



## Support conservation efforts in the Kimberley

Despite a temporary halt to Kimberley conservation efforts as a result of record floods in January 2023, Australian Wildlife Conservancy staff at Mornington-Marion Downs and Charnley River-Artesian Range sanctuaries have shown great resilience, and are back on the ground to undergo restorations and continue with day-to-day sanctuary operations. A well-prepared team meant that everyone was kept safe throughout the event – however, while operations have been able to resume, it may take years until AWC fully recovers from the longstanding effects of the floods.

### *Charnley River-Artesian Range*

Charnley River-Artesian Range Sanctuary luckily only suffered minimal damage from ex-tropical Cyclone Ellie. However, staff were emergency evacuated from the Charnley River operations base and accommodated in Broome until conditions were deemed safe for them to return. With limited work to do in terms of repair, upgrades to infrastructure have since resumed as part of the Kimberley Conservation Hub. The construction of this landmark project will provide significant improvements to Charnley's current conservation and research operations, as well as provide vital facilities to accommodate staff, Traditional Custodians, and visitors. The conservation hub will include new research and office amenities, as well as meeting and training spaces, which invites greater opportunity for collaboration with partners, stakeholders, and most importantly with Indigenous groups.





Purple-crowned Fairy Wrens. Niki Teunissen/AWC.

## *Mornington-Marion Downs*

At the beginning of the year, Mornington's research office was completely submerged, with a waterline that reached the roof of the building. Three months after the floodwaters receded, electricity and water were restored to the main workshop, as well as four houses that had survived complete inundation. Land managers were then able to shift their focus to re-establishing road access across the sanctuary. This allowed for temporary staff-stays, when land management activities resumed, and the early dry season prescribed burns began. These priority activities were essential in providing fire breaks to protect the remaining infrastructure at Mornington, as well as habitat for the Purple-crowned Fairy-wren.

Excitingly, researchers from Monash University have returned to Mornington and resumed an 18-year-long study on the Fairy Wren population. Led by Professor Anne Peters, PhD students Ariana La Porte and Ian Hoppe made a short trip to Mornington in May, where they were relieved to find that 74% of the population had survived the floods, and over a quarter of the breeding groups were observed with fledglings. Researchers were also hopeful to report that multiple groups were exhibiting breeding behaviours (feeding young chicks, incubating eggs, and building new nests) a month later than their typical breeding season. The team is now back on sanctuary in a more permanent capacity, and research is in full swing despite the impact on fieldwork.

Nine months later, a number staff members have returned to Mornington full-time, with others conducting work remotely from Broome. Land management teams are continuing to work towards restoring the damages felt at Mornington. While massive progress has been made, there is still much to be done, and it is estimated that Mornington repairs will continue well into 2024.

Thank you for supporting this project – your contribution to conservation in the Kimberley has been essential in ensuring the future of AWC's operations in Australia's expansive north region.

