MEDIA RELEASE

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Grasswrens Show Remarkable Resilience After Devastating Fires

A recent grasswren survey conducted by BirdLife Northern Queensland has revealed that the endangered Carpentarian Grasswren has shown remarkable resilience following the extensive wildfires that ravaged the area north of Mount Isa in late 2023.

Despite the widespread destruction of their habitat from the wildfires, the survey, funded by Southern Gulf NRM through the Glencore Queensland Metals' Community Assistance Grants, found that these grasswrens were present at over 83% of the surveyed sites. This is particularly encouraging given the increasing trend of increasing numbers since the surveys began in 2018 after a notable population decline from previous large-scale wildfire events. The survey also highlighted the importance of maintaining unburnt patches of spinifex, especially near rocky outcrops that can provide refuges.

Approaching the burnt areas, the survey coordinator, Kath Shurcliff and her team feared the worst for the local grasswren population. "When we approached the burnt areas, we thought, no way are we going to find any grasswrens here! But as we surveyed known territories where we had found birds in previous years, there they were again! What a relief to find that they could survive the immediate impacts of those fires!"

Citizen science volunteers, such as those from BirdLife Northern Queensland, play a vital role in conserving iconic species such as the Carpentarian Grasswren. These volunteers are the backbone of many bird surveys, as they often camp out in remote locations, covering vast areas to provide crucial data. Their keen eyes and ears help project officers and researchers locate endangered birds, identify key habitat areas, and track population trends. This information is essential for Carpentarian Grasswren, as it directs Southern Gulf NRM's fire management strategies, ensuring the continued presence of young patches of spinifex for the grasswren during future wildfires.

"We are incredibly appreciative of our volunteers and are encouraged by the resilience of the Carpentarian Grasswren population," said Alison Larard, CEO at Southern Gulf NRM. "We are mindful of the challenges faced by the Carpentarian Grasswrens and will continue to monitor their progress closely."

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Following the survey, the funding from the community grant will also enable Southern Gulf NRM's Project Officer, Lyndy Skea, to collaborate with landholders, the Mount Isa Fire Brigade, and fire specialists to deliver crucial fire training and controlled burns (via aerial incendiary burning) once the wet season begins.

Maryann Wipaki, General Manager Health Safety Environment and Community, Glencore emphasized the importance of supporting local biodiversity projects, "Glencore is deeply committed to supporting sustainable environmental projects that safeguard our unique wildlife and natural habitats. The partnership between Southern Gulf NRM and Glencore is not only about conservation but also about protecting our precious ecosystems for future generations. The recent survey results are encouraging, and highlight the importance of continued support and collaboration in preserving biodiversity in the North West".

Southern Gulf NRM would like to express their sincere gratitude to BirdLife Northern Queensland and the dedicated team of volunteers who made this survey possible. Their tireless efforts are crucial in protecting these iconic bird species.

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Southern Gulf NRM is the Natural Resource Management organisation for the Southern Gulf region of north west Queensland. We work with the community to deliver projects that improve and protect our region's natural resources and to maintain the prosperity of industries that rely on these. The Southern Gulf water catchment region includes all the land whose creeks and rivers run into the southern Gulf of Carpentaria. This encompasses an area of 215,000km square^2.

Photos x 5

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Photo credit: Steve Murphy

Photo credit: Lyndy Skea

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