

Painter heads west to put art to work for bilbies



Artist Ronelle Reid has headed to Charleville for a week for a residency that will lend support to the Save the Bilby Fund.

MAY 20, 2021

A WILDLIFE artist will be in residence this week as part of a project that will raise money to save the endangered bilby.

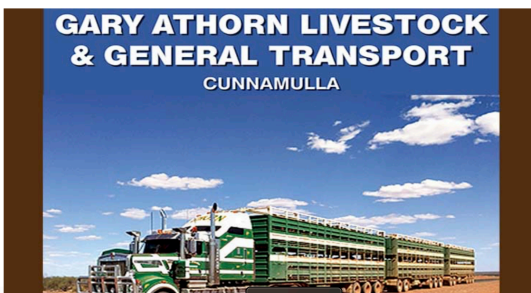
Ronelle Reid, of Cedar Vale, south of Brisbane, will spend a week in Charleville observing, documenting and learning about the bilby. From her week's stay, she will produce a painting that will be sold at a threatened species auction with proceeds going towards the Save the Bilby fund.

Ronelle, a former RSPCA worker and trained artist, became interested in the bilby during a trip to southwest Qld during lockdown last year. The Bilby Experience was closed at the time but she managed to work her way in enough to learn a little about the bilby and its importance. "After that, I thought it's such an interesting species. I wanted to see it and I really got a feel

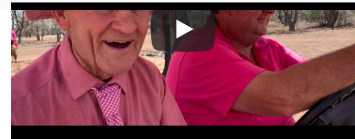
for the outback," she said.

Ronelle successfully applied for a regional arts development fund grant to help finance her outback residency which will be the first hosted by the Save the Bilby fund. The residence is not Ronelle's first.

"Last year, I did a residence at the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary. I'm always looking for opportunities to try and help promote a species. My work is very much about endangered animals and habitat loss and things like that. I thought the bilby is such an important species in the ecosystem in that country. It's one of the species that helps other species out," she said.



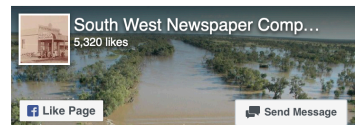
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Ronelle said most Australians did not hear about the bilby except at Easter when it was pulled out as a local alternative to imported bunnies. "People don't really understand how important they are. They are really little bulldozers. They move the earth around and get the vegetation down lower, and a lot of their burrows are used by other animals. I think something like 16 other species depend on the bilby."

Ronelle has pursued art as a career since taking a redundancy after 20 years with the RSPCA, where she worked in customer service and adoptions. "I'd always come home after work and paint," she said.

She studied art but said life experience and working at the RSPCA had very much shaped her art. Using ink, oils and watercolours, she paints detailed naturalistic but quirky compositions which often pair species that would not naturally co-exist.

"It's kind of a way to make people think that sometimes animals are having to make homes in places that are not natural to them and are having to change the way they live because of the pressures we put on them," she said.



The Anarchist, by Ronelle Reid, who will paint a bilby work for auction after her Charleville residency.

Ronelle plans to take as many bilby photos as she can while at Charleville, no easy task given they are a nocturnal species. She will arm herself with a tripod to keep the camera still but as a non-coffee drinker, will be without caffeine to keep her eyes open.

"I'll have bilbies to keep me awake," she said.

She is excited about being able to see her furry muses in their natural territory. "I've never actually met one live. I've seen a few. I saw one at Taronga Park and another at Currumbin but they are only in little exhibits."

Ronelle is a fan of community efforts to save the bilby and also of the area itself and plans to share the wonders of the west with friends online while she is away. "I'll be sending a bit of Charleville back to my followers," she said.

"A lot of people have never been to any places out here. They don't get the feel or the scale and the colours are so extreme. It's an amazing place."

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