

Saving native turtles one hatchling at a time

March 3 2022



Credit: Murdoch University

Murdoch University researchers have welcomed a baby turtle into the world this week as part of an important incubation research project aiming to save the iconic Southwestern snake-necked turtles at Bibra Lake from dwindling population numbers.

The project, in collaboration with the City of Cockburn, aims to bump up turtle numbers across Perth's southern suburbs through the

development of restocking programs for the [vulnerable species](#) (*Chelodina oblonga*—prev. *C. colliei*).

Leading the research is Murdoch University Honors student April Sturm who has been on a quest to find out if different temperature and moisture regimes affect hatching success and hatchling traits.

Ms. Sturm said the emergence of the new hatchling is an exciting, major milestone to protect the reptiles, and it will be used to help track the species movements. "These hatchlings will be now used to monitor habitat use and survival after release, which will also help us understand how we can better protect them."

Ms. Sturm's efforts follow on from Murdoch University Ph.D. student Anthony Santoro's Honors project in 2017 which indicated that overall abundances of turtle populations were declining, and juvenile turtles were missing from most urban wetlands.

Anthony said his research suggested that predators, including the invasive fox and native ravens were destroying most nests, and are likely one of the major causes for the lack of juveniles in Perth's turtle populations. "While the Murdoch University and City of Cockburn Turtle Tracker citizen science program and invasive predator control were helping to protect nests around Bibra Lake, we also wanted to start learning about incubating eggs, so we could supplement the natural population with hatchlings," he said

To assist researchers, collect data and protect this vulnerable species, the public is urged to log any sightings of turtles via the free [TurtleSAT](#) app available to download via Google Play and the App Store.

Staff and volunteers from the City of Cockburn have been using the app for several years to log sightings of turtles and nests.

If you find a baby turtle on the move across Cockburn's lakes, wetlands and footpaths, City of Cockburn Environmental Education Officer Rafeena Boyle encourages the community to give it a helping hand. "If you notice a [baby turtle](#) struggling as it embarks on the perilous journey from its nest to their freshwater home, help by moving it to the water's edge."

Pro Vice Chancellor of the Harry Butler Institute Professor Simon McKirdy said the project is imperative to ensure the conservation management of the vulnerable Southwestern snake-necked turtle. "On World Wildlife Day, it's fitting we acknowledge the wonderful research from the Harry Butler Institute that aims to resolve the dwindling numbers of the iconic Southwestern snake-necked turtles.

"Our collaboration with the City of Cockburn has been vital to this research, leading to a possible solution for restoration of the threatened species. We now encourage the community to get involved by logging any sightings of turtles through the free TurtleSAT app and helping misplaced [turtles](#) back to their freshwater home."

Provided by Murdoch University

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