

Australia's nocturnal bilby under threat after floods

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File photo of a nocturnal male bilby at Sydney Wildlife World. The future of Australia's desert-dwelling bilby is under threat after floods destroyed a predator fence which allowed feral cats to kill 150 of the newborn marsupials, conservationists said Thursday.

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The once-prolific nocturnal creature, which resembles a long-snouted rat, has died out in all but three of Australia's eight states and territories due to predators, dwindling food and [habitat loss](#).

In order to boost numbers in Queensland, where just 600 to 700 are estimated to remain in the wild and the species has been declared endangered, [conservationists](#) erected a two-metre high electrified predator fence to enclose an area of 25 square kilometres.

But Frank Manthey, co-founder of the Save The Bilby Fund, said recent floods in Queensland had destroyed parts of the fence, allowing feral cats to roam freely in a devastating setback for conservation efforts.

"We estimated we could have had around 150 newborn bilbies inside that fence, and they've cleared the lot out," Manthey told ABC television.

"We weren't vigilant enough to pick it up quick enough, but the cats did. When we discovered they were in there, it was too late."



A male bilby is shown at Sydney Wildlife World, September 11, 2009. The once-prolific nocturnal creature, which resembles a long-snouted rat, has died out in all but three of Australia's eight states and territories due to predators, dwindling food and habitat loss.

Manthey said some 3,000 feral cats had been shot in the vicinity in little more than a fortnight.

He also warned that, in a double-blow for [conservation efforts](#), the "Save the Bilby Fund" was in jeopardy due to the collapse of major partner

confectioner Darrell Lea.

The fund was receiving about Aus\$50,000 a year from the Easter sale of chocolate bilbies, instead of traditional [bunnies](#), by Darrell Lea. The company went into receivership last year, closing its stores and cutting off funding.

Bilbies, once prolific across 70 percent of the Australian continent, have been reduced to small, scattered populations across [desert areas](#) of Queensland, [Western Australia](#) and the Northern Territory.

The bilby is the largest and sole surviving species of the bandicoot family in arid and semi-arid Australia. It typically weighs 0.8 - 1.1 kilograms and measures 55 centimetres in height.

The omnivores use their long, sticky tongues to eat small lizards and spiders, worms, insects and a range of plants. They live in deep burrows to keep cool and only emerge at night.

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