

Endangered birds set up home in brand new habitat

Two endangered Mount Lofty Ranges Southern Emu-Wrens have recently been sighted in brand new habitat on the Finnis River, thanks to revegetation work in the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth (CLLMM) area.

Following the initial sighting of a male Southern Emu-Wren in the area in late February, a female wren was spotted just before Easter, raising hopes that the birds could be a potential breeding pair.

Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) CLLMM Vegetation Program Manager Hafiz Stewart said the birds were sighted on property revegetated as part of the CLLMM Recovery Project's revegetation program – one of the largest of its kind in Australia.

The CLLMM Recovery Project has sought to restore the area's environment, native vegetation, native fish and local communities since prolonged drought and water over-allocation across the Murray-Darling Basin left the wetlands on the brink of environmental collapse in 2010.

"The sighting of these endangered birds, in what is believed to be their most south easterly position, is a triumph for the staff and community members who braved all weather conditions to participate in planting programs to help revegetate the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth area," Mr Stewart said.

"The sighting is particularly timely, given that the CLLMM Vegetation Program is nearing completion, and really cements the value of working with the community over the last five years.

"To see real proof of the success of our efforts to provide habitat for such an iconic South Australian species is the icing on the cake."

The CLLMM Vegetation Program has tackled the ecological problems of the region at a landscape scale by prioritising the vegetation communities to restore, and by determining where restoration activities should occur. Revegetation activities have increased the resilience and connectivity of native habitats, and provided valuable refuges for the region's native flora and fauna, such as the endangered Mount Lofty Ranges Southern Emu-Wrens.

Degradation and disappearance of habitat have contributed to the decline of this distinct Mount Lofty Ranges subspecies of the Southern Emu-Wren, with only a few hundred still remaining in the region.

Project officer for the Mount Lofty Ranges Southern Emu-Wren and Fleurieu Peninsula Swamps Recovery Program, Tim Vale, said the appearance of the Southern Emu-Wrens in the newly created habitat was very significant.

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"There are believed to be a maximum of 300 individuals left across the Fleurieu, with the species still declining despite a long-term recovery plan," Mr Vale said.

"This is the first time this bird has been spotted in an area of revegetated habitat, which is really heartening as the birds are quite specific in their habitat selection and use."

The property's revegetation schedule was coordinated by Goolwa/Wellington Local Action Planning Association (GWLAP) on behalf of DEWNR. GWLAP Revegetation Project Officer Kerri Bartley managed some of the onsite plantings and maintenance of the plants.

Kerri said the property was historically grazed back to a bare paddock before teams of planters from local community groups moved in to plant more than 12,000 plants of 52 local native species.

"The property is now covered in plants and the program has created brand new habitat using seed sourced and grown locally," Ms Bartley said.

"These sightings in newly planted habitat highlight the correct selection and placement of native plants appropriate for attracting native birds. This habitat will hopefully continue to attract other native fauna to the area in the future.

"The sighting of the female emu-wren is particularly exciting news and we wait in hope that breeding occurs."

The Coorong Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth Recovery Project is funded by the South Australian Government's *Murray Futures* program and the Australian Government.

