



Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions



WIRRUWANA NEWS

UPDATES FROM DIRK HARTOG ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

SPRING 2020

The Dirk Hartog Island National Park *Return to 1616* Ecological Restoration Project Stage Two is well under way with four species already translocated to the island including the banded and rufous hare-wallabies, Shark Bay bandicoot and dibbler. With this comes new priorities to keep track of all the new arrivals, build a body of knowledge to pave the way for new recruits, and ensure visitors are provided with information to help protect the new island inhabitants.

Cryptic grasswrens



The return of native animals to Dirk Hartog Island National Park is well on its way with four species already translocated to the island as part of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions' (DBCA) *Return to 1616* project. But the 'one-way, all-expenses-paid' trip to their new island home is just the first step in the establishment of sustainable populations on the island. To lay the foundations and ensure success, lots of information must first be gathered on each species well before their trip.

The western grasswren (*Amytornis textilis textilis*) is currently planned for reintroduction to Dirk Hartog Island National Park. This secretive species now only occurs on the mainland in the Shark Bay area (within WA) and very little is known about them. Aline Gibson Vega, PhD student from The University of Western Australia, aims to fill this information gap.

Naturally the first step was to find some grasswrens. Together with the DBCA *Return to 1616* team, Aline visited Peron Peninsula and Bush Heritage Australia's (BHA) Hamelin Station Reserve over several field trips in 2019 and 2020.

Assisted by BHA ecologists and project collaborators Michelle Hall and Ben Parkhurst, a special set of 'mist nets' were designed to catch ground-dwelling birds, such as

grasswrens. Mist nets are so fine they're almost invisible. When set in the correct place, birds become gently entangled as they hop or fly into it.

Once this method for capturing grasswrens was perfected, individuals were banded with a metal ring and a unique combination of colour bands on their legs. Grasswrens can then be identified from a distance using binoculars or spotting scopes. This helps researchers to learn about group behaviour, breeding success, dispersal, population genetics and how long grasswrens live. After many weeks of trapping, 120 individuals have now been banded, representing approximately 60 family groups that occupy an area of approximately 150 hectares. A huge effort for a very cryptic species.

Information provided by Aline's research on the ecology of this secretive species will be used in the future to help plan for their successful reintroduction to Dirk Hartog Island National Park.

Above left Western grasswren planned for reintroduction to Dirk Hartog Island National Park. Photo – Aline Gibson Vega

Above PhD student Aline Gibson Vega holding a western grasswren.