

Why Turtles Matter



Presented by
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Acknowledgement of Country

I wish to acknowledge that we are here today on Beeliar
boodja in the Country of the Nyungar people.

I acknowledge their continuing connection to
land, waters and culture and pay our respects to
the Elders, past and present.

Together we continue to care for Country.



Photo credits: Paul Markendale

Southwestern snake-necked turtles – why are they important?



Also known as a **long-necked** or **oblong** turtle, they are a native freshwater species, living in the wetlands and waterways of southwestern WA.



Often referred to as the vacuum cleaners of our wetlands – they are **ecologically important**, playing an essential role in **nutrient cycling** and **maintaining health of the aquatic environment** by eating carrion and controlling pest species.



Turtles are **culturally significant** to **Indigenous Australians** and embody ancestral knowledge – serving as a totem, a messenger and a guardian.

They are **iconic** for the **local community** – celebrated in artwork across the Beeliar wetlands and beyond.



Why do turtles need our help?

Turtles are impacted by chronic issues playing out in the Perth metropolitan area and across their ancestral range in southwest WA.



Reduction in quality, size and ongoing fragmentation of their wetland habitats through urban development.



Death by vehicle strike on local roads from increasing traffic and inadequate controls.



Terrestrial predation – foxes and ravens intercept turtles when they venture onto land to nest or move between wetlands.



Ineffective conservation strategies and resilience planning – identified shortfalls are not addressed. Progress is limited by inflexible approaches of decision makers.

The Walliabup Wildlife Warriors evolved from the Bibra Lake Turtle Tracker volunteers.

A group of passionate, likeminded community members, operating within the Wetlands Conservation Society of WA .

We share common goals:



uniting and educating people.

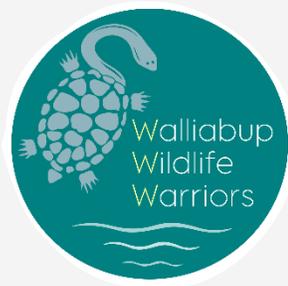


campaigning for progressive and meaningful conservation action.



advocating for the preservation and restoration of our wetlands.

What have we learned since 2024?



The 2024 mass turtle death event at Bibra Lake was widely reported in the national media.

- **Foxes were observed excavating and killing aestivating turtles** from the dry lakebed over several weeks between March and April.
- A volunteer-led lakebed survey **recovered over 130 turtle remains** – of which 96 were assessed by SOSNT as recent and likely due to foxes.



Photo credit: Susan George

A similar drying event at Bibra Lake in 2025 resulted in discovery of **a further 43 turtle remains** between February and May.

Foxes were again recorded excavating and killing turtles from the lakebed during this period – learnings had not been enacted.

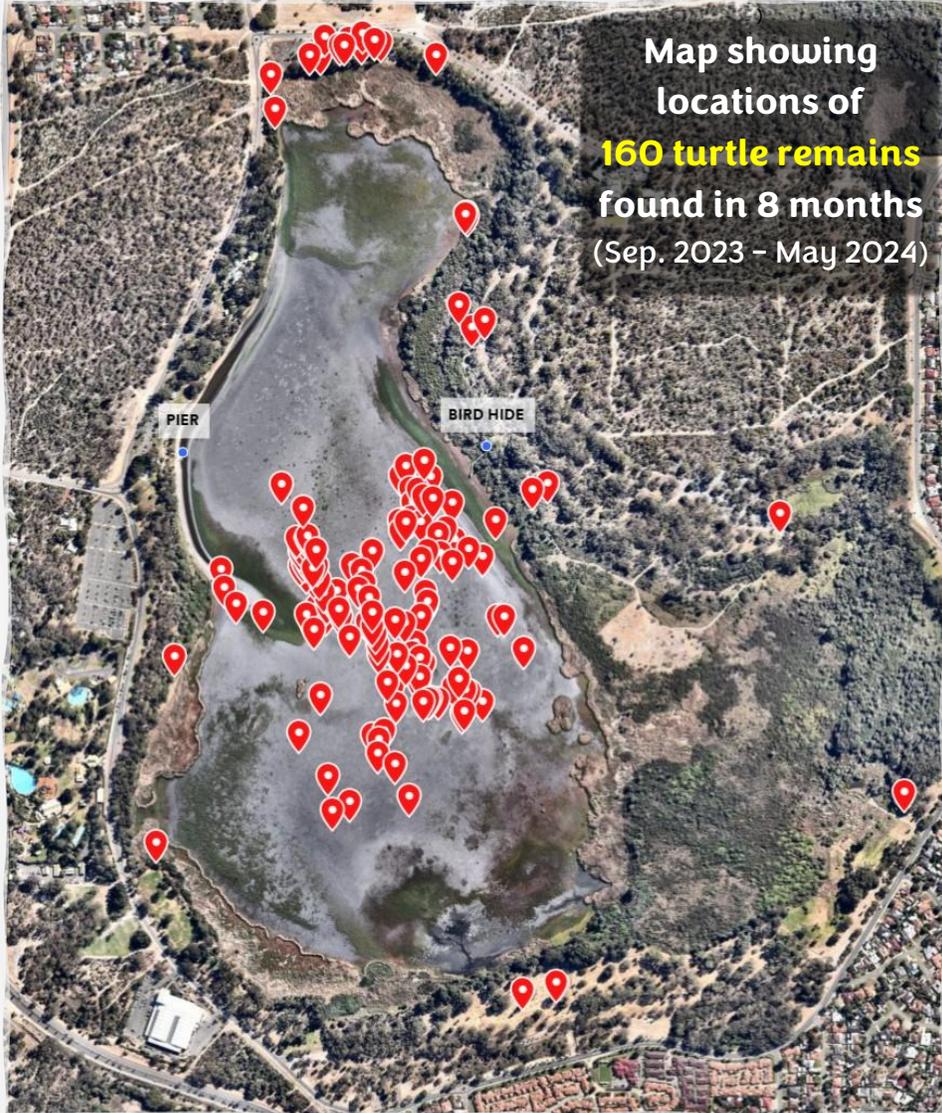


Photo credit: Susan George

What have we learned since 2024?



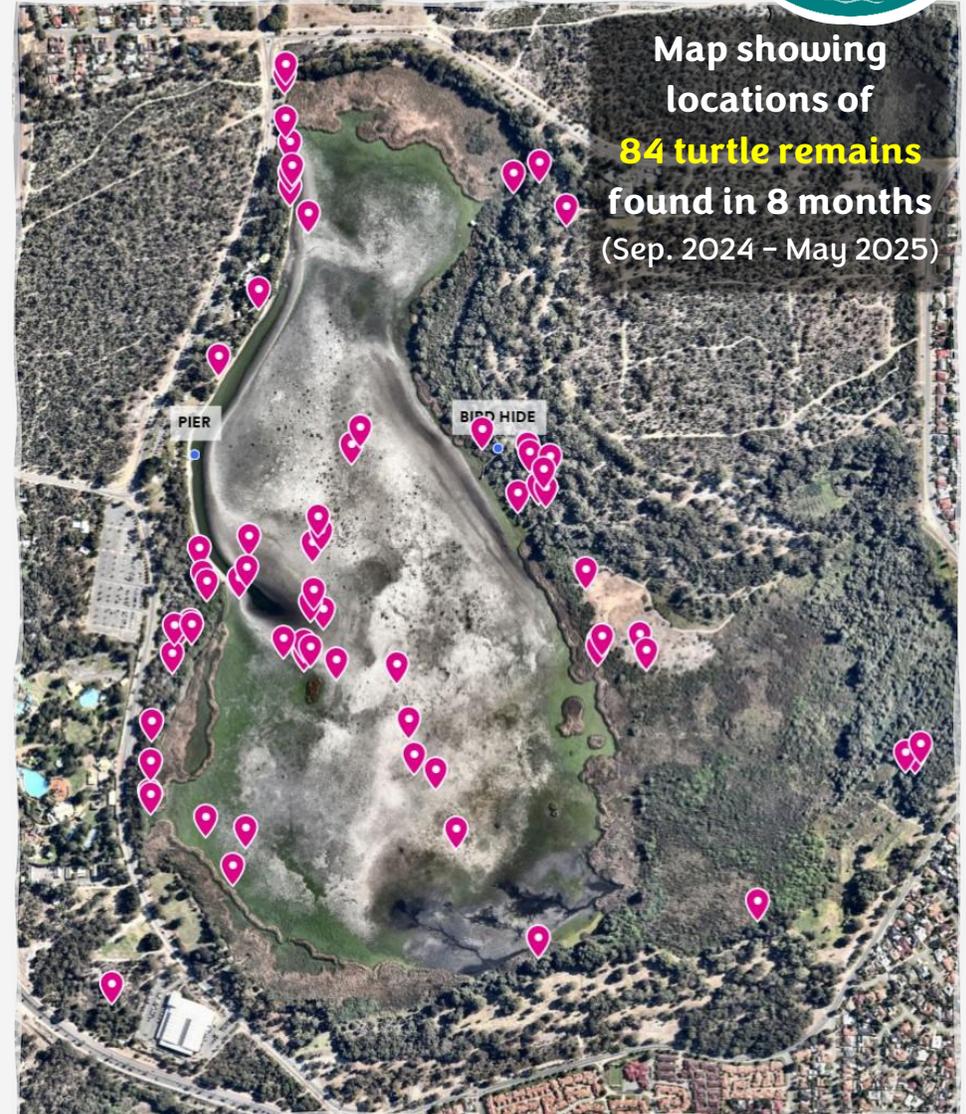
April 2024 Bibra Lake aerial photo



Dry lakebed survey



April 2025 Bibra Lake aerial photo



What have we learned since 2024?



 To help highlight the ongoing issue of turtle deaths, WWW volunteers have been undertaking field surveys and logging key information since September 2023.

 Yangebup and Little Rush Lakes were added from September 2024.
Yangebup Lake is a permanent wetland which does not dry out in summer.

 In total 510 deceased turtles have been recorded – with 367 assessed as recent.

Summary:

 48% of all recent remains were found between September and December, during the nesting season before the lakes begin to dry.

 Around 13% of all recent deaths were due to **vehicle strike** on roads adjoining wetlands.

 Losses were heavy across all lakes. **Predation by foxes and raven** likely the most common causes.

Recent turtle remains found Sep-2024 to Dec-2025

(most recent 15 months)

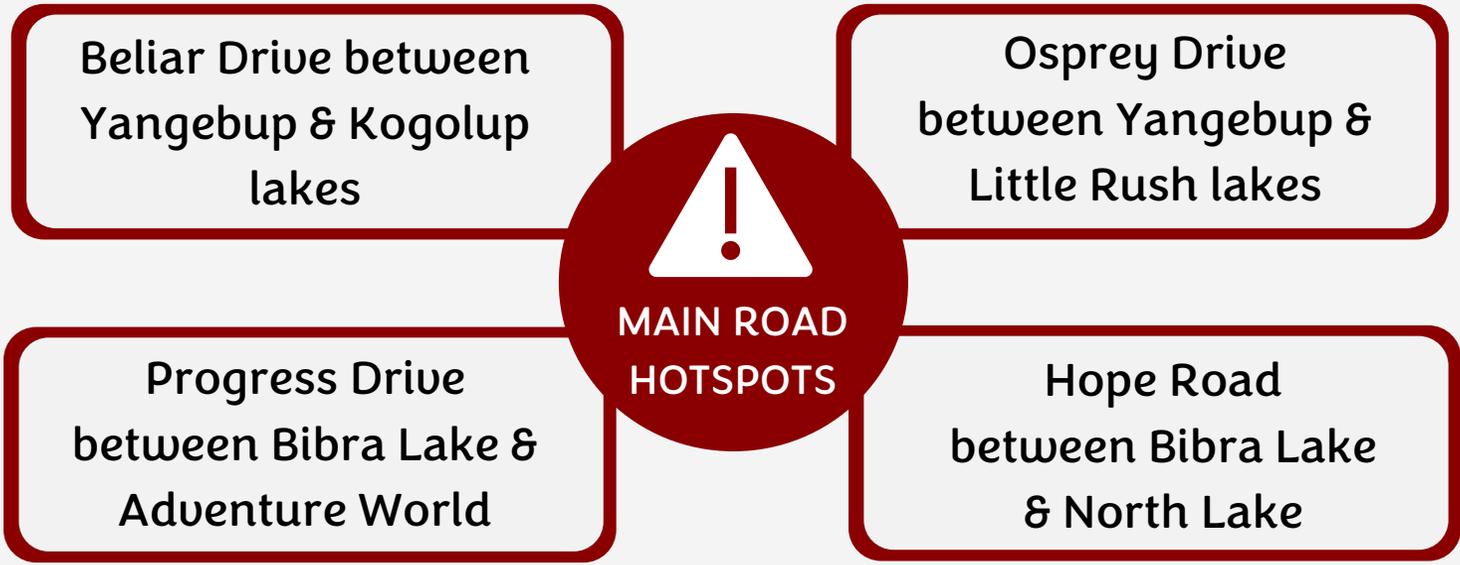
<u>Location</u>	<u>Total recent deaths</u>	
Bibra Lake	87	77% of 113 total found
Little Rush lake	61	62% of 99 total found
Yangebup lake	52	48% of 109 total found
Roads (all lakes)	31	100% of 31 total found

Road deaths

The Beeliam wetlands suffers from poor interconnectivity.

Historically, turtles could move freely between wetlands. Roads, buildings, walls, fences, drains and train lines now impede their ancestral migration routes.

Lakes are hemmed in by urban developments & intersected by high-speed arterial routes and busy access roads.



Road hotspots around the south Beeliam wetlands



Road deaths



Turtles migrate overland to seek nesting sites, for breeding and to search for new waterbodies in summer as lakes dry. **Many journeys are unsuccessful.**

WWW volunteers have assisted over 80 turtles to safely cross roads since July 2025.

Without volunteers and upstanding community members helping out, the death toll on our roads would be much higher.

Turtle migrations are difficult to predict and we can't be there 24/7.

Lowering speed limits on roads next to wetlands is an important first step until long-term mitigation strategies can be put in place.

There needs to be a focus on ecologically centred road designs and the development of fit-for-purpose wildlife crossings.

Establishing protected migration corridors and ensuring gene flow between wetlands is critical for healthy, resilient turtle populations.

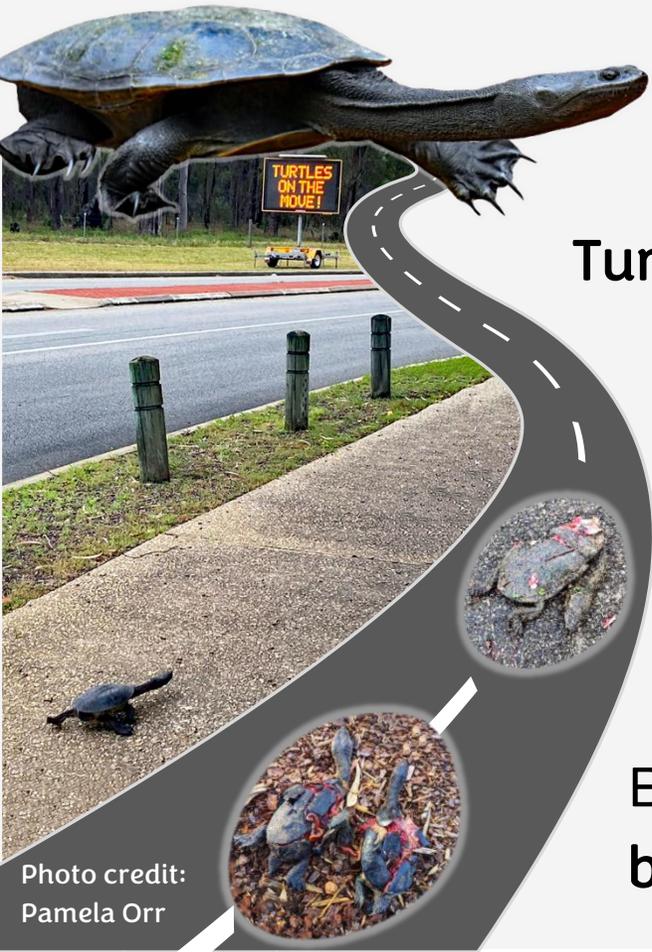


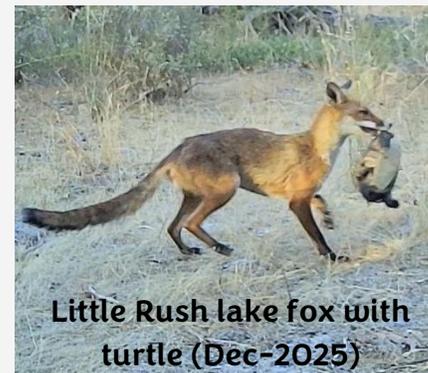
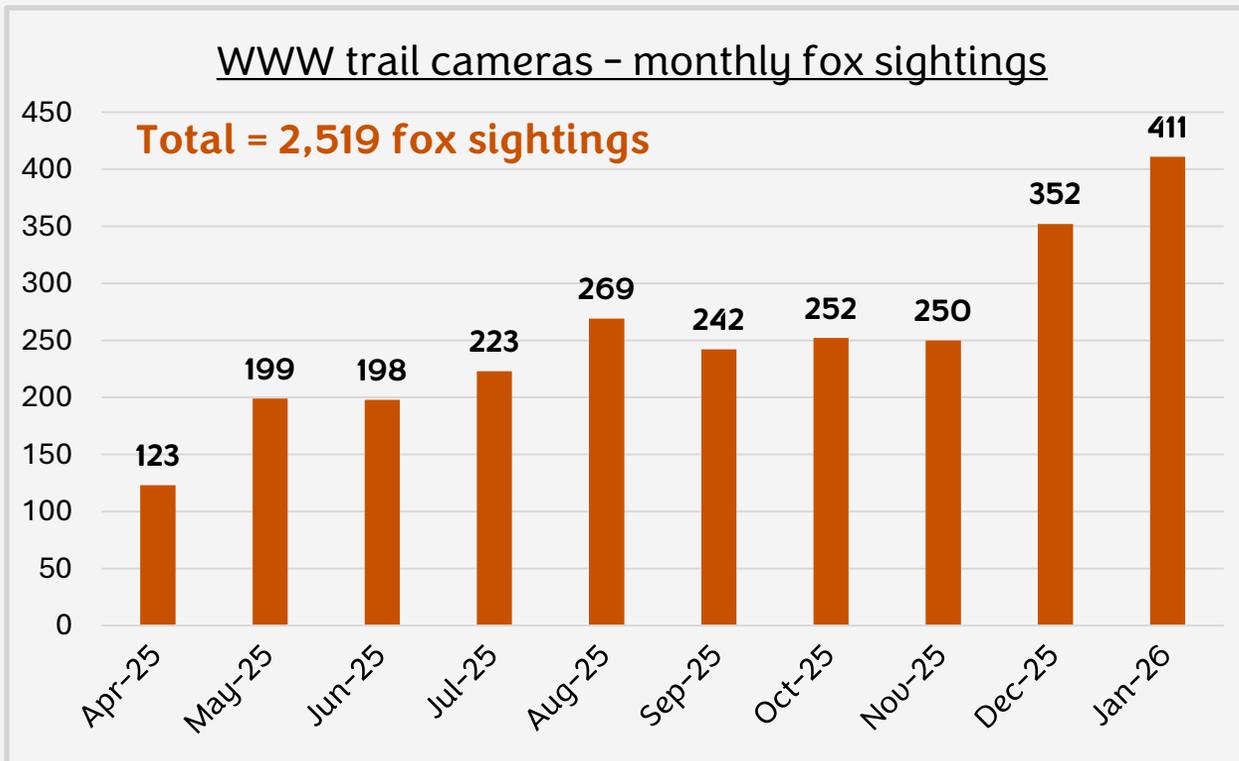
Photo credit:
Pamela Orr

Fox monitoring program

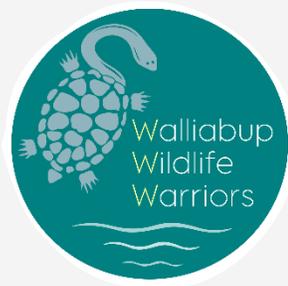
To understand more about the impact of foxes, **WWW volunteers self-funded 9 trail cameras** and have operated these at known hotspots around 3 local conservation reserves.

Sightings were reported to the LGA on a regular basis to help **inform their feral control program**.

Fox activity was prevalent all year, with an increase from December as cubs became mobile.



Advocacy and campaigning



To try to make a difference we have **appealed to decision makers and increased public awareness of the issues impacting our turtles and their wetland homes.**



Issued a letter to lobby WA state government to highlight the widespread fox problem

Petition to council for quarterly fox control – collecting 700 signatures from the community

Met with politicians to speak up for our wildlife and advocate for change



Submitted a motion to Elector's meeting to increase fox control

Asked public questions at council meetings to highlight key issues where shortfalls exist

Engaged the media via various channels to help spread awareness

Drove community initiatives and education campaigns

Collaborated with cross-functional organisations to explore synergies and increase learning

Everyone needs to play their part



Volunteer efforts alone cannot save our turtles – we **urgently need decision makers at all levels of government to act now, before it is too late!**



We need **meaningful commitments and actions** – there are legal and moral obligations for decision makers to **value nature and protect wildlife.**



Resilience is required at an ecological level. A genetically diverse turtle population in a healthy wetland ecosystem is better equipped to handle the effects of climate change.



Turtle numbers **will not bounce back without intervention.** Safeguards are needed to create a **safe environment** for them to **flourish and survive** well into adulthood.



A framework is needed to manage these **complex, intertwined issues** and generate a **roadmap for success with tangible actions and tracked progress.**



CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE PLANNING

“ *If we take care of nature, nature will in turn take care of us.* ”

Sir David Attenborough



Photo credits: Paul Markendale