



2016 Warru survey shows a promising future

Written by Magdalena Zabek

Over the past decade, the Warru Recovery Team (WRT) and employees from the APY Lands have undertaken numerous black-footed rock wallaby (warru) trapping surveys. Their hard work and dedication has been rewarded this year with the survey revealing many positive signs of increasing warru numbers and resilience.

Performed annually until 2014 and every second year thereafter, this marked the 11th trapping survey in the Musgrave and Tomkinson Ranges, located in the north-east and north-west of the APY Lands in South Australia.

The survey teams consisted of indigenous rangers, Traditional Owners, IPA coordinators, project officers, ecologists and volunteers who came from the APY Lands, interstate and overseas. Regardless of age, nationality or occupation, they all shared one thing in common – a passion for the preservation of the APY Lands’ black-footed rock wallaby.

Considered one of South Australia’s most endangered species, *warru* numbers and range had contracted dramatically over the past 80 years in South Australia, particularly in the APY Lands.

Over the course of a week in July this year, trapping teams climbed some of the tallest hills in the APY’s Musgrave and Tomkinson Ranges. Careful preparation and a committed effort during the survey week paid off with many previously un-trapped warru being recorded.

A total of 53 warru were trapped in the Musgrave Ranges with 22 of those having not been caught before. In the Tomkinson Ranges, a total of 12 warru were trapped with five of those previously unrecorded in previous surveys.

Top: Harry Wheoki and Ethan Dagg set up traps in the Musgrave Ranges Photographed by Magdalena Zabek
Below: Warru Ranger Elisha Roesch releases a warru after fitting it with a microchip and an ear tag
Photographed by Ethan Dagg



Below right: Jacob McKenzie comforts a young warru waiting to have its details recorded
Photographed by Ellen Ryan-Colton





Photographed by Ethan Dagg

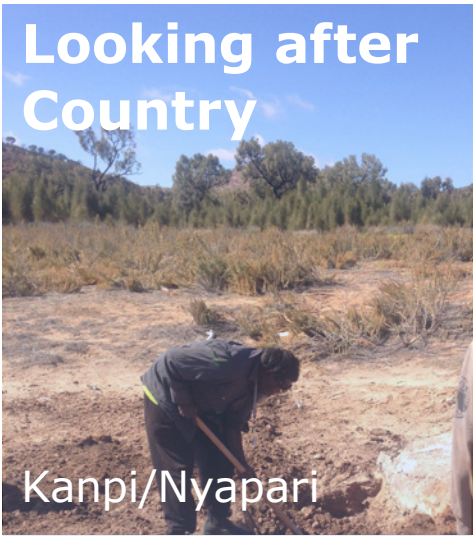
Analysed data indicated that trapping sites in the Musgrave and Tomkinson Ranges are occupied by at least 80 warru. We know that the warru population in these ranges extends much further than the small areas where trapping occurred, so the number of warru is likely an underestimate of the total status of the meta-population in the APY Lands.

Trapping surveys provide information about the wellbeing of the warru population. Nearly all females trapped had pouch young, indicating high breeding rates and the proportion of re-trapped adult warru from previous years suggested high survivorship of adult individuals. The ongoing feral predator management program together with the recent abundance of food in the Musgrave Ranges are likely to have contributed to this year’s positive survey results.

The information gathered from this year’s trapping survey is valuable to the warru translocation project. Next year the team plan to release a colony of semi-captive warru that were carefully cross-fostered and bred in captivity in Monarto Zoo. Over the last five years, the semi-captive animals have been kept in a specially designed predator-free enclosure in APY Lands.

It is hoped that these semi-captive warru will be released together with wild individuals from Musgrave Ranges into a new release site at Wamitjara, where warru previously existed. This translocation will go a long way to filling the vision of the Warru Recovery Team of reversing population decline and restoring warru to their former range and where their story (*Tjukurpa*) can continue.

Warru rangers set off across the high country in the Tomkinson Ranges.
Photograph by Christopher Dodd



Looking after Country

Kanpi/Nyapari

In September this year Project Manager Clint Taylor set out with Traditional Owners Aaron and Sammy Ken from Nyapari Community and Jonathon Lyons, Harold Lyons, Adrian Watson and Jeremiah James from Angatja/Amata communities to check the spread of Buffel grass growing along roadsides around Kanpi/Nyapari in the APY Lands.

The group mapped 70km of road, recording the sites where Buffel grass had spread and where plants occurred in isolation, destroying them.

When working around Angatja, the men were very keen to take the opportunity to clean up around the rockholes in their country. Guided by Jonathon Lyons they dug out the silt filled rock holes and cleared away unwanted vegetation.

These sites not only have cultural significance to the local Traditional Owners but in most cases provide the only potable water for the region’s wildlife.



Photos by Clint Taylor