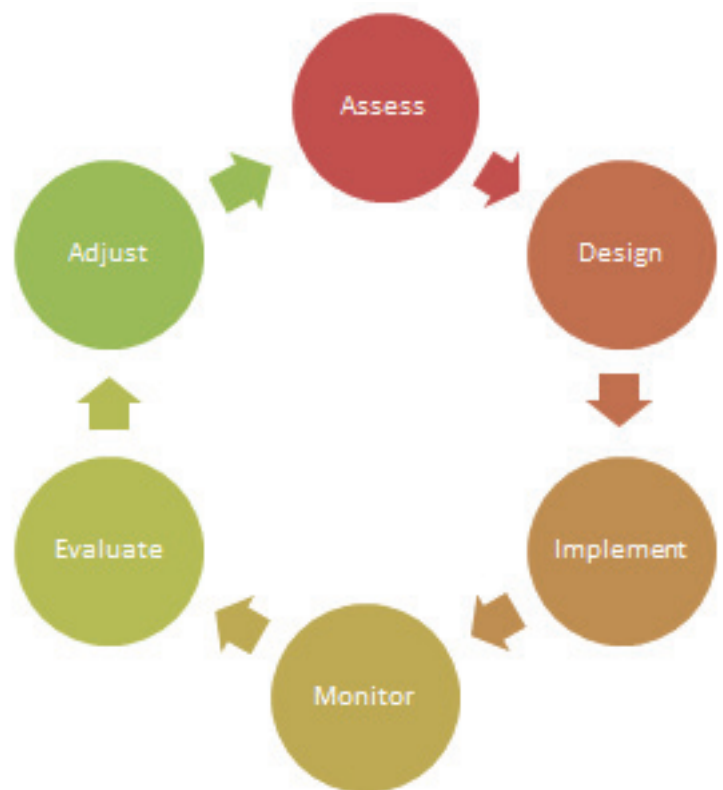
Description

The Department of Parks and Wildlife will design a database for capturing and inputting all Malleefowl records in the GVD. This database will include standards for data quality and reliability. The project will capture all documented Malleefowl records in the region. It

also involves contacting relevant stakeholders in the region to obtain as many undocumented reports as possible. This will include a field trip to at least one remote Aboriginal community to discuss their knowledge and sightings of Malleefowl. The database will be publically available and connected to NatureMap. The Parks and Wildlife team will also develop guidelines for data input and design a Malleefowl page on the Parks and Wildlife website.

Decision making on projects

To ensure the strongest possible project selection, the Trust undertook a rigorous process, utilising the strengths from a range of experts including environmental researchers, consultants, government agencies and industry. The figure on the next page outlines the steps undertaken to decide on what projects to tender for and how the successful applicants were selected. All of the projects funded by the Trust will be part of an adaptive management framework (see figure opposite) which ensures that the outcomes and learnings of one project are reviewed and utilised for the development of ongoing actions.



Trust's project selection process

Trust's objectives identified

Trust holds workshops on key threatened species

The Trust drafts Research and Adaptive Management Plans (RAMPs) for key species using workshop outcomes

Expert reviewers provide feedback on RAMPs

Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) established

TAP review the Trust's objectives and the reviewed RAMPs and determine priority projects for the first round of funding

Management Panel decide on priority projects, utilising advice from TAP

Expressions of interest for 4 priority projects released

The TAP assess more than 40 applications for EOIs

The Management Panel makes decisions on successful projects using the TAPs advice

Successful projects are contacted for contract negotiations

Unsuccessful applicants notified

Contracts awarded to successful applicants

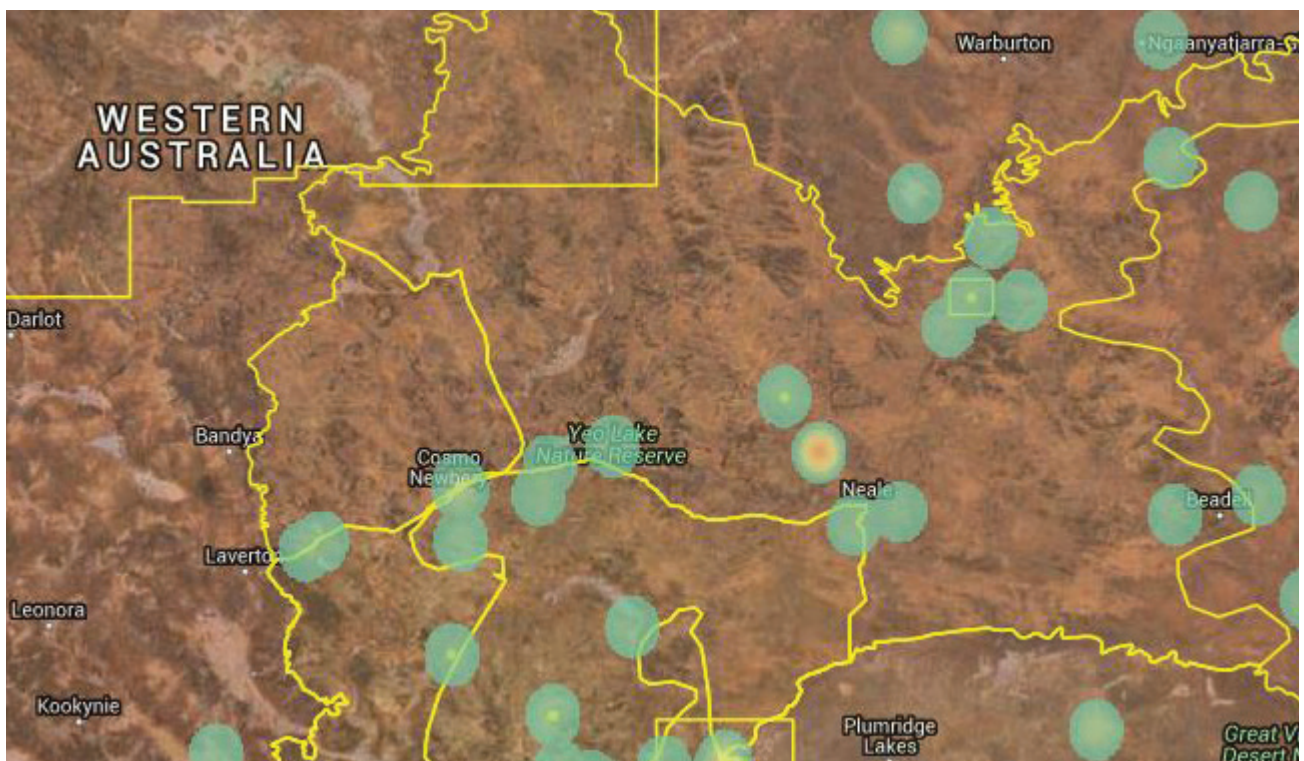
Knowledge Hub live!

As part of the Trust's commitment to ensuring that information on the Great Victoria Desert is publically shared, the Trust has awarded Gaia Resources a project to deliver a 'Knowledge Hub' for the region. This exciting project has just gone live on the Trust's website! It contains a number of base layers including Indigenous protected areas (IPAs), IBRAs regions and tenements in the region.

It has also compiled a number of reports which have been put into different categories. Reports can be investigated for 'Key information' or spatial extent. This project, utilising infrastructure provided through Rangelands NRM, will collate and spatially represent all known (and available) biodiversity data for the region. The process of adding reports and data will be ongoing

and anyone with reports to add, are asked to email them to the Trust Coordinator. The aim is allow all users access information on the GVD in an integrated platform, combining data from a range of sources in an easy to use visual format.

It is hoped that different stakeholders operating in the region will see the ongoing benefit of knowledge sharing and contribute relevant information to the Knowledge Hub. Please visit: www.gvdbiodiversitytrust.org.au/our-region/. As the map is aimed at helping all users in the region access information, we ask you to let us know how it can be improved – How useable it is? How useful? Is there other base layer information you think would be useful? Please contact the Trust Coordinator with any feedback.



In our region

Tracking the Sandhill Dunnart

On location with Jo Riley and Jeff Turpin



Keeping up-to-date with projects happening in the region is important to understanding the growing knowledge of biodiversity in the region. This edition we have a report from Jo Riley and Jeff Turpin on the exciting work they're doing, tracking Sandhill Dunnarts in the GVD. If you have some activities taking place in the GVD and you'd like to share your story, please contact: kathryn.sinclair@gvdbiodiversitytrust.org.au

Sitting amongst the stars on a sandy dune, we shiver and laugh. It is 4am, it's freezing cold and there is no-one around for miles. It's perfect. Ah - time to get a fix! We are of course radiotracking Sandhill Dunnarts in the Great Victoria Desert, Western Australia. As part of an ongoing monitoring program for APA Group, kicked off by zoologist and environmental scientist Jeff Turpin, we have been privileged to be allowed an insight into the lives of these endangered and elusive animals. These nocturnally active, and we mean

active, sand dune dwellers have given us a few surprises over the past year. By fitting radio-transmitters to a select number, we've found out that once they're up, they're in for the long haul: on average they had 11 hour activity periods and some males have home ranges of up to 200 hectares! Thankfully, the female we tracked was more sedentary, and was happy in her patch of about 20 hectares.

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Males and females repeatedly used the same burrow and log day shelters, and we found one male in the same nesting area six months later. It will be great to see if we can capture them or their offspring on our next trip. So, what are these little guys doing all night? Well at least some of the time they're eating ants. We spoke to an ant expert, the WA Museum's Briant Heterick, who had a good sift through their poo. We found a large proportion of *Camponotus* ants and also termites, spiders, beetles and even some Heteropteran parts. Yum!

And where do they look for such delicious treats? Turns out all over really. We were surprised and excited to find that they forage in mulga patches, open spinifex and mixed woodland swales and also on the sand dunes.

Though they need to be on the lookout for feral cats, as we have found Sandhill Dunnart fur in their scats. I'm part way into my MSc through the University of Bristol and have another seven animals to track; we're only just beginning to get a peak

into the wonderful lives of Sandhill Dunnarts.

I'm now in the process of performing cluster analyses to determine if they have any habitat preferences, which I will then use with MaxEnt habitat modelling. Hopefully, I will be able to construct an accurate model and get out there to do some more trapping! Who knows where we could find the next population? The ultimate goal in all this research is to discover the hidden world of the Sandhill Dunnart, and to protect and conserve them for future generations. And with faces like these, you just have to.

