

The Howard Sand Plains covers an area of 264 km² within the Howard River region, approximately 30 km east of Darwin in the Northern Territory. These sand plains are a NT Site of Conservation Significance that contains Sandsheet Heath vegetation, an 'at-risk' ecosystem in the Darwin coastal bioregion and is one of the 12 national priority High Environmental Value Aquatic Ecosystem sites. It has been classified 'at risk' due to the nature of plant and animal species found in the area and its proximity to encroaching urban development.



Sandsheet heath is generally made up of lightly scattered trees (*Melaleuca nervosa*, *Grevillea pteridifolia* and *Banksia dentata*) over a dense herbaceous layer made up of a large diversity of sedges and herbs. Due to the unique drainage and conditions created by these sand pockets, a wide range of plant and animal species specifically occur within this landscape type and include a range of slightly different plant communities on the sand pockets.

Photographs by Emma Lupin

Howard Sand Plains

The area is a high priority for conservation as Rare and endangered species include the small carnivorous bladderwort plants of the genus *Utricularia*, for which the area is considered a diversity hotspot. At least 26 species have been found within the Howard Sand Plains. The site also supports the endangered herb *Typhonium taylori* and the Howard River Toadlet (*Uperoleia daviesae*). The toadlet species is known



only from the greater Darwin region and seems to be confined to the seasonally flooded sandplains of this area. In addition, 36 species recorded from the site are listed under international conventions protecting migratory birds. The high conservation sites are considered a priority as they are the best representative sites to support conservation of the endangered species which depend on this habitat.



Large portions of the site have been cleared, mined for sand and gravel, disturbed by roads, or planted with exotic trees and crops. The site is also increasingly impinged by intensifying urban growth with Humpty Doo and parts of Howard Springs and Coolalinga being within the site boundaries. Weeds, fire, fertiliser, hydrological changes and recreational vehicles are all additional threats.

This project aims to

- Reduce the impact of weeds and fire at high priority conservation sites.-
- Raise awareness of the area and its importance and engage community in its protection
- Undertake post-mining revegetation trials.

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