



Media Release

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Tracking Bunyip Birds

Rice farmers across the Riverina and bird lovers throughout Australia are being urged to get behind a crowdfunding project set to uncover the secrets of Australia's Bunyip Bird by using satellite transmitters.

The globally endangered Australasian Bittern is one of the country's most poorly known birds, but recently a breeding population using rice crops has been found to occur in very significant numbers, yet nobody knows where they go after the rice has been harvested.

The **Bitterns in Rice Project** is a collaboration between Birdlife Australia, the Ricegrowers' Association of Australia (RGA), the Riverina Local Land Services, Murrumbidgee Landcare and range of other organisations. It is aiming to raise \$50 000 to satellite track at least seven bitterns, providing valuable ecological data and enabling people to follow the birds' movements online.

The initiative is part of a joint project with Landcare and Pozible, a crowdfunding organisation.

Neil Bull from the RGA is calling on rice growers to pledge support for the project, from as little as \$20.

"It's all or nothing; we've got 40 days to achieve our target of \$50 000, otherwise none of the pledges are withdrawn from donors and the project doesn't go ahead," Mr Bull said.

"There are rewards for each different pledge, with a \$1000 pledge offering a guided bitterns in rice tour and the \$2500 pledge offering the naming rights to one of the bitterns that will be tracked."

Wildlife ecologist, Matt Herring said the information will be priceless and that the Bitterns in Rice Project is a great example of how agriculture and the environment can work together.

"We can learn how mobile the bitterns are during the rice season and see which wetlands they depend on during the non-breeding season; for all we know they might love the cold and migrate to Tasmania or New Zealand," Mr Herring said.

The Bitterns in Rice Project is well on the way to demonstrating how biodiversity conservation and agriculture needn't be in conflict. Bittern friendly rice growing tips have been developed and with the data from satellite tracking, conservation efforts like environmental flows can be targeted to benefit these endangered birds outside of the rice season.

Andrew Silcocks from Birdlife Australia is optimistic that the bird watching community will provide strong support and that the target will be reached. He also said the study may end up connecting people from unlikely places.

"It's possible that the bitterns we see in wetlands along Victoria's coast during winter are those from the Riverina's rice crops, effectively meaning people in places like Melbourne and Portland share the same bitterns as those in Griffith and Deniliquin," Mr Silcocks said.

The Tracking Bunyip Birds Project is being launched on September 18th and people can visit the Pozible page to learn more and to make a pledge at <http://pozi.be/bunyipbirds>

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