



Friday 3 February 2017

Rare Australasian Bittern tagged near Mayrung

A young male Australasian Bittern was discovered in a rice crop at Mayrung property 'Willum Park' on Tuesday.

Fondly named 'MILo' by Murray Irrigation staff, the Bittern has since been tagged with a transmitter to help uncover the network of wetlands that the population depends on during the colder months after harvest.

The capture of MILo - the first Australasian Bittern to be tagged in the Murray Valley - is part of the 'Bitterns in Rice Project' which is proudly supported by Murray Irrigation.

'Willum Park' is owned by local farmers Paul and Shelley Scoullar. Fittingly, Shelley's father John Hand photographed Bitterns in his rice crop back in 2009. He was one of the first to do so in the Murray Valley.

Mr Hand sent his photo to Birdlife Australia seeking information about the cryptic bird. It was this communication that inspired the formation of the Bitterns in Rice Project.

"I'm just so thrilled," Mrs Scoullar said.

"Dad took the photograph that triggered this project, and now the first Bittern tagged in the Murray Valley was captured on our property.

"Plus, with Murray Irrigation being sponsors of the tracking program, and me being a passionate customer of Murray Irrigation, it's all just aligned perfectly."

The globally endangered Australasian Bittern is the centre of an innovative collaboration between the Ricegrowers' Association of Australia (RGA), Murray Irrigation, Coleambally Irrigation, Birdlife Australia, Riverina and Murray Local Land Services and many other organisations.

Neil Bull, RGA Environmental Projects Manager, said the project was formed to better understand the behaviour of these unique and endangered birds.

"Without the support of organisations like Murray Irrigation, it wouldn't have been possible to launch Bitterns in Rice, which is focussed on displaying how farming systems and environmental outcomes are not mutually exclusive," he said.

"The project improves awareness of how food production and wildlife conservation can work together."

The Australasian Bittern is an endangered species with numbers thought to be less than 2,500 birds remaining in the wild. Bitterns have found a unique home in the NSW Riverina, finding rice to be the perfect vegetated wetland for roosting and breeding.

Murray Irrigation CEO Michael Renehan said the company is happy to be able to support an innovative project like Bitterns in Rice.

"Many of our customers are rice growers and this project reinforces the habitat values of rice growing," he said.

"We look forward to staying in touch with MILo and continuing to support the project in the future."

More information on the Bitterns in Rice project can be found here: www.bitternsinrice.com.au.

Ends.

Media contact: Communications Officer, Nathan Holahan: T. 1300 138 265.

Photo "Milo": An Australasian Bittern is captured and tagged at a Mayrung property on Tuesday 31 January.
Credit: Matt Herring.