

Helping cotton-growing communities to boost biodiversity

FOR the first time, research has identified priority areas and hands-on actions to help boost biodiversity conservation in Australia's 36 cotton-growing shires.

Led by the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC), the new research looked at 315 threatened and iconic plant and animal species in the cotton landscapes of eastern Australia, from the NSW-Victorian border to the Fitzroy Basin in Queensland, and used that data to develop targeted biodiversity management profiles for each of the 36 regions.

Building on previous research funded by CRDC, Forest Wood Products Australia, CSIRO and the Rural R&D for Profit Program, each management profile specifies the biodiversity assets, including vegetation types, wetlands, species, rivers and creek lines, and adjacent public land reserves, and recommends management actions to best suit the habitats of the particular species represented in each of the shires.

CRDC is now planning to use the research findings to create practical guides for cotton growers and people living in cotton-growing communities to take action to improve and boost the biodiversity in their areas. The information guides will be published in 2020.

Stacey Vogel, CRDC R&D Manager, said the guides will help to lead 'boots on the ground' action to improve conditions for the rich diversity of species contained in cotton landscapes.

"The research findings from this project are extensive – but even better – they're really practical," she said.

"The cotton landscapes of eastern Australia contain a rich diversity of native plant and animal species that occur in a mosaic of forest, woodland, wetland, grassland and cropland systems.

"CRDC is going to use the research findings about these landscapes to provide all 36 cotton-growing regions in eastern Australia with information guides to better understand and manage their specific biodiversity needs.

"Whether it's the red-tailed black cockatoo, the river red gum or spotted-tailed quoll, the guides will show simple and practical actions that we can all take to help improve habitats.

"Protecting biodiversity is essential for all cotton-growing communities because biodiversity delivers ecosystem services on which businesses and communities enjoy and depend. The guides to be released in 2020 will be helpful additions to the cotton grower's toolbox for improving biodiversity."

Project partner Dr Julian Wall from natural science consultancy Zrog said guides will assist cotton growers to build natural capital and biodiversity into their farm management practices.

"We know that when people are more aware of the range in biodiversity in their natural landscape they tend to become more aware of the importance of managing them as part of their business," Julian said.

"There's an increased understanding in the agriculture sector in general around the importance of retaining biodiversity, and this research will help support that awareness and education for the betterment of farms and local communities," he said.

The research is part of CRDC's Cotton Landcare Tech-Innovations 2021 project which involves experts from Australia and around the world working in partnership to strengthen Australian cotton farm biodiversity and sustainability management. For more information visit www.crdc.com.au/cotton-landcare-tech-innovations.

For more: Bernadette Pilling, Cotton Landcare Tech-Innovations 2021, 0450 324 332, bernadette@houseofcommunications.com.au



CRDC's guides will help improve habitats for a wide range of native species encountered in the cotton landscape, such as the Australian bustard, broilga, superb fairy wren, shingleback and wedge-tailed eagle. (IMAGES: © Lachlan Copeland, Eco Logical Australia).