

MEDIA RELEASE

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Endangered Carpenterian Grasswrens Protected From Fire ... by Fire

An innovative fire management project of controlled burning is being carried out this week on Calton Hills Station, North West of Mount Isa. The controlled burning builds on previous project work undertaken as part of the National Landcare Program and will help continue toward the goal of Carpenterian Grasswren conservation in the area.

The project is a partnership between the Kalkadoon community-owned Calton Hills Station, Southern Gulf NRM and Birdlife Australia that aims to protect the habitat of the nationally-endangered Carpenterian Grasswren.

This project is supported by Southern Gulf NRM, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

Frequent, low intensity fires managed over millennia by Aboriginal people was the fire regime Carpenterian Grasswrens became adapted to.

Large, hot wildfires are a risk to Carpenterian Grasswrens, but a risk to graziers as well. The fire that destroys Grasswren habitat also destroys fodder, fences and other assets. There is a strong alignment between Grasswren conservation and cattle production.

Preparations for the burning have been made over several months and operations could not commence until after sufficient rainfall to ensure moderate fire behaviour.

The anxiously-awaited wet season rains finally arrived in February and project partners have jumped at the opportunity to safely conduct the burning while conditions are most suitable.

Burning will be conducted using incendiary devices distributed from a helicopter under the expert guidance of Mick Blackman from Friendly Fire Ecological Consultants.

Satellite image analysis will be used to monitor the extent of the fires in this remote and rugged landscape.

The project also aims to build fire management knowledge and skills among cattle station personnel.

The Queensland Rural Fire Service has provided substantial support for the project including capacity building through their professional training and also the loan of fire suppression equipment.

Birdlife Australia volunteers will survey the project area in coming months to assess the impact of operations on the population of this iconic bird.

Southern Gulf NRM has secured funding from the National Landcare Program to continue the project for an additional four years. This is an opportunity for neighbouring stations to benefit from a regional fire management initiative that will extend from Calton Hills Station to Boodjamulla National Park.

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Carpentarian Grasswren – Fast Facts

- The Carpentarian Grasswren is largely confined to North West Queensland, in the region between Mount Isa and the NT border.
- It is classified as an endangered species under Australian and Queensland environmental laws.
- Long-unburnt spinifex clumps are a vital habitat component for the endangered Carpentarian Grasswren.
- Populations of the Carpentarian Grasswren were badly affected by extensive, hot, dry-season wildfires that burnt through the region in 2011 and 2012.
- Ironically, well-managed fire is the best tool to ensure that sufficient unburnt spinifex remains for the bird. A mosaic of burnt and unburnt areas significantly reduces the risk of hot wildfires that could destroy habitat over large areas.



Photo Credit: Steve Murphy