

# Outback wildlife sanctuary in NT undertakes biggest feral cat eradication project in the world

ABC NEWS 12 Jun 2017 NT Country Hour By Katrina Beavan

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-12/work-on-feral-animal-proof-fence-underway-in-outback-nt/8609540>



**Photo:** Tim Allard and Joe Schofield stand on what will soon be part of a 9,500 hectare feral animal-free zone. (ABC Rural: Katrina Beavan)

Work is underway at Newhaven Wildlife Sanctuary north-west of Alice Springs to create a feral animal-free zone by building a 44-kilometre fence.

It has been described as the largest feral cat eradication project in the world, and will eventually span 100,000 hectares.

The fence line will initially cover 9,500 hectares for stage one, before expanding to include a larger chunk of the 260,000ha property.

Australian Wildlife Conservancy national operations manager Tim Allard said it was a solution to a very big problem.

"The feral cat, the numbers vary, but they're decimating millions of native species every night," he said.

"We want to get rid of feral cats. At the moment the best way we can do that is by building a fence, eradicating feral animals from within it, and reintroducing native animals.

"Once you get an environment without the feral animals inside it, the native population thrives."

## NATIVE SPECIES TO RETURN

Mr Allard said weeds, mismanaged fire, and feral animals were the biggest threats to Australia's native animal population.

By keeping feral animals out, it is hoped the sanctuary will see the return of 10 native species, including the central rock rat, mala, numbats, bilbies and phascogales.

According to Mr Allard, it is hard to determine how long it will take for the populations to properly return once the fence is up.

"Based on previous experience, what we've just done with our Mt Gibson property in Western Australia, it's a pretty immediate outcome that you get," he said.

"Our first species were the brush-tailed bettong, [that] we reintroduced at Mt Gibson, and within a matter of months they were already having juvenile bettongs.

"We introduced bilbies, they were reproducing, and so on with the numbats.

**"So it doesn't take long to remove the threats, give them a habitat that they can survive in, and they'll look after themselves."**

## WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO KEEP CATS OUT?

**Photo:** Materials for stage one of Newhaven's feral cat eradication have arrived. Initially, a 44km fence will surround 9,500 hectares of the property. (ABC Rural: Katrina Beavan )

Newhaven sanctuary manager Joe Schofield said almost 20 kilometres had been cleared so far for the fence line.

"The fence will be about 1.8 metres in height and it will have a floppy top, so the mesh curves over at the top and is supported by high tensile wires," he said.

"There will be netting with skirts at the base to stop animals digging to get in or out. There will be two electric wires as well that run on the outside."

Mr Schofield said there would also be regular fence checks to make sure the perimeter had not been breached.

He said all going well, stage one should be finished by February.



## NIGHT PARROT RETURN UNLIKELY

**Photo:** Possible sightings of the night parrot were reported at Newhaven years ago, but it is unlikely they will return. (Supplied: Bruce Greatwich)



Possible sightings of the night parrot were reported at Newhaven years ago, but since then the elusive bird has not emerged.

But with the possible return of so many native animals, the question has been asked, could the night parrot crop up once more?

According to Mr Schofield, it is unlikely.

"It'd be lovely to think that they could be here. Night parrots have been found in areas that have very, very specific habitats," he said.

"Unfortunately the fire histories in Australia over the last 100 years have meant that that specific habitat is so restricted, and the likelihood of them being here currently is very low I believe.

"Having predators excluded from the area opens up all sorts of possibilities for the future, particularly when you look at the scale of stage two where we'll be stepping it up to an area 10 times the size of this initial stage."

**Photo:** Eventually the feral cat eradication project will cover 100,000 hectares of Newhaven Wildlife Sanctuary. (ABC Rural: Katrina Beavan)

## SANCTUARY EXPECTED TO BE TOURIST DRAWCARD

Night parrot or not, Mr Allard said the project could draw in tourists from around the world.

**"In two or three years time it'll be like stepping back 200 years into the past before Europeans turned up, before feral animals were introduced," he said.**

"You'll be able to walk around and see bilbies, numbats, phascogales. It's going to be a fantastic place to be.

"We're pretty sure it's going to be a drawcard for people to come to Central Australia.

"Central Australia is a wonderful place as it is. This is just going to add more value to the reason for coming here."

