

Emus get GPS treatment

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Murdoch University researchers will be placing GPS tracking devices on six emus to track their movements and habits in jarrah forest at Avon National Park.

The two-year study will examine the animal's role in [seed dispersal](#) in order to inform conservation models for plant species in the face of habitat loss and fragmentation, and [changing climate](#) and [fire regimes](#).

Professor Neal Enright said the research team was testing several theories.

"We believe emus are the key long-distance disperser for a small group of large-seeded plant species restricted to South West Australian jarrah

forests," Professor Enright said.

"In areas where emu abundance has declined due to human impacts, we expect to find that these plant species will have lower [genetic diversity](#), be less productive and have fewer seedlings.

"As well as establishing the importance of emus, we hope our findings can be used to develop models for plant species in preparation for climate change through the 21st century."

Professor Enright said the GPS trackers were small, lightweight and would have no physical impact on the birds.

The trackers can be programmed remotely, so that data can be collected at a high frequency for short time intervals to assess movement behaviour such as walking, eating and resting, and at a low frequency at other times to conserve battery power.

This information will help determine the role of the emu in seed dispersal, including [seasonal variations](#), and provide information such as gathering sites and the size of the emus' home ranges.

Professor Enright said that field research would involve sampling emu faeces to establish feeding history, allowing researchers to test how passage through the emu gut influenced subsequent [seed germination](#).

The project builds on Professor Enright's previous research funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) on frequency, mechanisms and consequences of long-distance seed dispersal.

Provided by Murdoch University

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