Enhancing King Island Brown Thornbill habitat patches for future corridors

Project summary

The endemic King Island Brown Thornbill (KIBT) was recently classed as the Australian bird most likely to go extinct within the next 20 years, if no action is taken to protect it. The critically endangered bird is mainly threatened by vegetation clearing and wildfire events. The occurrence of KIBT is linked to dense vegetation that holds large Eucalyptus trees, as found in Pegarah State Forest and Yarra Creek area.

Funded by the Australian Governments Environment Restoration Fund - Threatened Species Strategy Action Plan - Priority Species Grants Program, this project supported KIBT recovery by firstly promoting the benefits of native vegetation protection to King Island landholders and land managers, both as habitat and a productive asset on farm. The project also enhanced critical habitat to the bird's survival by working with priority area landholders to undertake native vegetation protection activities at the northern end of a proposed habitat corridor that will link KIBT population strongholds.

Project achievements

Community engagement
Community awareness was raised through delivery of information sessions at various community events and at an end-of-project field day. Engagement activities reached approximately 100 community members, with a further 63 community members also completing a project community survey. This survey was an important tool to better understand how the KIBT and its habitat is valued in the community. The level of engagement is significant considering the small population of King Island. Many of those engaged are also respected farming landholders who have become project champions and community advocates, leaving a strong legacy for our work.

Conservation action
Three adjoining landholders were engaged to establish a demonstration site to showcase improved native vegetation management on their farms to protect critical KIBT habitat. Over eight hectares of KIBT habitat has been protected in a buffer zone south of the Pegarah State Forest, that also establishes the northern end of a potential habitat corridor to priority bird populations at Yarra Creek to the south.

On-ground activities included fencing to exclude livestock and wallabies from important native vegetation remnants, including riparian areas along Lancaster Creek. Weeds and pasture were treated in habitat areas by an on-grounds work crew and targeted wallaby culling helped reduce grazing pressure on newly emerging seedlings. The site will be frequently monitored by King Island Landcare Group volunteers and landholders have committed to maintain the sites, including newly erected fencing.

Planning for future success
All landholders in the priority habitat corridor area between Pegarah State Forest and Yarra Creek have been engaged during this project, becoming more aware of the important role that they can play in KIBT recovery. Half of these landholders are prepared to support future proposed activities, including one of the largest landholders on the island. This probvides almost 70% of private land coverage in this priority area and is a solid foundation for future activities.

What next?

By demonstrating an effective approach to conservation management in agricultural landscapes, project partners will build relationships with landholders and land managers for future recovery actions and strengthen a partnership approach to KI Brown Thornbill conservation that will go a long way to averting another extinction disaster.

The endangered KI Brown Thornbill, *Acanthiza pusilla subsp. archibaldi.* Photo: Barry Baker

A patch of remnant vegetation dominated by Swamp Paperbark and *Monoyoca glauca*, was previously infested with pasture grasses.

New fencing established to protect habitats from grazing and trampling