

WIRRUWANA NEWS

UPDATES FROM DIRK HARTOG ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

WINTER 2026

Discover the latest updates from the *Return to 1616* Ecological Restoration Project including tips for wildlife watching while on the Island, how to pack for your trip, the world's first grasswren translocation and Malgana artists' design of a Woylie.



A small, elusive bird has made history on Wirruwana/Dirk Hartog Island. For the first time, translocated western grasswrens have successfully bred and produced offspring that have survived to adulthood on the island—marking a major conservation milestone.

The western grasswren (*Amytornis textilis textilis*) disappeared from Wirruwana around 100 years ago. In 2022, 85 birds were translocated to the island as part of the *Return to 1616* Ecological Restoration Project. This was not only the first time the species had been returned to Wirruwana, but also the first translocation of any grasswren species worldwide.

The birds were sourced from Bush Heritage Australia's Hamelin Station Reserve and from the Peron Peninsula, including François Peron National Park, on Malgana Country. The translocation was supported by strong partnerships, including with Bush Heritage Australia, which provided logistical support and helped build the knowledge base needed to guide the project.

Since their release, monitoring has shown encouraging signs. Western grasswrens, known for being extremely difficult to detect, have continued to be recorded through targeted surveys, remote camera trapping and acoustic monitoring. Breeding

activity was confirmed within the first year, indicating the birds were beginning to settle into their new environment.

The most significant breakthrough came in 2025, when multiple unbanded adult grasswrens were recorded on camera and observed during field surveys. All birds released during the translocation were fitted with coloured leg bands, meaning that birds without bands must have been born on the island. The observation of these unbanded individuals confirms, for the first time, successful recruitment into the population on Wirruwana.

At the same time, some of the original translocated birds are still persisting on the island, now more than three years after release. This combination of survival and successful breeding suggests that the population is establishing, despite the challenges of a harsh and variable environment.

The achievement is particularly significant given the complexities involved in translocating a highly cryptic species with specific habitat requirements. It reflects years of planning, research and adaptive management by the *Return to 1616* team and partners.

Continued over...

Above An Island born western grass wren. Photo – Ben Parkhurst

Grasswren translocation *continued...*

As the only bird species included in the translocation program, the western grasswren plays a unique role in the broader restoration effort. Its return adds an important layer to the island's recovering ecosystems and contributes to rebuilding ecological function across the landscape.

While ongoing monitoring will be critical to understand long-term population trends, the early signs are promising. The successful breeding of western grasswrens on Wirruwana represents a historic first and an encouraging step forward in restoring one of Australia's most remote and ecologically significant islands.

Above right A Western Grasswren without bands on its legs, proving that it was born on the island. *Photo – DBCA*

Right Monitoring the Islands Western Grasswren population. *Photo – K Rayner/DBCA*



Malgana artwork celebrates the return of the woylie

A new piece of artwork by Malgana artist Chynna Chadderton is adding a cultural dimension to the *Return to 1616* Ecological Restoration Project on Wirruwana/Dirk Hartog Island.

Commissioned to create a design inspired by the woylie, Ms Chadderton, a proud Malgana woman from Gathaagudu (Shark Bay), has developed a piece that reflects the deep connections between wildlife, Country and community. The woylie (*Bettongia penicillata*), recently returned to the island, is the ninth species to be reintroduced as part of the project.

Drawing on her connection to Country and contemporary Aboriginal storytelling, Ms Chadderton's work blends traditional elements such as dots, lines and symbolic forms with her own artistic style. Through this approach, the design shares both cultural meaning and personal expression.

At the heart of the artwork is a story of connection. The patterns within the woylie's body symbolise the links between plants, animals and the natural elements that shape Wirruwana, including the sun, sand dunes and shrubs. Together, these elements represent the island itself—an environment that can be harsh, yet supports unique wildlife and allows species such as the woylie to thrive.

A central symbol within the artwork represents community and the coming together of people to protect and restore native species. This reflects the

collaborative effort behind the *Return to 1616* project and the shared commitment to caring for Country.

The design is already being used to engage visitors and share the story of the island's restoration. Printed on calico bags, it forms part of Welcome Packs for visitors to Wirruwana and features in environmental education activities. During the April school holidays, the bags were used in a hands-on activity at Monkey Mia Visitor Centre, where participants created their own designs while learning about the project and the species being returned.

Incorporating Aboriginal artwork into the project is an important

step in bringing cultural perspectives into conservation efforts. It provides a meaningful way to communicate the significance of species restoration while recognising the enduring connection of Traditional Owners to Country.

As the *Return to 1616* project continues, initiatives like this highlight the value of combining science, culture and community engagement to support long-term conservation outcomes.

Ms Chadderton's artwork can be viewed at blueyesart.com.au



Above Malgana artist Chynna Chadderton, whose woylie design brings cultural knowledge and conservation together. *Photo – Blueyes Art*

Left Children colour in the woylie design while learning about ecosystem restoration. *Photo – DBCA*



Planning your visit to Wirruwana

With its remote landscapes, rich wildlife and remarkable conservation story, it's an experience like no other. A little planning before you go and a few simple actions while you're there, will help protect the island and ensure your visit is memorable for all the right reasons.

Protecting the island starts at home

Before you leave, it's important to pack carefully. Unwanted hitchhikers like insects, seeds and small animals can travel in camping gear, clothing and vehicles, posing a significant risk to the island's fragile ecosystems.

The Asian house-gecko and black rat are not currently present on Wirruwana and we want to keep it that way. Both species occur on the mainland, including in Denham, so there is a real risk they could be accidentally transported to the island.

Take time to thoroughly clean your clothing, camping gear and equipment. Remove soil and seeds from footwear and check for insects and spiders. Pack food in clean, sealed containers instead of cardboard packaging, which can harbour pests, and ensure fresh produce is free of soil, snails and insects. Campfires are not permitted anywhere in the national park, and pets are not allowed.

Vehicles can also carry pests and weeds. Pay close attention to tyres, the underside and interior areas where soil and seeds can collect. Many weeds have already been removed from the island and it's important they are not reintroduced. The *Return to 1616* project team is working hard to eradicate species such as double gee, castor oil plant, couch grass, lupin, ruby dock and wild radish and preventing new infestations is critical.

Visiting on your boat

The waters to the east of the island lie within the Shark Bay Marine Park, so it's important to understand zoning, including sanctuary areas where additional protections apply.

If you're planning to stay overnight, camping is available at designated Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) campgrounds or at the Dirk Hartog Island Eco Lodge. All sites must be booked in advance.

During your stay

While on the island, simple actions can make a big difference. Stay on existing tracks and camp only in designated areas to avoid damaging vegetation and spreading weeds.

Drive slowly at all times and take extra care at dusk and dawn, when native animals are most active. Avoid driving during these times where possible to reduce the risk of collisions with wildlife.

Continued over...

Above Stay on track to protect the environment.

Right While on the Island, drive slowly to avoid wildlife that share the same tracks.

Photos – Samille Mitchell/DBCA



Planning your visit to Wirruwana *continued...*

All rubbish must be bagged and taken off the island. Store it securely while you're there to prevent wildlife access.

To help protect native wildlife, rodent baits and traps must not be used on the island, as they can unintentionally poison species such as the threatened Shark Bay mouse and other small mammals and birds. Instead, store food in sealed containers, keep camp areas clean and free of scraps and remove rubbish regularly and secure it away from animals. These simple steps help keep the island's wildlife safe.

Wildlife watching tips

Native wildlife on Wirruwana is protected by law and should not be disturbed. Thanks to the success of restoration efforts, visitors now have a greater chance of encountering wildlife, so it's important to observe animals responsibly.

Many of the island's animals are nocturnal, so the best time for wildlife spotting is in the evening. Head out for a quiet walk using a low-light or red-light torch to minimise disturbance.

Move slowly, keep your distance and stay low if you encounter wildlife. The quieter you are, the better your chances of a special sighting. Most importantly, enjoy the moment and never feed animals, as this can harm their health and natural behaviours.

A visit to Wirruwana is more than a holiday—it's a chance to experience one of Australia's most ambitious ecological restoration projects firsthand. By taking a few extra steps before and during your trip, you'll help protect this special place for generations to come.



Top 5 tips for visiting Wirruwana

- **Clean before you travel**
Remove soil, seeds and insects from your vehicle, gear and clothing to protect the island's ecosystems.
- **Pack smart**
Use sealed containers for food and don't bring firewood, pets or rodent baits to the island.
- **Stay on track**
Keep to existing tracks and camp only in designated sites to avoid damaging vegetation.
- **Leave no trace**
Take all rubbish with you and store it securely while on the island.
- **Watch wildlife responsibly**
Be quiet, keep your distance and never feed animals.

More information:

Return to 1616 Ecological restoration Project:
dbca.wa.gov.au/returnto1616

DHNP: explore.parks.dbca.wa.gov.au/park/dirk-hartog-island-national-park

Shark Bay Marine Park:
explore.parks.dbca.wa.gov.au/park/shark-bay-marine-park

Above Do a final check for weeds and seeds on your vehicle before boarding the barge to the Island.

Left Invasive ice plant on the Island near the barge landing, highlighting the importance of biosecurity. *Photos – DBCA*

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Visit dbca.wa.gov.au/returnto1616 to learn more about *Return to 1616*.

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