



First Aboriginal-led National Recovery Team for Cape York's endangered Golden-Shouldered Parrot

In a positive first for species conservation, Olkola Elder Mike Ross has led the reinstated National Recovery Team meeting for *Alwal*, the endangered Golden-Shouldered Parrot, on Olkola Country this week.

He becomes the first Aboriginal person to Chair a National Recovery Team, in acknowledgment of the depth of knowledge Aboriginal people have to contribute to saving species and caring for country.

This week's meeting signals a resurgence of the long term commitment and resolve to protect Alwal forever. There has not been an active Recovery Team in place for this species since 2003.

Olkola Aboriginal Corporation Chair Mike Ross said his appointment was significant and an important step forward.

"Our job is to link our traditional knowledge and cultural knowledge with the scientific way – there is a pathway there, there has always been a pathway between our traditional knowledge and science. If we can link that (to protect the environment) then our work will have been completed," said Ross.

The National Recovery Team has 10 members in total, comprised of representatives from five Traditional Owner groups (Olkola, Kunjen, Wakaman, Thaypan and Kokoberrin), Bush Heritage Australia, Sue Shephard from Artemis Station (a long-time advocate for the parrot), Dr Gabriel Crowley (species expert) and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

Bush Heritage ecologist Allana Brown, who is Deputy Chair of the Recovery Team, has been working with Olkola since 2015 to support Olkola rangers to study the Northern population of Golden-shouldered parrots and undertake landscape-scale habitat management.

"One of the actions we're taking is to reinstate Olkola traditional fire regimes and storm burns at critical

nesting areas that have been impacted by woody thickening. We've also undertaken nest surveys which have improved our understanding of Alwal's current extent of occurrence," explains Brown.

"Nest site surveys are improving our estimates of the Northern population and we've started a long-term monitoring program to assess breeding success based on daily probability of survival, predation, vegetation response to fire management and to further develop remote camera survey techniques."

About the Golden-Shouldered Parrot

The budgerigar-sized parrot that nests in termite mounds is a totem of northern Australia's Olkola people and known as Alwal in Olkola language. The bird is on the IUCN's Red List and listed as endangered by the Queensland and Australian governments. The closest relative of the Golden-shouldered Parrot is the now-extinct paradise parrot once found in southeast Queensland.

The golden-shouldered parrot (*Psephotus chrysopterygius*) is a small granivore found only in Cape York Peninsula. It is also known as the 'ant bed parrot' because it digs out nest chambers in termite mounds when they are soft from wet season rains. The male is turquoise with a black crown, bright yellow on the wing and forehead and with a salmon pink belly. Females and immature birds are mostly green with a turquoise rump.

Estimates are that there are fewer than 1,500 parrots left in Olkola country, whereas once there were large jewelled flocks seen regularly at waterholes at the end of the dry season.

Alwal is a savanna grassland specialist. By looking after Alwal's habitat, dietary and nesting requirements, Olkola Land Managers are also looking after a whole suite of other savanna flora and fauna; including Cockatoo Grass, a keystone species across the North.

