

Bilby survey finds vulnerable species holding steady, but feral cats continue to pose a problem

ABC News By [Steven Schubert](#)

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Numbers of vulnerable bilbies are holding steady, according to a new baseline survey conducted by Indigenous ranger groups in arid Australia.



[Photo: The vulnerable species is holding steady in the wild \(Department of Natural Resources\)](#)

The "Bilby Blitz" program sought to establish the baseline numbers to contribute to a federal government plan for the survival of the species, which is threatened by feral cats, foxes, weeds and uncontrolled fires.

The blitz has involved Indigenous rangers using tracking skills passed down through generations to find active burrows across the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

"I was taught by my mum and dad, they showed me a bilby burrow," said Gladys Nungarrayi Brown, an Indigenous ranger based in Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory.

"I feel strongly towards them, I'd like to look after them, make sure they're still around."

Since Easter, Indigenous rangers have looked at 248 areas of land, each two hectares in size, and on all Aboriginal owned or managed land.

Central Land Council regional land management officer Richard Moyle said rangers found evidence of bilby activity in 58 of them.

Worryingly, rangers found evidence of feral cats in 111 of the search areas, and foxes in 50.

"They're still out there, we found bilbies where we expected to find them," he said.

"We also looked in areas where they had historically been found, and not surprisingly, they haven't been seen there for a while.

"We didn't find any new populations in those areas."

MULTILINGUAL 'BILBY BLITZ' APP KEY TO GATHERING ACCURATE DATA

Tracking skills allow rangers to set up motion activated cameras, and a specially designed mobile phone app is used to log evidence of bilby and predator activity.

The bilingual app can be set to English or two Indigenous languages, including Warlpiri, with potential to be expanded.

Mr Moyle said it would be a "lasting legacy" of the Bilby Blitz.

"That helps Indigenous rangers whose levels of education are varied to be able to have significant input in a scientific way of collecting data," he said.

While the bilby is listed as vulnerable, other more threatened species can also expect to benefit from the star power of the cute and cuddly marsupial.

"Everyone loves a bilby, they're cute, they're furry so they have that appeal," Mr Moyle said.

"They're a bit of a flagship species in that if you can preserve the bilby, you preserve the habitat [and] get rid of the threats which are fairly common across arid Australia."

As well as helping to preserve a swag of native plants and animals, Ms Brown has one more hope for the bilby.

"I'd like to cuddle them, I haven't cuddled them yet," she said.