

MEDIA RELEASE

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Radio tracking to give new insights on Black-throated Finch

Ecologists have deployed innovative radio tracking technology at Bravus' Carmichael Project to learn more about the southern sub-species of the Black-throated Finch.

Bravus Mining and Resources CEO David Boshoff said that the research program was an important part of Bravus' ongoing commitment to understand and protect the iconic bird.

"This new research is taking place in our 33,000 hectare conservation area, which is one of the largest privately-owned conservation areas in the country, and is the size of 33,000 football fields. The research is also occurring across the mining lease," Mr Boshoff said.

"The radio tracking data will tell us more about how far the finches travel and where they live and will help guide our environmental management practices into the future.

"We have been studying the finch since 2012 and have undertaken more than 15 monitoring surveys to date, ensuring we know more about the Black-throated Finch than ever before.

"We are pleased to enter the next phase of this innovative research which will ensure the species continues to thrive in the region," he said.

The southern sub-species of the Black-throated Finch is an endangered species found in coastal northern Queensland and inland central Queensland including the Galilee Basin and areas near Charters Towers and Townsville.

Mr Boshoff said highly trained ecologists fitted the birds with leg ID bands and tiny transmitters as part of their research. The transmitters emit a signal every 13 seconds, which is tracked by 27 radio towers across the project area. The signals allow researchers to track the birds' movements to shed light on how the Black-throated Finch lives and behaves.

"We're looking at the finch's movement patterns, the foraging behaviour, foraging preferences and the seed availability, and we're trying to tie that all into land management practices."

This latest research has helped to inform the first official population estimate for the Black-throated Finch ever conducted near the Carmichael mine, which will act as a baseline for when the full population estimate is completed in 2024.

Mr Boshoff said the area covered by the initial population estimate was a whopping 60,000 hectares, more than twice the size of Moreton Island, which requires detailed research into the methodology on how to conduct a population estimate for the finch.

"This is not your average project area - we can't physically walk 60,000 hectares of land to spot every finch in the area. The birds are quite dispersed across this area it requires considerable survey effort to survey a meaningful proportion of the population.

"For years we have been undertaking research into the finch's behaviour to ensure we are applying the appropriate methodologies to delivering population estimates, and the radio tracking research underway is an important part of that.

"We're pleased to see that the initial population estimate, conducted by third-party scientific experts demonstrates that our management plan is effective and the finch is thriving," he said.

The initial population estimate conducted by third party experts has seen estimated numbers of 641-2,202 finches across 102 sites, within the overall 60,000 hectare area.

Mr Boshoff said Bravus was pleased to see such a strong number of finches in the estimation, however there are a number of factors which should be taken into consideration on population estimates.

"Importantly, we conducted the initial estimate in 102 locations where previous surveys indicated the finches like to congregate, not the whole 60,000 hectares which would be impossible.

"On any given day the survey numbers can be affected by a multitude of factors such as inclement weather, availability of food and water, and seasonal timing of the estimates.

Mr Boshoff said there were many incorrect claims from detractor groups trying to provide false numbers on the finch population, but Bravus was the only organisation that has ever conducted a finch population estimate in the region.

"No other organisation has ever conducted official Black-throated Finch population estimates in this particular area before and nor have they conducted the years of intricate research into the finch that we have.

"Our research is delivered by third party experts, who hold both Australian and Queensland Government permits to conduct the research and safely monitor the finch, so we are confident in the information and evidence they have provided us. We are happy to share it with everyone so we can provide the facts and dispel the myths," he said.

The research and initial population estimate complement the latest Black-throated Finch Management Plan annual report findings for 2021, which demonstrated Bravus' plans to support the finch were effective and working as planned.

"Importantly, the report demonstrated the practices we have implemented, such as fauna spotters during construction, have ensured not a single finch has been harmed in the construction process.

"Some of our key learnings from the 2021 annual report indicated ways we can improve the finch's habitat through cultural fire burning practices to encourage improvement of habitat, which would be conducted in partnership with the local indigenous business, Woongal Environmental Services.

"We also learned how we could improve cattle stocking rates to encourage management of grass levels, and we have undertaken pest animal and weed management to prevent damage to seed regeneration that we are implementing for the finch."

Surveys and monitoring of the finch conducted throughout the year included numerous techniques, such as active searches, water source inspections and surveys, remote camera observations and bioacoustics monitoring.

Bravus will continue to conduct research on the Black-throated Finch over the coming years to ensure best-practice plans are in place for the management of finch habitat near the mine site.

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Editors notes

- See more about the black-throated finch here - <https://www.bravus.com.au/black-throated-finch-management-plan/>