



# Working to protect turtles

**BY GEORGINA HOWDEN-CHITTY**

ENDANGERED and vulnerable turtles on Gunbower Island are struggling to reproduce, with foxes attacking their nests as fast as eggs are laid.

But North Central Catchment Management Authority is working with University of Western Sydney students and Turtles Australia to understand fox behaviour and curb the attacks.

The team has identified Gunbower Island, near Kerang, as freshwater turtle breeding territory and prime habitat for the endangered broad-shelled turtle, the vulnerable Murray River turtle and the eastern long-necked turtle.

North Central CMA project manager Adrian Martins said there were a range of threats to turtles but fox attacks were the most serious.

Foxes attack female turtles as they lay eggs or eat the eggs once they are laid.

"Turtles are most vulnerable as they come out of the lagoons and creeks," Mr Martins said.

"We're trying to better understand how we can reduce the impact of foxes on nesting

behaviour." The team has recently finished a fox baiting program to align with the broad-shelled turtle's nesting season.

Fox baits were planted along a 20-kilometre section of Gunbower Island and in Cockatoo Lagoon, near Cohuna.

Over six weeks 80 baits were taken, indicating a large number of foxes.

Mr Martins said University of Western Sydney students were doing a long-term study of the area to monitor the

program's success. Hopefully fox baiting has allowed turtles to hatch this year, resulting in more turtles in coming years.

"Previous studies have only found older turtles," Mr Martins said.

"This indicates that juveniles aren't hatching.

"We'll continue to do baiting program every year and refine it as best we can. We rely on federal government funding."

The program also utilises hidden cameras with motion sensors to sight foxes.

"The idea is that it gives us another set of eyes in the landscape

to monitor activity on the ground," Mr Martins said.

Mr Martins encouraged landholders to continue implementing their own fox control methods and to refer to advice on the Department of Environment and Primary Industries' website.

"There's got to be a wide body of people undertaking these activities to have a greater effect in the long term," he said.

There is also an app called turtlesat for members of the public to report turtle sightings, with information at [www.turtlesat.org.au](http://www.turtlesat.org.au)



**PREDATOR:** A fox on the prowl.



**ENDANGERED:** The broad-shelled turtle.

Pictures: CONTRIBUTED