

MEDIA RELEASE

28 March 2024

Latest funding boost will “keep an eye on the frogs”

Efforts to return native growling grass frogs to Winton Wetlands are set to receive a major boost with new funds just granted by a philanthropic body, the Wettenhall Environment Trust.

The Trust has announced a \$50,000 grant to increase the capacity of breeding facilities installed at the wetlands to assist frogs through their critical breeding and early development stages.

This is believed to be the biggest single amount granted by the Wettenhall Trust under its Small Environmental Grants Program to an environmental project of this kind.

Members of the Board of Trustees of Wettenhall visited Winton Wetlands on Thursday 28 March for their annual strategic planning meeting, taking the opportunity to inspect first-hand the progress to date with the growling grass frog project.

Wettenhall has already been a long standing and generous supporter of the ‘Growlers’ project in the past, providing funds for an initial feasibility study in 2018. Together with the Purry Burry Trust they subsequently provided further funding to fit out the building which now houses the frog laboratory and adjacent outdoor breeding pods.

The first batch of around 30 Growlers were transferred from a location near Bendigo managed by water company Coliban Water in March last year, and have spent the past year settling in and being closely monitored for general health and any signs of fungal or other infections. All are doing well.

The Winton Wetlands team views the latest announcement and visit from Wettenhall as a welcome expression of confidence by the Trust that the Growler project is progressing well.

“We’re keen now to extend the number of holding pods from six up to eight or nine, taking account of what we’ve learned over the past year in regard to the kinds of design which may be most conducive to the rearing of tadpoles,” Winton Wetlands Restoration Manager Dr Lisa Farnsworth said today.

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“We think we can fine-tune a little to improve the chances for successful breeding and rearing of the young.

“A particularly exciting aspect of the latest funding is that it’s going to give us the chance to show members of the public what’s going on each day, via a live video link.

Some of the funds will also go towards creating a live video feed from the frog holding area to the Mokoan Hub & Café - the central information point for visitors coming to the wetlands - allowing members of the public to view frogs and tadpoles on screen at any time.

“This fits in with one of our other key objectives which is to engage more members of the community in what’s going on here and help them to understand what it’s all about and how to support the work.

“Before long it will be possible to sip on a coffee in our Hub & Café while keeping an eye on what the frogs and, hopefully, tadpoles are up to!”

Progress to date has resulted from close cooperation between Winton Wetlands and a network of passionate and highly skilled volunteers, staff, researchers and agency staff as well as financial support from generous private and corporate donations and federal government and philanthropic funding.

“The frog breeding work we’re doing at Winton Wetlands has relevance beyond one area alone,” Winton Wetlands Aquatic Ecologist Lance Lloyd said today. “It links into much broader efforts now under way for restoration of wildlife habitat and water quality across the nation, at local, State and Commonwealth levels.

“We’re delighted to be playing our part in helping facilitate more cooperation and information sharing, and this latest generous funding boost from Wettenhall will enable us go further on that journey.”

Winton Wetlands is one of the largest and most significant wetland restoration projects in the southern hemisphere, managed by a Committee of Management reporting to the Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). It comprises more than 30 wetlands spread over a land area of 8750 hectares, and is home to many rare or endangered species. It is the first wetland outside of the USA to be designated as a ‘Wetland of Distinction’ by the international Society of Wetland Scientists.

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