

PROTECTING THE ARNHEM PLATEAU SANDSTONE SHRUBLAND

PROJECT FACTSHEET

The challenge

The 32,000 km² sandstone plateau of western Arnhem Land is highly biodiverse, with many of its plants and animals found nowhere else. A high proportion of the plants here are fire-sensitive and are impacted by frequent and intense fires.

The Arnhem Plateau sandstone shrubland complex ('stone country') is a nationally threatened ecological community within the plateau. Stone country is threatened by frequent, large, and intense fires, and by grassy weeds (particularly gamba and mission grasses) that out-compete native species and exacerbate fires. Many plants and animals, such as the threatened white-throated grasswren (*Amytornis woodwardi*), rely on old-growth vegetation and will only breed if there are large, old spinifex shrubs to build their nests in. The white-throated grasswren isn't found anywhere else.

Project goals

This project aims to help improve the condition of stone country by collaborating with First Nations ranger groups and Traditional Owners to:

- undertake targeted weed surveys to inform management;
- manage weeds to reduce the spread of grassy weeds into stone country;
- survey for the white-throated grasswren using several survey methodologies and use results to inform fire management activities to protect grasswren habitat;
- manage fire to protect key species and areas and mitigate extensive wildfires; and
- monitor to ensure management activities are achieving their objectives.



Photo: Kelly Dixon

Working together

Survey and management sites across stone country will be chosen during participatory planning sessions with the relevant First Nations ranger groups and Traditional Owners.

This project will support rangers to carry out on-ground management activities, and will facilitate Traditional Owners to reconnect with Country in areas that may not be visited often.

This project will provide on-ground training by experienced ecological staff in several novel survey methods for rangers and Traditional Owners, and support capacity building in desktop analysis and spatial mapping of data. The results from grasswren surveys will improve our knowledge of the distribution of the seldom-seen species and inform management activities.

This project will run from May 2024 to June 2028.



Making a difference

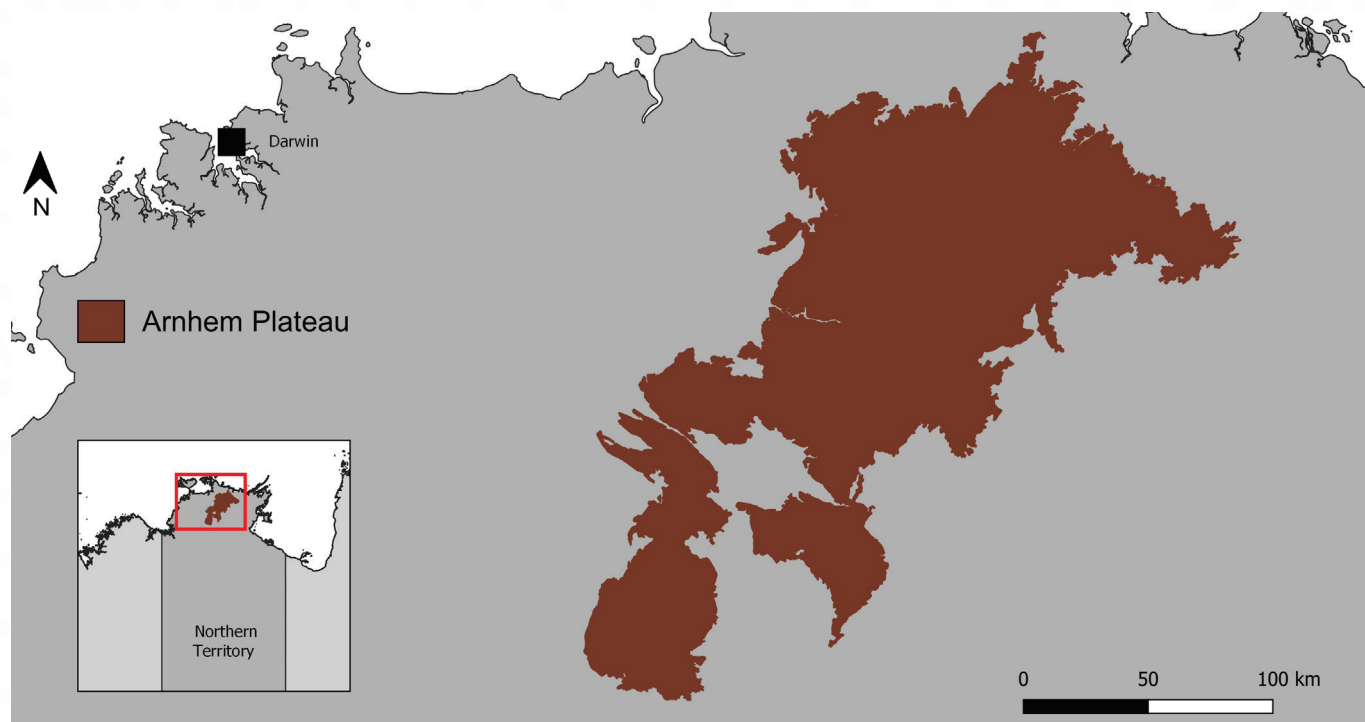
Participatory planning will guide site selection for surveys for targeted flora, priority fauna, and threats. Collaborative efforts will support threat management activities such as strategic fire management and weed control. Monitoring at key sites will inform management decisions and identify the degree to which actions are improving the habitat of stone country and for priority species. This project will address priority actions listed in relevant conservation advices and Healthy Country plans, and will facilitate First Nations leadership and support on-Country visits to increase knowledge transfer and traditional land management practices.

Next steps

An ecological niche model for the white-throated grasswren is being updated to help identify areas of potentially suitable habitat across stone country.

We're organising participatory planning and consultation meetings early in 2025 to collaboratively choose sites for surveys and management activities.

The first grasswren surveys will occur from March 2025. Fire management activities will be supported through the dry season.



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