

Yasi damage hits rare gliders hard

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A DESPERATE battle is under way in north Queensland to save the critically endangered mahogany glider after its coastal forests were torn to shreds by Cyclone Yasi.

Conservationists and Girringun Aboriginal Corporation members have built 70 feeding stations in a narrow 110km band between Tully and Ingham, the only place the gliders remain.

Wildlife Preservation Society projects manager Ewa Meyer yesterday said that it was the area hardest hit by Yasi and early estimates were about half the gliders' habitat was severely impacted.

It was not known how many would have died but because many trees were blown down, it was hard to imagine there was not an impact.

Winds of near 285km/h stripped trees of blossoms and leaves, removing gliders' food and exposing

Saving one species helps all

- Mahogany gliders are restricted to a small coastal strip in the southern Wet Tropics.
- About 2000 remain.
- Each needs about 20ha in which to live.
- They feed mostly on flowering plants and insects.

- About 80 per cent of their habitat has been cleared.
- Sclerophyll forests suitable for gliders are converting to rainforest because of altered fire regimes.
- Roads disrupt and fragment gliders.
- Gliders are killed by becoming entangled in barbed-wire fences.



- To save the mahogany glider is also to help many other species that share its habitat. They include the apollo jewel butterfly, lesser sooty owl, rufous owl (pictured), southern cassowary, crimson finch, spectacled flying fox, golden-tipped bat, ant plant, swamp orchid, leafy hyacinth orchid and the honeydew plant.

them to predators such as rufous owls, making their survival more difficult.

"It's hard to work out the total impact," Ms Meyer said. "Conditions

are horrific and because of the trees down and continuous rain making the ground very boggy, we haven't been able to get into many areas for

surveys. With canopy gone, they are exposed beautifully for predators."

The Foundation of Australia's Most Endangered Species has funded a 12-month monitoring program on the gliders, thought to number about 2000.

The state and federal governments also have a long-term recovery plan under way.

Ms Meyer said as well as feeding stations being stocked with native flowers and fruit, about 60 den boxes had been put up so animals had refuges.

"The monitoring will show how everything is working," she said.

Ms Meyer said positives were that swamp mahogany trees had started flowering, providing an important glider food, and the extent of help from land holders and volunteers was surprising.

"It's a bit like the mud army that came out to help after the floods in Brisbane, but this time it is for gliders," she said.



TOUGH TIME: Mahogany gliders are confined to a narrow 110km band between Tully and Ingham, right where Cyclone Yasi made landfall. **Picture:** D. Dickson