

Media Release

Inaugural Ninu (Bilby) Festival – Kiwirrkurra, Gibson Desert

20-24 June 2016

A first of its kind summit to be held in the remote Gibson Desert, Western Australia will demonstrate that the chance of saving Australia's iconic Bilby from extinction is being strengthened by the work of Indigenous rangers across Northern Territory and Western Australia. A key focus of the event is to further explore the connections between western scientific and Indigenous ecological knowledge in ensuring the survival of the Bilby in the desert.

In the past 100 years, due to human impact and feral predators (cats, foxes) the range of the Bilby has shrunk by 80 per cent. Today only small scattered populations can be found in the Australian desert, mainly in land that is still owned and looked after by Indigenous land managers.

The Indigenous Desert Alliance (IDA) - a regional collaborative of Indigenous land management groups in across the WA/NT and SA deserts - is supporting the event because of the global environmental importance of Bilby conservation, and its significance to Indigenous people.

The inaugural Ninu (the Pintupi word for Bilby) Festival will be held in June on the Kiwirrkurra Indigenous Protected Area, home to a healthy Bilby population. The event will bring together more than 120 Indigenous rangers from 20 different ranger groups, internationally respected scientists, philanthropic conservation organisations and key government representatives to share ideas, experiences and discuss the latest research into managing Bilbies.

The 3-day event will also celebrate the cultural significance of the Bilby to desert Indigenous groups, collate information from all groups about the status of Bilby populations in their regions, trial the use of drones to survey Bilbies, promote the use of Indigenous tracking expertise, experiment with the new *Feral Cat Grooming Trap* and many other innovative initiatives.

Kate Crossing from Central Desert Native Title Services who facilitates the management of the Kiwirrkurra Indigenous Protected Area said "Scientists and Traditional Owners are working together to save the Bilby. The festival is our opportunity to share traditional and contemporary knowledge about the Bilby and its threats across the Australian deserts."

Indigenous Ranger Sally Napurula Butler said the Kiwirrkurra community was excited about holding the festival at Kiwirrkurra. "We are looking forward to showing all the rangers from other communities how we look after *Ninu* - setting up cameras at burrows, hunting cats, and making little fires so when it rains lots of grass seeds grow up for *Ninu*."

Wildlife Ecologist Dr Rachel Paltridge who assists the Kiwirrkurra Rangers with their Bilby management program is optimistic about the future of the Bilby in Australia if we make the right choices and investment in people and management now for the future.

"Through the Indigenous Ranger Programs and Indigenous Protected Areas, we are building terrific capacity out on the ground where Bilbies still occur. At least 120 Rangers are already engaged in

Bilby monitoring programs and ready and willing to help protect this species, but that's across a truly massive area of millions and millions of hectares. If we can ensure that everyone has the best available information and sufficient training and resources to implement management programs we will be in a really good position to save the Bilby, not just behind fences but out in the wild."

"And we need to listen to the voices from the Desert who have the best knowledge of where the Bilbies are, where they've disappeared from, what fire regimes and food plants they respond to, and why they are worth protecting."

It is hoped that a major outcome of the Ninu Festival will be that Indigenous ranger groups who have participated in the event will return to their lands positive, energised and well-equipped to ramp up their efforts to protect the bilby.

Factsheet

The Bilby has been listed in the Top 20 Priority Mammal Species for recovery in the Australian Government's National Threatened Species Strategy.

At a National Bilby Summit held in 2015, it was agreed that mobilising and working with the support and knowledge of Traditional Owners in remote communities offered one of the greatest opportunities for sustained, on-ground conservation action to protect Bilbies across their range.

The Indigenous Bilby Knowledge Festival has received generous support from the following supporters across the nation.

- Country Needs People - <http://www.countryneedspeople.org.au/>
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Australian Government
- Bush Heritage Australia
- Save the Bilby Fund
- Taronga Zoo – Taronga Conservation Society NSW
- Department of Parks and Wildlife WA
- Rangelands NRM WA
- Territory NRM NT
- Dreamworld QLD
- WWF Australia
- Desert Wildlife Services
- Environs Kimberley

The Festival is being organised by the **Indigenous Desert Alliance**, a network of Indigenous Land Management groups from WA, NT and SA. The IDA are working together to develop and implement regional projects that will address threats to the unique bio-diversity of our globally significant deserts, help to increase the capacity of Indigenous ranger teams to protect the desert and promote the world leading environmental work being carried out across the desert by Indigenous land managers.

Photo by Lisa Hatzimihail: Kiwirrkurra Traditional Owner Sally Napurula Butler visited the Bilbies at the Alice Springs Desert Park after a recent Bilby survey and cat hunting trip on the Kiwirrkurra Indigenous Protected Area.



For more information please contact Kate Crossing on 0409 206 287