

MEDIA RELEASE

5 June 2024

Turtles take to island living for World Environment Day

'Turtle Island' may sound like the name of a fabulous resort or maybe even a new TV reality show – but in fact it's the name of a serious initiative happening out at Winton Wetlands to help protect turtles against predators.

Two artificial islands have been constructed by La Trobe University researchers and floated out into the wetlands with the aim of giving longneck turtles a safe haven for breeding and egg-laying.

A first island was floated out into one of the ponds of the wetlands several months ago, and following initial signs of success - with two turtles already using the structure - a second island has been launched this month into a bigger pond that has a larger turtle population.

If successful, the two islands will protect many egg-laying turtles, turtle eggs and hatchlings against attacks by foxes.

Once fully grown, turtles are protected from foxes but the challenge for researchers is to find ways to give them a fighting chance to survive into adulthood.

"We're excited that La Trobe University's turtle research team led by Dr James Van Dyke have chosen to trial this novel approach here at Winton Wetlands," Restoration Manager Dr Lisa Farnsworth said today.

"If it proves successful in the long term, our hope is that it may be rolled out to many other locations over time.

"It's a particularly encouraging development to talk about this week with Wednesday 5 June being World Environment Day. Turtles have an important role to play in maintaining healthy and balanced wetlands ecosystems."

There are estimated to be between 500 and 1,000 turtles across the Winton Wetlands reserve. Winton Wetlands is the most ambitious wetland restoration project of its kind in Australia, and the first wetland outside of the USA to be declared a wetland of distinction by the Society of Wetland Scientists.

-ends-

Further media information: Dr Lisa Farnsworth
Lisa.Farnsworth@wintonwetlands.org.au – 0467 448 100