



Support conservation efforts in the Kimberley

Thank you for being a supporter of Australian Wildlife Conservancy's (AWC) conservation efforts in the Kimberley. It has been a year now since Mornington-Marion Downs Wildlife Sanctuary, located in the heart of the Kimberley, was washed out in the heavy rainfall from ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie. The largest flood event on record forced staff and visiting researchers to evacuate by helicopter as river levels rose and backfilled onto Mornington's operations base – personal belongings, equipment, and years of herbarium specimens floated away in the downpour.

Sanctuary Manager, Stella Thomas, estimated that 95% of the sanctuary's operations base was affected – the infrastructure of which was completely destroyed, leaving only four houses and a single workshop as a foundation for the mammoth recovery effort ahead. Your contribution to AWC's conservation efforts in the Kimberley has been essential in this recovery. This update provides insight into the significant progress you have made possible over the last 12 months, and how you can contribute to ongoing restoration work in this special part of Australia.

Recovery Efforts

Mornington's recovery began with bringing the surviving facilities back to safe, livable standards. Electricity and water facilities were restored to those parts of the sanctuary in April, and road access became feasible in early May.

In August, AWC staff and volunteers teamed up with non-profit Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) to complete a large and urgent week-long clean-up. Approximately 18 tonnes of waste, mostly objects destroyed in the flood, was removed from affected buildings. Items removed from the sanctuary included damaged reference books and research documents, science and land management equipment, samples from the Mornington herbarium, electrical waste, whitegoods, people's destroyed belongings and other debris. It was a mammoth effort, and a high-priority activity to prevent the waste being distributed across the sanctuary, and reduce the risk of mold during the wet season.





Purple-crowned Fairy Wrens. Niki Teunissen/AWC.

Science Programs

Three months after the floodwaters receded, once electricity and water were restored to the main workshop and land management activities could resume, 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 endangered Purple-crowned Fairy-wren.

A small team of ecologists from Monash University returned to the sanctuary in May to restart their 17-year research into a population of Purple-crowned Fairy-wren at Mornington - one of the longest ongoing field studies of a bird population in northern Australia. 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. Despite the good news, the rest of AWC's Mornington scientists have been working on projects in other parts of the Kimberley due to facility limitations. The main focus at Mornington over the next few months is now on renovating flooded staff huts to get them back to a livable standard. AWC is also in the process of hiring two new ecologists for Mornington - the wider team are looking forward to having the full science team back on site.

AWC has also continued to invest in the construction of the Kimberley Conservation Hub at Charnley River-Artesian Range Wildlife Sanctuary (Willingin country). This infrastructure will act as a key base for scientific research, fire management, feral animal control, and other conservation projects spanning 4.3-6.1 million hectares of the Kimberley.

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.

