



QMDC Conservation Detector Dogs on task to save Queensland's bilbies

Queensland Murray-Darling Committee (QMDC) Conservation Detector Dogs 'Sophie' and 'Rocky' are putting their noses on the line to help restore a critical bilby population in south-west Queensland.

The English Springer spaniels have been tasked to sniff out the last of the feral cats inside a purpose-built bilby enclosure in Currawinya National Park.

The pair are the first conservation canines to be owned by a natural resource management body in Queensland and are trained specifically to find wild dogs, foxes, rabbits and feral cats.

Their worth as a conservation management tool is proving invaluable with the Queensland Government. The Currawinya area was once home to the endangered bilby and the Queensland Government hopes to re-introduce them to the park in the future.

QMDC Regional Pest Technical Officer and 'Sophie's handler Dr Dave Berman said the dogs would ensure the bilbies would no longer fall prey to a population of feral cats that had established itself in the Currawinya enclosure after floodwaters damaged the fence.

"The Queensland Government has done an exceptional job in removing more than 40 cats and we're delighted to be tasked with tackling the remaining few," Dr Berman said.

"In two missions undertaken since November we've found cat tracks, remains of prey and three more cats were trapped," Dr Berman said.

Relying on evidence found, the team believes there could be anywhere between five and 15 cats still at large.

"Based on what we know, these cats pose the biggest challenge as they're exceptionally good at hiding and have managed to avoid being trapped, baited or shot," Dr Berman said.

"We're trying to find the most difficult of the most difficult feral species. This is where the dogs give us the edge in pinpointing exactly where the cats are active," he said.

Dr Berman and fellow pest officer Tom Garrett, who handles 'Rocky', hope to return to Currawinya later in the year for a third and possibly final assault.

The team has invited Steve Austin, the world-renowned detector dog trainer who supplied 'Sophie' and 'Rocky' to QMDC, to again lend his expertise and join the expedition.

Mr Berman described the dogs as "good science" and "an innovation for detection and monitoring" especially where numbers of pests were at low densities and non-target species were of concern during baiting programs.

“The dogs cover twice as much ground as we do and can distinguish between the presence of live animals, their scats or just their scent,” Dr Berman said.

When working, the dogs wear GPS units which enable their tracks to be mapped, ensuring the entire target area gets “sniffed”.

“It’s a blend of one of the oldest technologies in the world with the latest in monitoring techniques and we’re confident of a successful mission,” he said.

The Queensland Murray-Darling Committee is supported through funding from the Australian Government and the Queensland Government State Regional NRM Investment Program.

Visit www.qmdc.org.au for more information.

Media contact/s

More information: QMDC Regional Pest Technical Officer Dave Berman, ph: 0409 774 509

Released by: QMDC Regional Communications Officer Donna Hurley, ph 0427 749 436