

Back from the Brink

Heath revegetation project

The Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board, with a number of partners, is reducing immediate extinction risks and improving the long-term viability of threatened species and ecological communities in the Mount Lofty Ranges and Fleurieu Peninsula through the Back from the Brink project.

One of the major components of the project, is the re-creation of suitable habitat for threatened bird species associated with closed shrubland habitats (includes heath, heathy woodlands and swamps).

Flagship species

This work specifically aims to help reduce the extinction risk of three high conservation priority threatened bird species:

- The Mount Lofty Ranges chestnut-rumped heathwren - nationally Endangered (EPBC Act)
- The Mount Lofty Ranges southern emu-wren - nationally Endangered (EPBC Act)
- The western beautiful firetail finch - State listed (NPW Act)

Due to ongoing declines caused by habitat loss, these species were identified as priorities for habitat restoration in the Mount Lofty Ranges in a Landscape Assessment Framework conducted for the region.

Two of the primary causes of habitat loss have been clearance and altered fire regimes. Consequently, restoration action involving revegetation of cleared land and prescribed burning to reinvigorate existing habitat are required to reduce the extinction risk of these species.

Revegetation

Increasing the area of suitable habitat around the areas of existing habitat, which presently support populations of the target species, is expected to assist the local populations with recovery and help reduce local extinction risk.

As part of this project, major revegetation activities are being undertaken in two reserves of the southern Fleurieu Peninsula: Deep Creek National Park and Newland Head Conservation Park. This work builds on the extensive habitat restoration works (>112 hectares) previously undertaken by the board in Deep Creek.

Plantings and direct seeding of carefully selected plant species are established according to the desired habitat structure for the target bird species. Consequently, a major point of difference with this type of revegetation is the high vegetation density targets and lack of overstorey plant species, particularly eucalypts.

In 2020/21, habitat restoration works between Deep Creek NP and Newland Head CP resulted in revegetation across approximately 70 hectares, with 160,700 seedlings planted across 50 hectares, and a further 20.8 hectares direct seeded. Works from 2021/22 included the infill planting of approximately 80,000 seedlings across more than 31 hectares of direct seeded revegetation.

Western beautiful firetail



One of the most area-sensitive species of the closed shrubland birds, the western beautiful firetail (*Stagonopleura bella samueli*) is currently state rated as Rare (NPW Act). A review of its rating is currently being undertaken to better reflect its true conservation status.

The population in Deep Creek NP is critical to the persistence of the species in the Mount Lofty Ranges. It was once much more widespread.

The Deep Creek/Balquidder complex is one of only two places (the other Cox Scrub CP) in which they are still found in the region and it is also their stronghold in the region, holding around 90% of the population (estimated at <50 birds) (J. Allan pers. com., 2021).

Extensive surveys recently undertaken were unable to find individuals in Mount Bold, Myponga or Newland Head CP where they were once commonly found (Allan et. al. 2020).

Mount Lofty Ranges southern emu-wren



The Mount Lofty Ranges southern emu-wren (*Stipiturus malachurus intermedius*) is nationally Endangered (EPBC Act) and appears to now only be found at four primary locations - Deep Creek NP, the lower Finniss River/ Tookayerta Creek, three swamps around Mount Compass (Stipiturus CP, Hesperilla CP and the Mount Compass School swamp), and at Cox Scrub CP, where only two birds were estimated to remain in 2018 (Hodder and Price unpublished data), and have not been sighted since.

Some new locations have been found along the Finniss River, and this now has the largest number of contemporary records for any of the primary locations (Allan et al, 2020).

Mount Lofty Ranges chestnut-rumped heathwren



The Mount Lofty Ranges chestnut-rumped heathwren (*Hylacola pyrrhopygius parkeri*) is nationally Endangered (EPBC Act) and appears to have disappeared from much of the Deep Creek/Balquhiddler landscape, with only one opportune record in 2018.

Additionally it also appears to have disappeared from the Hindmarsh Tiers and Stirling areas. Recent surveys have confirmed contemporary populations in the Mount Bold/ Scott Creek complex, Myponga and Newland Head CP (Allan et al, 2020), and several sites north of the Hills and Fleurieu region.

Other species

Numerous other fauna and flora species will also benefit from the habitat that is created. For example the nationally Endangered (EPBC Act) southern brown bandicoot, nationally Vulnerable (EPBC Act) South Australian bassian thrush and the State Vulnerable (SA NPW Act) heath goanna, occur in Deep Creek NP and surrounding properties.



Above: Southern brown bandicoot

Heath revegetation targets

For Closed Shrubland Birds in heath our approximate habitat area target is 14,000 hectares of new heath created in priority cleared areas.

It will require cleared land to be revegetated and no longer used for agricultural/forestry production, including no grazing by stock which can degrade and reduce the density of the heath away from the high densities required by the target species.

We currently have approx. 11,000 hectares of heath, so the additional 14,000 hectares is needed to make a total of 25,000 Ha. This area was estimated for a Minimum Viable Population of western beautiful firetails (the most area sensitive species in that closed shrubland species group).

The Back from the Brink project is supported by the Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board through funding from the Australian Government and the Landscape Levy.



National
Landscape
Program



Further information

landscape.sa.gov.au/hf/backfromthebrink

WAVY LANDSCAPE
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
HILLS AND FLEURIEU

Keep in touch with our activities through
Facebook [@HFLandscapeSA](https://www.facebook.com/HFLandscapeSA)