



SAVING OUR SPECIES

Bellingher River snapping turtle

Myuchelys georgesii
Critically Endangered

Where do they occur?

The Bellingher River snapping turtle is only found in a 60-kilometre stretch of the Bellingher River in Northern NSW. Their preferred habitat is moderate to deep pools with rocky layers.

Why are populations declining in the wild?

This species was listed as Critically Endangered under the NSW *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* after a virus, now known as the Bellingher River virus, caused mass mortality of the turtles in early 2015. An estimated 90% of the population was wiped out in just six weeks.

What is being done to save them?

A rapid response by the NSW Government and partners during the virus outbreak had 17 healthy turtles placed into a captive breeding program managed by Taronga Zoo. The turtles are breeding, and the program has since expanded to include Symbio Wildlife Park.

Trial release

Since 2018, the NSW Government has managed the trial release and monitoring of 82 captive-bred juvenile Bellingher River snapping turtles. Without this, the species is likely to become extinct in the wild.



Bellinger River snapping turtle
Photo: Shannon Greenfields/DPIE

The release program follows an approved translocation plan under the guidance of reptile and translocation experts, wildlife disease experts and zoo professionals.

Radio transmitters are attached to the released turtles to assist with locating them during monthly monitoring. We aim to find out what happens to the turtles after being released, if they have survived and if they are adapting in the wild.

We also measure the growth rate of the animals, to determine body condition, as well as general health and exposure to the virus.

Lessons from the trial release program will inform recovery planning for the species and any future releases of Bellinger River snapping turtles back into the wild.

We are still learning

There is still much we don't know about this species and the virus. Research is being undertaken by the NSW Government to determine how the virus is transmitted, what might make this species susceptible to the virus and if the virus is still present in the river system.

Under the Saving our Species Program the NSW Government is funding several actions to conserve the Bellinger River snapping turtle. These include:

- captive breeding
- regular monitoring of the remaining wild population
- restoring and improving habitat in the upper Bellinger River
- a citizen science program to track water quality across the catchment
- research into genetics, population dynamics and the virus.

Bellinger River snapping turtle (*Myuchelys georgesi*) is a short-necked native freshwater turtle which grows up to 25 centimetres in shell length.



Bellinger River snapping turtle
Photo: Shane Ruming/DPIE

Help save the Bellinger River snapping turtle

There are lots of ways you can help save the Bellinger River snapping turtle.

- Report sick or dead turtles, phone our Environment Hotline 131 555
- Contact the North East Ecosystems and Threatened Species Unit (02) 6659 8200
- Report turtle sightings at www.bionet.nsw.gov.au or www.turtlesat.org.au
- Volunteer with Bellinger Riverwatch and take part in citizen science water quality monitoring www.ozgreen.org/br

Saving our Species is a NSW Government program targeting on-ground action to secure threatened plants and animals from extinction. The program aims to increase the number of species that can survive securely in the wild.

Saving our Species can only succeed if we work together. We need your support to ensure that today's actions help to secure the future of NSW's threatened species.

Acknowledgments: Partners including Taronga Zoo, Symbio Wildlife Park, Regional NSW, Bellinger Landcare, OzGREEN and Western Sydney University and landholders, community members and researchers involved in the project.

To find out more about threatened species in NSW and the Saving our Species program:

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/SOS

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