



# Media Release

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## **BRISTLEBIRDS BOUNCE BACK FROM EAST GIPPSLAND BUSHFIRES**

Research in East Gippsland on the endangered Eastern Bristlebird has found the birds responded to the 2019/20 summer bushfires in an unexpected way.

On a research trip into Howe Flat, east of Mallacoota, Dr Rohan Clarke from Monash University heard the bird's distinctive call from burnt Lowland Forest and gully vegetation that was regenerating after the bushfires.

DELWP Team Leader for the Eastern Bristlebird Recovery Project, Mick Bramwell said: "The species has always favoured nearby heathland and wetland scrub areas and has not previously been recorded in forested areas."

"The discovery of the birds in burnt forest is great news as it indicates they not only survived the bushfire but have also moved into new habitat including areas that had been burnt," Mr Bramwell said.

"A lot of grasses have grown up in the burnt forest areas making it suitable habitat for the species - we'll continue observing them over the next 3-5 years to see if they remain in this forest area after the trees recover from the bushfire.

"We are hoping that this discovery means Eastern Bristlebirds are more resilient to fires than initially thought."

The research team is taking DNA samples for testing and during the latest trip the team managed to take 16 samples.

The new samples will be tested and compared to DNA samples from the 15 birds that were taken to Melbourne as an insurance measure to protect the species during the bushfires.

The results from the initial 15 birds showed some in-breeding. The new DNA samples will help determine if the rest of the population has the same issues and if needed inform a plan to increase their genetic diversity.

The Victorian population of Eastern Bristlebirds is confined to Howe Flat and is estimated to be around 120-160 in the wild.

The research is part of the Victorian Government's \$51.5 million Bushfire Biodiversity Response and Recovery program.

The research team comprised a mix of DELWP Natural Environment Program staff and researchers from Monash University and Wollongong University.