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Summary of Bounceback Threat Mitigation and Conservation Activities on Vulkathunha Gammon Ranges National Park 2021-2022

This report provides a summary of feral animal control and monitoring conducted by DEW staff and volunteers as part of the Bounceback program during 2021-2022, thirty-years since the first goat cull was held on Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park (V-GRNP). These works are undertaken in strict adherence with relevant state legislation and permits.

Fox Control Activities

Aerial Fox Baiting

Aerial fox baiting was undertaken in November 21 and May 22. Properties within the Gammon Ranges baited area include Nantawarinna, Yankaninna, Arkaroola, Wooltana, Warraweena, Pinda Springs, and Narinna totalling an area of 185,940ha and distributing 22,032 baits at a rate on 1 bait per 5 km².

Ground fox baiting

Ground baiting for foxes is undertaken in August 21 and February 22. On V-GRNP 3500 baits are distributed by ground baiting.

Fox Monitoring and trends

Networks of 60 Motion sensor cameras are deployed on VGRNP for a period of no less than 30 days each year since 2016. There have been no fox detections on these cameras.

Feral Cat Control Activities

A planned aerial baiting prior was scheduled for August 2021 using 25,000 Curiosity cat baits. Unfortunately a week prior to the planned delivery and distribution of the baits, the company that

manufactures the Curiosity baits were unable to supply the baits so no aerial baiting for feral cats was undertaken.

In May 2022 during the CWM Feral Goat Control a CWM team conducted 6 nights of targeted feral cat spotlighting in the quoll and phascogale reintroduction areas. Only 2 cats were observed and 1 of those cats was shot.

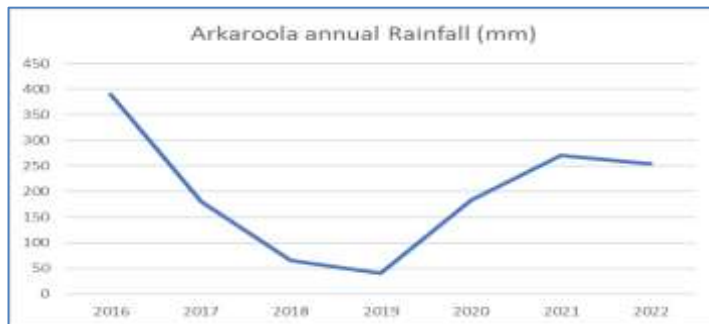
Feral Cat Monitoring and Trends



Networks of 60 Motion sensor cameras are deployed on VGRNP for a period of no less than 30 days each year since 2016. Motion sensor cameras detections provide a method of measuring the relative cat activity from year to year (see graph left).

Activity levels for cats on cameras appear to be strongly influenced by annual rainfall. This is likely due to strong association between cat and rabbit abundance (see next section)

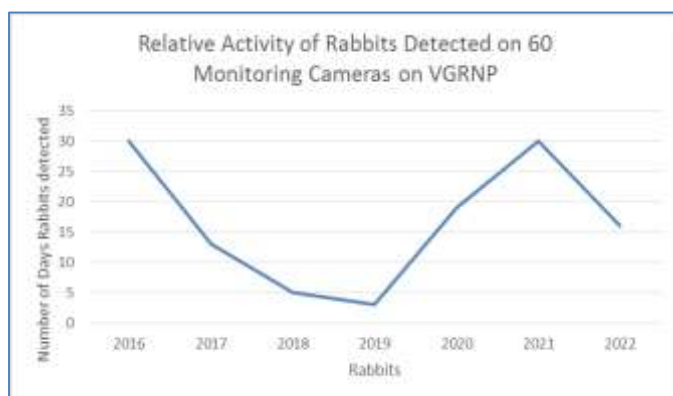
NB. Rainfall for 2022 is for first 6 months only.



Rabbit Control Activities

No coordinated rabbit control program was undertaken on V-GRNP. However in May 2022 the rabbit population was decimated by what appears to be a combination outbreak of myxoma and RHD virus.

Rabbit Monitoring and Trends



Networks of 60 Motion sensor cameras are deployed on VGRNP for a period of no less than 30 days each year since 2016. Motion sensor cameras detections provide a method of measuring the relative rabbit activity from year to year (see graph below).

Rabbit activity on camera is strongly linked to rainfall (see Arkaroola rainfall graph in section on cats).

Feral Goat Control Activities

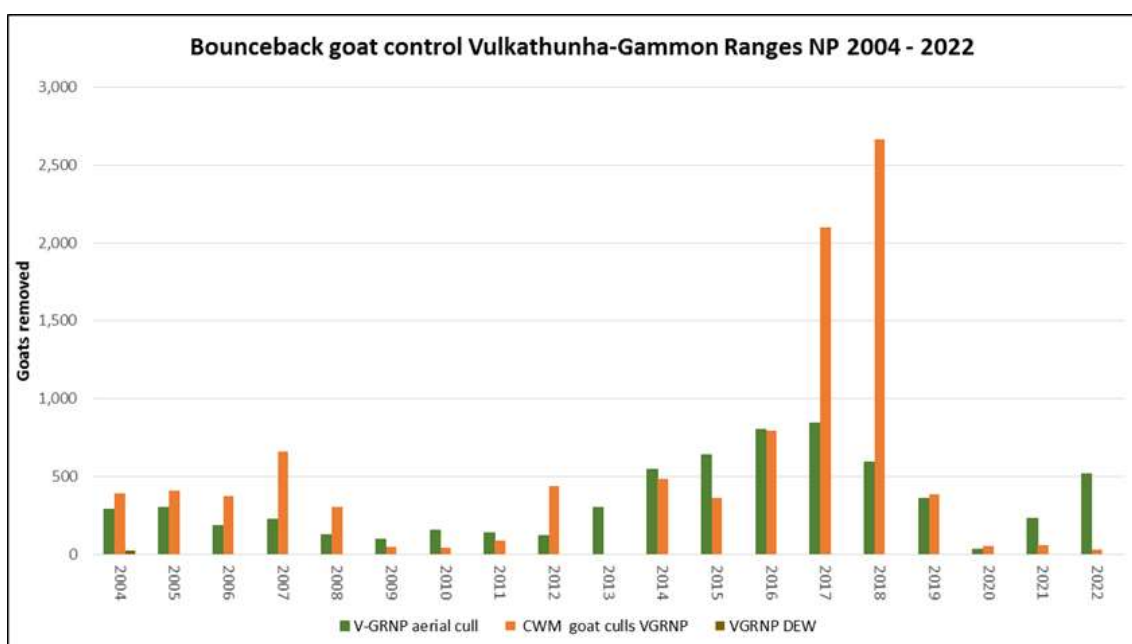
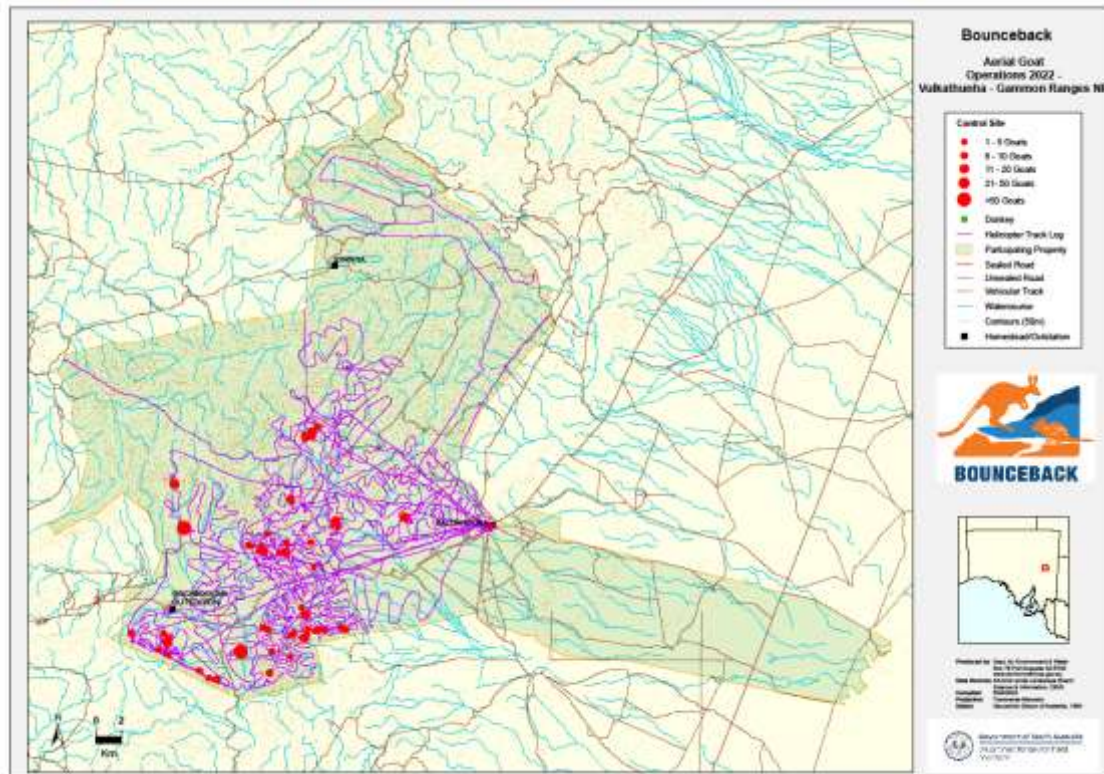
CWM Goat Culls

Two CWM ground culls were undertaken on VGRNP in November 21 and May 22. In November 21 a total of 38 goats were removed and in May 22 a total of 32 goats and one cat were removed.

Aerial goat cull

The annual aerial goat cull was conducted in March 22 with the following results:

- VGRNP – 519 goats and two donkeys removed (see attached map of Aerial Goat Operations 2022 – VGRNP). Note flight log data for the western part of VGRNP was corrupted and unable to be displayed)
- Yankaninna Station 47 goats and 4 donkeys removed
- Arkaroola 2 goats removed



Mustering on VGRNP

A contractor has been engaged to undertake mustering of goats on V-GRNP. At this stage no goats have been removed by the contractor.

Feral Goat Monitoring and trends

Networks of 60 Motion sensor cameras are deployed on VGRNP for a period of no less than 30 days each year since 2016. Motion sensor cameras detections provide a method of measuring the relative feral goat activity from year to year (see graph below).



Other Conservation Activities

Red-tailed Phascogales

On March 17 2022 during a traditional “welcome to country” ceremony, two Adnyamathanha elders hailed the reintroduction to the Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park of 20 Red-tailed Phascogales. Terence Coulthard and Roger Johnson enlightened a small group of onlookers that repopulating Country with

“lost” species such as the “Calura” was of immense importance to Aboriginal culture. The release is the latest achievement by the partnership between the Foundation of Australia’s Most Endangered Species Ltd (FAME), the SA Department for Environment and Water and SA Arid Lands Landscape Board. The females settled into the chosen release site well, whilst some of the males decided on long range forays onto the plains, however, enough remained to ensure that females were mated and are producing joeys. Predation from native owls and feral cats appears to be the main threat, an issue we can only partially deal with through the control of cats. Food and shelter are abundant in what has been an exceptional rainfall year with animals having gained or maintained weight over the last four months. Recent captures show that females have young in pouch.

Idnya (Western Quolls)

Idnya (western quoll) from Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park were reintroduced to a different area of Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park on the 2nd April following a “welcome to country” ceremony with Roger Johnson and Cliff Coulthard. Most of the 25 Idnya settled into the area with only 3 becoming undetectable within the first month. Females have settled into preferred areas and have been visited by the remaining males during the mating season. Animals have found numerous shelter sites and have generally gained weight. To date we have no evidence of losses to predation. Recent captures show that females have young in pouch.

The reintroductions have been made possible through the introduced pest control work on Vulkathunha and surrounding properties managed through the Bounceback Program, a 30 year National Parks and Wildlife Service collaboration with the SA Arid Lands Landscapes Board, the Australian Government’s Landcare Program, FAME and neighbours such as the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary and Nantawarinna Indigenous Protected Area.

This article provided by Rob Brandle and Geoff Axford – Dept. for Environment & Water.

St. John Ambulance Rural Areas First Aid Course.



The Friends were successful in obtaining a grant for some members to attend a Rural Areas First Aid course with St. John. Spread of several sessions 7 of our members will be attending the course.

The 3-day remote area first aid course is specifically designed to meet the first aid needs of bushwalkers, wilderness guides, and people who work or live in remote locations.

The course covers everything from comprehensive first aid treatments to aeromedical evacuation, long-term care, self-care, and contingency planning. This course is focused on the safety of the first aider and extended care of an ill or injured casualty where help is likely to be delayed or inaccessible.

Friends of Parks Inc. - Tote Bags



The Friends of Parks Inc. to commemorate their 40 years provided Friends groups with a supply of tote bags to be distributed to members active in their groups. We have a supply and some have been distributed to members who attended our AGM in March. The bags will be available to members attending any of our working bees in the Park this year or if you would like one posted to you please advise Graeme (gdoats@bigpond.net.au).

Road Side Sign



Member, Roger Mathers suggested that an A frame sign could be placed near the Visitor Centre at Balcanoona. After some collaboration with other members on the design and wording a sign was prepared and was handed to Ranger Jesse Evans for delivery to Balcanoona when he attended the Co-Management Board meeting at Hawker in March. The sign will only be on display when we are there and it is hopeful that visitors will come on over for a chat.

FRIENDS SOCIAL MEETING



At the AGM Graeme proposed that perhaps the Friends members might like to meet on a social occasion, other than at working bees.

A social meeting would provide members who are not able to attend working bees but might like a chance to meet other members over a chop and sausage and a glass of their favourite beverage. There was some interest shown by those present.

If you think that you would attend a picnic style gathering say at the Belair National Park or Morialta Conservation Park, perhaps in October-November please contact Graeme (gdoats@bigpond.net.au).

HELP HELP! – MINUTE SECRETARY WANTED

We desperately need someone to come along to our Committee meetings to be the Minute Secretary - **CAN YOU HELP?** Just, 4 meeting each year, days and time very flexible. Please contact Martin – m.caon56@gmail.com

Balcanoona Park HQ and Historic Precinct Revegetation Project

Update Report to CMB February 2023

Plantings

Since the commencement of the project in 2019, there are about 710 plants being supported and maintained of which about 500 have been propagated and planted out by the Friends. We estimate around 10% of plants have died mainly due blocked drippers.

Some of the early plantings are now over 2 meters high which is very encouraging. Initial species focused on upper-story plants including local varieties of eucalypts and acacias. Our more recent plantings include a wider variety of under-story species, ground covers and grasses.

After 4 years, with the help of good seasonal rains, ongoing onsite support by our rangers, irrigation support, checking and maintenance by Friends on periodic working bees, we can now see good progress being made.

Evidence of natural regeneration of local species continues in and around our revegetation effort, providing improved habitats for a range of insects and birds.



Irrigation

The redesigned irrigation system provides a reliable supply of water to the plants. Six individual systems support Areas 1, 2, 3, Mound, Office, and Office Carpark. Each of the 25 mm headers and 13 mm lines now have end taps enabling the build-up of salts to be flushed out.

The taps supporting Areas 1, 2, 3 and Mound are now larger enabling a stronger

water flow from the bore inlet to the headers.

Seed Collection and Propagation

Friends collect seeds and cuttings from a wide range of plants from around Balcanoona and local environs. Sian collects seeds from species when they ripen and send onto the friends. Around 25 different species can now be propagated including trees, shrubs, smaller plants, and grasses.

During 2022, the Friends developed an enjoyable and production connection with folks at Copley involved with their revegetation projects. A significant joint propagation effort was undertaken in December using Copley's expertise and facilities. The seedlings will be shared between the Balcanoona and Copley revegetation projects. We expect several Copley people will join in on our trips to Balcanoona in 2023.

Next Steps

Plantings

Areas 1, 2, Office and Carpark, the revegetation are well progressed, our focus will be maintenance and infills of smaller plants, grasses and ground covers.

For Mound and Area 3 upper story plantings will continue as well infills of understory plants.

The revegetation of Area 4 is to be limited (initially) to a 25 metre strip alongside the entry road to the Visitor information Area. Irrigation layout and upper story plantings will now commence.

Plant labels

While the wording for plant labels is largely complete (Adnyamathanha, common and scientific names) we intend to seek grant monies to manufacture the labels.

Encouraging natural regeneration

We will trial additional ways to encourage more natural regeneration including small furrows and depressions to capture airborne seeds, water and leaf litter; broadcasting some of our collected seeds; and adding drippers in soil depressions along existing lines.

Old Balcanoona Homestead Garden

While the fencing of the garden has commenced, the purpose, design and plantings has yet to be determined. We suggest a project plan be developed for the OBHS Garden as part of a broader visitor/interpretation planning for the area. With such a plan in place, the Friends can then confidently proceed with the revegetation of the Garden.

Quolls thrive in Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park

Once a widespread species in the Flinders Ranges, the western quoll is making a quiet comeback.



Locally known as an idnya, the carnivorous marsupial was once found across Australia but until recently it could only be spotted in small pockets of wilderness in south west Western Australia.

But an ongoing project led by the Department for Environment and Water (DEW) is helping to reintroduce this feisty native animal to national parks in the northern Flinders Ranges.

The final of four planned idnya releases rolled out in Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park late last month.

(Quoll image – DEW Rob Brandle)

Idnya already have been successfully released in Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park, establishing a thriving population.

In recent months they have also been spotted off-park as well, boosting hopes that they will continue to establish populations in this remote part of South Australia.

Foundation for Australia's Most Endangered Species (FAME) Chief Executive Officer Tracy McNamara, says the foundation has been absolutely delighted with the success of the program.

"Our partnership with DEW in this project continually reflects that when like-minded, capable conservationists join forces, the potential for success remains high," Ms McNamara said.

The newly established population in the Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park is multi-organisational conservation collaboration, returning the endangered idnya to an area where they once roamed.

DEW Senior Conservation Ecologist Rob Brandle said that the translocation and release of western quolls was a key part of one of Australia's longest running biodiversity programs, Bounceback.

"Radio-tracking from the release in April last year indicated a good survival rate with no evidence of predation from cats, possibly because of the abundance of alternative prey in what has been an exceptionally productive year after 250mm of rain in the first 5 months," he said.

"The initial reintroduction of the western quoll to South Australia was very successful, with the Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park population surviving its first prolonged drought and growing annually since 2019.

"Our most recent annual monitoring event trapping 35% more animals than our previous best in March 2022. This has meant our translocation of 25 animals to Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park last March 2022 had minimal impact on our population, and enabled us to translocate a further 25 animals to this park in March 2023, as well as assist the Taronga Zoo breeding program with 5 extra animals.

"This is the fourth time that we have released western quolls into the national park in the past 12 months and the addition of further individuals is a major step towards improving its conservation status."

Bounceback is a landscape scale conservation program that aims to protect and restore the semi-arid environments of the Flinders, Olary and Gawler ranges, operating on national park reserves, Aboriginal owned and managed lands, private sanctuaries, and pastoral lands.

The project is supported by partner organisations including the Foundation for Australia's Most Endangered Species, the South Australian Arid Lands Landscapes Board through its Bounceback and Beyond project funded by the Australian Government's National Landcare Program, and the Taronga Western Plains Zoo.

This article was first published by the Department for Environment and Water in online "Environment News 5 April 2023".

Follow this link for a video - [Celebrating 30 years of Bounceback - YouTube](#)

CO-MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING – HAWKER 28 FEBRUARY 2023

Friends' members Roger Mathers and Graeme Oats were invited by the Co-Management Board and Dept. for Environment & Water to attend the Board's meeting to present a report on our activities during 2022 and plans for 2023 and were introduced to the Board and heartily welcomed.

Roger & Graeme presented to the Board a comprehensive written report accompanied with slides on our activities during 2022. With the Oocaboolina refurbishment project completed Graeme advised the Board that members were willing to assist the Rangers with any other infrastructural repairs and maintenance of the Parks other accommodation premises and infrastructure.

Roger presented a detailed report on the Balcanoona revegetation project and plans for the next few years. The Board were informed of other activities by the Friends such as the ongoing monitoring of the fish and water quality in the Weetootla and Nepowie gorges, our recent engagement with the Copley & District Progress Association and their propagation program.

District Ranger, Dave Phillips with the district endorsement recommended and received approval for developing a brochure of most commonly seen birds in the Northern Flinders Ranges, buffel grass control at Balcanoona Creek and revegetation works at Weetootla campground. The Board endorsed our proposal to erect a directional marker dial at the summit of short ridge walk.

2023 PARK VISITS

WEETOOTLA MONITORING

May 15th to 22nd
Sept. 21st to 28th

BALCANOONA REVEGETATION

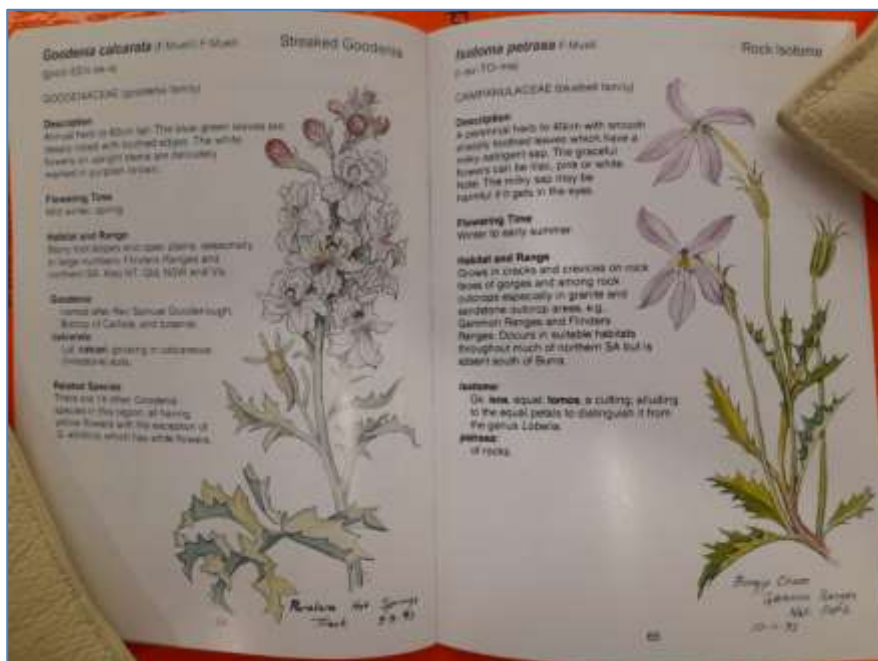
May 22nd to 29th
June 29th to July 6th
Sept. 14th to 21st

New projects to be undertaken by the Friends group as approved at the Co-Management Board meeting at Hawker in February 2023

- **Buffel grass control in Balcanoona Creek**
- **Revegetation works at Weetootla Campground**
- **Directional dial marker at the summit of a short ridge walk near Balcanoona**

Looking for passionate photographers, botanists and enthusiastic amateurs to lead a potential new project.

The Project: To produce a photographic booklet with images of the Flowers of the Northern Flinders whose use would be to identify plants found in the area. Inspiration may be drawn from the out-of-print booklet "Wildflowers of the Northern Flinders Ranges" by Rosemary Pedlar (a page reproduced below). Many photographs of flowers have already been taken by the Friends Group, and images from the internet could possibly be used as well (with permission). Text and a page layout would have to be developed. Contact Martin Caon if interested m.caon56@gmail.com



Nilpena-Ediacara National Park – Grand Opening – 27th April 2023

The Flinders Ranges provides some of South Australia's most iconic landscapes displaying geological formations and wildlife. It is also where evidence of earth's earliest animal life has been discovered.

The Flinders Ranges, traditional lands of the Adnyamathanha people, is renowned as one of South Australia's most remarkable landscapes. The dramatic scenery, unique geological formations and iconic wildlife attracts visitors from across the world. It is a place of rich cultural heritage and exceptional scientific value, where evidence of the emergence earth's earliest complex animal life has been discovered.

In Nilpena's unassuming hills, an ancient seafloor containing strange early lifeforms some half a billion years old has been exquisitely preserved in the fine sandstone grain. Nilpena is now recognised as the richest and most diverse Ediacaran fossil site on Earth, and has revolutionised our understanding of this remarkable time in Earth's history. Nilpena has a diversity of over 40 species recorded in the sediments of its ancient seafloors, and palaeontologists are revealing fascinating evidence about how these strange and cryptic early creatures lived, reproduced, and even hunted.

Stewardship of the fossils and their ongoing protection is key to the management of Nilpena Ediacara National Park. The fossil sites are fragile and the fossil field is a working research site. For this reason, free and independent access to move around the park will not be permitted.

The park officially opens on 27 April 2023. Two types of park tours will be made available to visitors by prior arrangement only.

Ediacara Experience Tour - booked through www.parks.com.au

Tour duration: 2 hours gate to gate

Departures: Wednesday and Saturday from 10am-12pm from 3 May to 30 November 2023. The park is closed between 1 December and 15th March each year to align with Desert Parks.

Inclusions: fully guided tour of the park precinct including the Woolshed and Blacksmith Shop AV Experience, including vehicle transfers from the Nilpena Ediacara National Park entrance.

Tour minimum: 2 passengers

Tour maximum: 15 passengers

Cost: \$80 per adult

Fossil Field Exploration Tour – booked through Nilpena Ediacara Tours in 2023

Tour duration: 4 hours gate to gate. Departures: on request

Inclusions: fully guided tour of the park precinct including the Woolshed, Blacksmith Shop AV Experience and fossil field, including vehicle transfers from the Nilpena Ediacara National Park entrance

For more information - www.parks.sa.gov.au/park-management/new-in-sa-national-parks/nilpena-ediacara or <https://www.parks.sa.gov.au/parks/nilpena-ediacara-national-park>

