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## Bringing the Eastern Bristlebird back from the brink

About 100 hectares of grassy forest on private land at Grady's Creek in the Border Ranges area near Kyogle has undergone a planned burn in an effort to help bring the endangered Eastern Bristlebird (*Dasyornis brachypterus*) back from the brink of extinction.

Ecologists estimate there are only about 30 known individuals left in the northern population of the species, which is clinging on in only a few places in northern NSW and southern Queensland. The bird's northern range covers an area of about 50 square kilometres, within which there may be less than 1000 hectares of suitable habitat left for nestling and foraging.

The controlled burn on September 5 was conducted by the NSW Rural Fire Service and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service on behalf of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC) and the local landholders to promote the correct conditions needed to support the local population. Specialist remote-area firefighters, rangers and local brigades conducted the operation in steep, remote country on private land adjacent to the Border Ranges National Park and Gondwana World Heritage Area.

"The eastern bristlebird northern recovery team and researchers believe that one of the biggest threats to the species in northern NSW and south-east Queensland is inappropriate fire regimes," said **Lynn Baker, Office of Environment and Heritage Senior Team Leader, Ecosystems and Threatened Species North East.**

"The extent and frequency of fires is important in determining the suitability of habitat. Small-scale or low-medium intensity fires leave small patches of unburnt habitat that provides critical refuge for birds during fire and act as a base for the recolonisation of burnt areas after fire. Intense or extensive wildfires, on the other hand, can eliminate large areas of suitable habitat, including potential refuges, and lead to local extinction."

**NCC Hotspots Program Ecologist Kevin Taylor** said the northern population of the Eastern Bristlebird had declined with changed land and fire management practices since the 1980s.

"Researchers believe the lack of fire since the 1980s has resulted in the loss of grassy habitats critical for its survival," Mr Taylor said. "Encroachment by shrubs and invasive weeds occurs during long periods without fire, so we hope this burn will deal with that problem. Post fire weed control will also be conducted as part of the project."

Mr Taylor said the burn at Grady's Creek may also benefit a population of the endangered Hastings River Mouse (*Pseudomys oralis*) that was found during small mammal surveys by NCC staff and researchers as part of ongoing monitoring at the site.

The burn was part of a project by the Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC) in collaboration with local landholders, the Northern Rivers Fire and Biodiversity Consortium, the Hotspots Fire Project, the South East Queensland Fire and Biodiversity Consortium and South East Queensland Catchments. These groups include representatives from state and local government agencies seeking a coordinated, landscape approach to fire and biodiversity. One of the properties involved, Sine Cera Rainforest Retreat, made its facilities available to act as a coordination centre during the burn. The program was supported with funding from an Australian Government Caring for Our Country grant.