



"The hole was as deep as my height, if not more," Ranger-in-Charge Richard Ross says. "We stopped to check, and it was good we did." When traveling on Olkola country after the wet season, no matter how experienced you may be, it is imperative to check the road conditions prior and during your travels, when in doubt stop and make sure it is safe to continue your journey.

We, the Olkola people, all stand together as one, upholding our traditions and culture with great respect for our old ways.

We lead and govern our traditional lands, business and future.

Others will listen to what we are saying and support our Ways.

Our ancestors have entrusted us to carry on the traditions and to care for the country and all the animals, plants and food within.

We do not take more than the land can give, so it will provide for generations to come.

Our elders teach the young people language and knowledge of how to protect our sacred sites, artifacts, water places and stories of our land, so they continue to live on for generations to come.

We support each other to live life to the fullest, living a healthy lifestyle, ensure we have happy homes, good healthcare and a safe community free of violence and crime.

## A word from our CEO...

The Olkola Corporation and staff have been in full steam for the past five months and noticeably, the urrbhu/onjyon (wet season) this year has been longer than expected CEO Deb Symonds writes ...



At the beginning of the year Corporation staff attended the Northern Australia Savanna Fire Forum in Darwin where we saw presentations from Traditional Owner groups from the top end and a lot of new technologies that have rolled out for the ajin (fire) project.

Building and construction at Sandy Creek for the Olkola Cultural Knowledge Centre resumes in late June or early July, after a good break from the urrbhu/ onjyon (wet season).

We are anticipating on celebrating the official Olkola Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) Dedication Ceremony this year on country, along with the official opening of the Nukakurra Walking Track.

We will be in touch with our members down the track about more details.

Overall, there are a lot of projects making progress this year and reflecting on the 10-year Olkola Healthy Country Strategic Plan, as we actively use this plan on a day-to-day basis, it can be reported that the strategies listed are working for our ten targets and are improving more and more each year.

The Laura Roadhouse recently celebrated the one year anniversary of their unattended fueling system.

We are looking forward to another great year ahead.

Please watch this space and our social media pages for more and enjoy this, our third newsletter.

#### Olkola Annual General Meeting

In early December 2022 staff met with members at the Cooktown PCYC for the Olkola Annual General Meeting.

The meeting was hosted virtually, as we knew it was a difficult time of year to travel.

The Corporation reported on Olkola's projects such as our ground-breaking Cultural Knowledge Centre, on-going Carbon Ajin (fire) Abatement Program and the successful Queensland Indigenous Land & Sea Rangers Program.

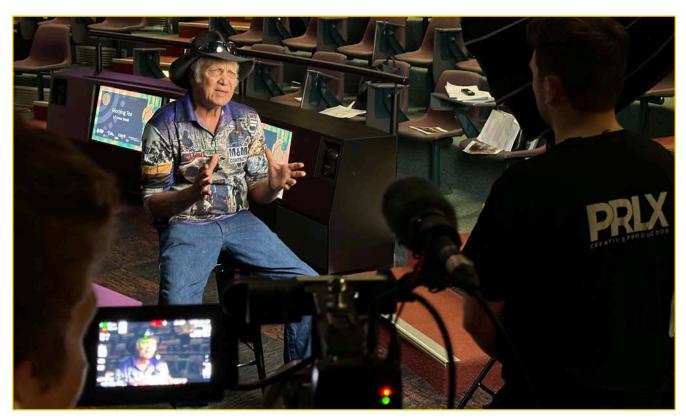
We celebrated and welcomed the newly elected Olkola Directors representing the Corporation and, to mark the end of 2022, the Corporation closed office mid-December and returned in January 2023 with a fresh mindset.







## A word from our Chair...



### The late wet has caused a lot of problems this year, Olkola Aboriginal Corporation Chair Mike Ross says.

The rivers have been up high and it's been difficult for workers to get back on country.

The Laura River was as high as I've seen it for a long time, and it kept up a long time too.

It slowed up the Cultural Centre build, which will now probably get underway again in July.

So the late wet season stopped the workers from doing work that they wanted to do, but they're starting to catch up now, starting to do things and get on top of it.

We went through the normal processes of going in to start cleaning country, mowing around the homestead and getting the infrastructure areas all back up and running again.

The burning program is happening right now.

We have also put on some

more new junior rangers for the IPA working from the new ranger base.

Four or five young people have already joined us now and they're out on country learning the ropes there.

Bringing them in is pretty exciting for us Olkola people and Olkola Corporation, to have young people coming in and wanting to be involved in the land management of the Olkola country.

The board has been working well.

The office staff have flat out and they're doing great work here at the office in Cairns.

There's more workers out on country now, more younger rangers and young people on country learning there.

We're still working on the projects around the golden-

shouldered parrot, the Alwal.

More parrots are around, which is good to see after 10-12 years of work.

Now we're seeing more young and that's a big tick for us, and good news too, I'm happy with that.

We are still having ongoing issues with mining leases, and there will always be a clash there.

But otherwise I've visited nearly all the country, and since the rivers have dropped the crew in the office and on the country have been very busy, and I'm glad to see that, I'm happy to see all the movement.

We need more involvement and more people involved.

Come and learn, there are opportunities here for all of us and we want you to come and see for yourselves what we are doing.



#### Cape York United #1 Claim

The United #1 Claim is progressing as sought by Olkola with individual groups to hold their own Determinations Cameron Law Principal Lawyer Thomas Cameron says.

"The Possum, Thaypan and Kuku Warra Peoples will have their Native Title recognised in July this year," he said.

"Olkola Country's Determination has been scheduled for July 2024.

"It is likely connection issues will soon be finalised and later this year Cape York Land Council (CYLC) will work with Olkola to establish southern and western boundaries and confirm the apical ancestors from whom our Olkola Native Title holders are descended.

"We are working with CYLC to identify what changes may be required to the corporation's rule book to allow it to become the Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) for Olkola People."

RIGHT: A map showing the tenements and BELOW is a summary for each tenement.

### PacGold - Existing tenements (shown in red)

- In late 2022 the Land Court decided in PacGold's favour regarding a number of recommendations that Olkola had made. Those findings meant that PacGold did not have to:
- o enter into a Cultural Heritage Management Agreement or Plan prior to commencing exploration activities: and
- o refer their actions to the Federal Minister for the Environment for assessment under the EPBC Act.
- PacGold then proceeded to clear about 70 drill pads in late 2022 but drilling did not commence prior to the wet
- As far as we are aware, drilling has not recommenced.
- We have requested that the Minister for the Environment conduct an assessment of the significant impact of PacGold's exploration activities under the EPBC Act. The Federal Department for the Environment are currently gathering information to consider that request. We are assisting by providing information.
- We have also lodged a complaint with the Queensland Department of Environment under the Nature Conservation Act

- on the basis that PacGold's activities are impacting a Threatened Species listed under that Act. To date no response has been received from the Queensland department.
- There has been destruction of termite mounds by PacGold in clearing the drill pads in late 2022. A letter has been sent to PacGold and Olkola are awaiting a response.
- It has become apparent that in conducting exploration using IP Geophysics (pegs with lines running between them carrying electrical current) PacGold have been digging small holes for the pegs. CYLC have sought advice from the Department of Resources about whether the digging of such holes constitutes 'ground disturbance' for the purposes of the NTPCs, thereby excluding such exploration from the definition of "Agreed Exploration Activities" under the NTPC and requiring notice, surveys and monitoring. At the date of this letter, no response has been received from the Department.

## PacGold - New tenements (shown in blue)

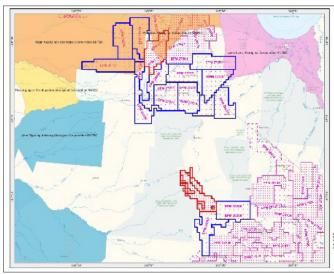
• EPMs 28287 and 28288 fall over the Kimba Plateau and extend to the southeast of PacGold's existing

#### Mining

Mr Cameron said there were new mining exploration tenements in the northern and south-eastern areas of Olkola Country.

"They are at various stages, from nonnotified application status through to being granted under the Native Title Protection Conditions (NTPCs)," he said.

"As part of the process of responding to mining applications, Olkola has been and will continue to engage in cultural heritage mapping."



#### tenements.

- On instructions from Olkola People, CYLC have opposed the granting of these new tenements under the NTPCs (Native Title Protection Conditions) and are seeking a right to negotiate.
- The dispute is going to hearing in the NNTT later this year.

#### Curwon Pty Ltd

- EPM 28137 falls in the majority within the Ngan Aak-Kunch Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (NAK) area, with a small portion within the Olkola nature
- The area of EPM 28137 contains several sites of cultural significance.
- Olkola and Wik People have instructed CYLC to oppose the granting of these new tenements under the NTPCs (Native Title Protection Conditions) and are seeking a right to negotiate.

#### Munuku Pty Ltd

- This tenement EPM27633 has been granted with the Native Title Protection Conditions.
- The tenement may be over known story places and significant sites.
- Traditional owners are working to ensure that story places and significant sites

are not impacted.

Tarragon Valley (South 32)

- These tenements were notified on 10 May 2023 (2 x notifications attached). CYLC will commence consultation with Olkola and Wik People on these tenements.
- The area adjacent to EPM 28395 was subject to a full inquiry which ultimately resulted in the tenements being removed before grant.
- Olkola People will have an opportunity to oppose the granting of the tenements in the coming months.

Anglogold Ashanti (EPMs 27269, 27270, 27271 and 27272)

- These tenements are in the right to negotiate phase.
- A draft agreement has been provided to the Explorer. Upon the receipt of the Explorer's feedback further consultation with Traditional Owners will be required.
- Olkola Corporation as the land holder, will be required to negotiate a separate conduct and compensation agreement with Anglogold Ashanti.

#### FMG Resources

• Tenements fall within Thaypan country and the board was not concerned with these items (from the perspective of Olkola).





Some of our Junior Rangers were lucky to attend the Queensland Indigenous Womens Ranger Network's (QIWRN's) three day networking forum in Cairns in mid-May.

QIWRN was established in 2018 to provide space for women rangers to share their experiences, ideas and information; provide support and advice; and enable connections in remote and isolated communities.

Attendees came from neighbouring ranger groups to as far away as Brisbane.

The event included sharing stories and presentations about healthy water, crocodile management team discussion and the importance of islands to Traditional Owners.

The girls took part in team building and network exercises to help break the ice and build connections.

They also got to participate in workshops to learn new

techniques for weaving.

Mentoring sessions helped them to expand their knowledge and they also heard learned about the climate vulnerability index. They said attending the network forum was beneficial in learning about other women ranger groups and building connections for future collaborations.







Several intense training and refresher courses were undertaken by Corporation staff during the months of February to March, CEO Deb Symonds says.

Continues next page...





#### From previous page...

"Olkola staff participated in a firearms safety training, which is crucial for our feral animal eradication programs on Olkola arrgi (country)," Deb said.

"This training emphasizes the responsibility required for staff safety at all times, which is paramount.

"In addition to the firearms safety training, we completed a two-day remote first aid training.

"This comprehensive training covered real-life scenarios and probable accidents or injuries that could occur on Olkola arrgi (country), such as bites, bleeds, and accidents.

"We also learned the process of calling emergency services for life-threatening situations.

"This knowledge is imperative for our staff, it is invaluable in case of any incidents and ensures we can maintain a safe aviation environment which is very important to us as an organisation."

She said the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) had also delivered Airband Radio Training to the Olkola Rangers at Killarney Station.

"This training aimed to prepare the rangers for the arrival of the RASS Mail Plane at Killarney Airstrip, ensuring the safe handling of goods and passengers while maintaining the existing airstrip," she said.

"Just a week later, they were successful."

Deb said training equipped the staff with important and necessary skills and knowledge to ensure safety across all aspects of their work.







# Extended wet offers training opportunities

An extended wet season has meant this year has mostly been about training workshops, meeting with partner organisations and planning, Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) Coordinator Helen Penrose says.

She said the Corporation team met in Cairns in early February for a planning workshop which set the groundwork for Olkola's goals in 2023.

"In March we held an Olkola and QPWS Fire and Pest Workshop, where discussions revolved around pest, fire, and cattle management, ghost bat research, fencing, and compliance," she said.

"QPWS staff from the operations, terrestrial compliance, and joint management sections were present.

"We also attended a two-day NQ Threatened Species Symposium in Cairns, and while we did not present at the symposium, we gained valuable insights into the latest research, management, and monitoring efforts across North Queensland, including updates from other Indigenous Ranger Groups."

Also in March, she said the team underwent two days of Remote First Aid course training in Cairns, equipping them with crucial skills to ensure safety during their fieldwork, and participated in their first Red Goshawk Recovery Team Meeting via zoom.

"The Red Goshawk, an endangered species listed under State and Commonwealth legislation, has a declining population trend with only an estimated 1,340 mature individuals remaining in the wild," she said.

"The meeting focused on monitoring the nesting site on Killarney, which plays a vital role in the conservation of the species.

"Red Goshawk researcher Chris McColl from the University of Queensland will be visiting Killarney in July to share his expertise on monitoring this rare species."

She said the rangers also attended a theory-based Water Quality Monitoring training session in Cooktown, with Christina







# Bringing Alwal Home

"The completion of the fencing around Piggy Piggy Springs is a significant achievement for us, and a positive result for the ecosystem," CEO Deb Symonds says.

The Olkola Infrastructure team successfully finished the fencing project as the wet season subsided.

"We recognised the importance of preserving this area and took proactive steps to ensure the ecosystem thrives without the interference of feral cattle, horses, and pigs," she said.

The impact of the fencing project was evident when Olkola Rangers re-visited the Springs, where they witnessed what had been a remarkable transformation.

"The whole area was flourishing with newly grown grasses, indicating the absence of destructive animal activity has allowed the natural vegetation to thrive," she said.

In addition to the fencing project the Alwal Rangers have diligently conducted several surveys over the year.

"The surveys have shown promising signs, with most nests observed having two to four young chicks, indicating a healthy breeding season," she said.

Deb said Corporation staff also actively participated in the 'North Queensland

Threataned Species Symposiums' held in Cairps

Threatened Species Symposium' held in Cairns in March. "The conference brought together various conservation groups and experts working on species recovery listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (ICUN)," she said.

"The 'North Queensland Threatened Species Symposium' was an excellent opportunity for us to engage with other organisations dedicated to conservation efforts.

"By collaborating and sharing insights, we can make a greater impact in preserving our threatened species and their habitats."

Howley from Cape York Water Partnerships.

"The next step is to refresh our on-country practical training during the dry season at rivers, creeks and wetlands of high cultural and biodiversity significance to ensure their long-term health" she said.

She said a recent trip to Killarney with Olkola Operations Manager Ash Ross included visits to Nukakurra Lagoon and Crosbie Station to assess road access and significant weed management issues.

"A highlight of the visit was the Killarney horse paddock tour with Richard and Junior," she said.

She said this month Olkola staff were busy finishing a QPWS compliance course with Andrew Bates and Paul Cochrane.

"The course provides valuable insights into compliance procedures, empowering them as future authorised compliance officers to gather and record evidence of illegal activity within Olkola country," she said.

Looking ahead, she said the IPA Project had several noteworthy events planned.

"The team will engage in IPA performance reporting in mid-July, presenting their progress from the past six months," she said.

"Additionally, an IPA dedication event is scheduled for August."

Helen said she was also working on drafting a range of plans, including a five-year Olkola weed management plan, feral animal management plan, bio-cultural water plan and threatened species and ecological community management and monitoring plans..

"As the IPA Project continues its efforts to protect and conserve Olkola country, these activities and initiatives underscore the commitment of the team towards sustainable land management and preservation of the region's unique ecosystems and cultural values," she said.

# Rangers committed despite seasonal challenges





The Olkola Rangers have faced several challenges in their fire management efforts due to the persistent wet conditions during the urrbhu/onjyon (wet season) across Olkola arrgi (country) for the 2023 season.

Ranger-in-Charge Richard Ross (pictured above right) said he and his team of four rangers were dedicated to protecting Olkola lands and, despite the difficulties, remained committed.

He said the situation now was the opposite of the difficulties they encountered towards the end of last year, when nearly 40 per cent of Olkola estate, including Olkola & Alwal National Park, was burnt for 2022 carbon credits and there were 55 hours of aerial operations.

"We had more troubling fire fronts through those few months compared to other years, including the loss of a memorable gum tree at Piggy Piggy," he said.

"Other than that, we've been doing around the boundaries, we went through round Sandy Creek, around Piggy Piggy, but we haven't been really successful. There's been a few 'not bad' burns, but it's still too wet.

"The excess water from the wet season has led to flooded areas and standing water across the paddocks, making burning operations challenging and preventing effective structural burning, further complicating our fire management efforts."

The wet conditions have also posed challenges in traveling to different locations.

"We recently tried to get out to Crosbie, but the twohour drive took us five, with getting logs and trees off the road, and clearing it all out," he said.

He said he was optimistic though.

"Another couple of weeks up and they will start really drying out, hopefully," he said. "We only have until June and July to burn and a bit in August."

While fire management remained a priority, he said the Olkola Rangers were also engaged in tidying up tasks and maintenance around their base.

He said plans for equipment repair and road maintenance to ensure smoother travel, avoiding delays like the recent fivehour journey to Crosbie.

Despite the current challenges, Richard said there was excitement about the ongoing progress of the cultural centre.

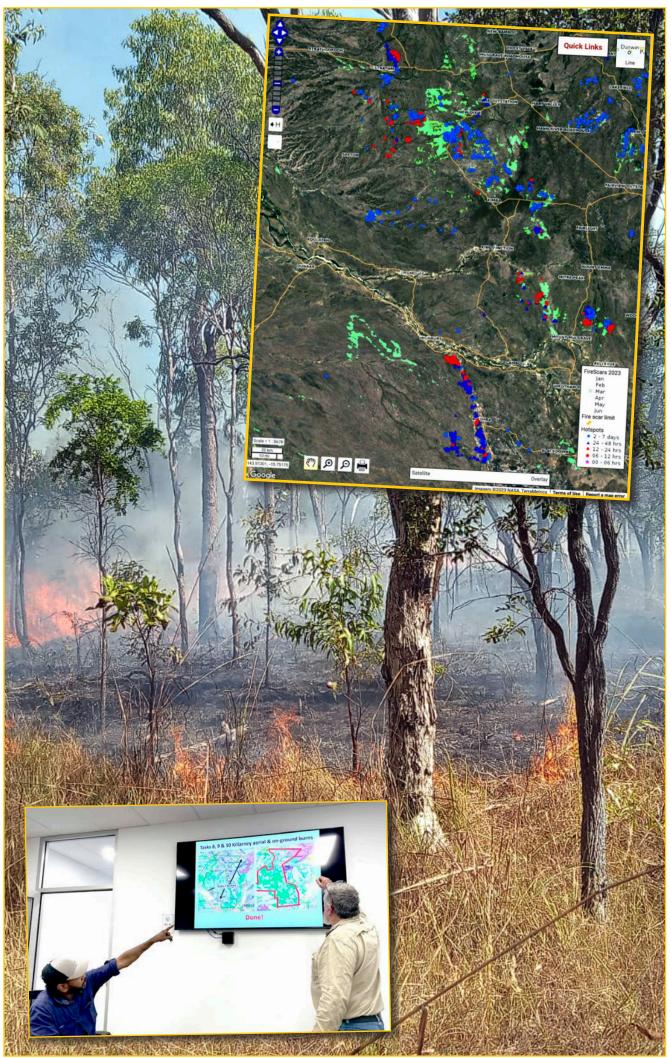
"It's starting to take shape, just quietly," he said.

He also said the Rangers had completed their initial weed surveys and spraying, compliance checks across Olkola country, and were all up to date with their first aid training.

"Last year, we held discussions about a new bird species found within Olkola country, the Red Goshawk, now reported on the ICUN as 'endangered'," he said.

"A number of rangers have recently undertaken oko (water) quality training at Cooktown PCYC where we can then continue to monitor Olkola waterways and their health."







Olkola Corporation has been actively collaborating with Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS) to enhance joint management activities, including fire, pest, and weed control, within Olkola and Alwal National Parks, CEO Deb Symonds says.

"In March, we had a productive meeting with QPWS to discuss our annual programs for joint management activities," she said.

"These discussions focused on vital aspects such as fire management, pest control, and weed eradication, ensuring the protection and preservation of Olkola and Alwal National Parks."

She said an aerial shoot was conducted late last year targeting feral animals within the parks.

"The results of the shoot was the elimination of 73 horses and 460 pigs, contributing to the ongoing efforts to maintain the ecological balance in the region," she said.

"Another aerial shoot is anticipated in the coming months or towards the end of the year to further address feral animal populations."

Deb said their efforts to identify and understand the diverse wildlife species

within the parks was ongoing.

"The Olkola Corporation, in collaboration with QPWS Rangers, recently embarked on a wallaby identification project in Alwal National Park (CYPAL)," she said.

"Tissue samples were collected from nine wallabies for DNA testing to determine their exact species.

"These wallabies are likely to be either the Cape York Rock Wallaby (Petrogale coenensis) or Godmans Rock Wallaby (Petrogale godmani) - differentiating between these species is challenging, even for experts, hence the need for DNA testing."

She said identifying the species was significant.

"If the wallabies were identified as P. coenensis, a listed threatened species, it would indicate a significant extension of their range," she said.

"Similarly, if they are P. godmani, it would be crucial information as this species

has a restricted distribution and may face future threats.

"At present, the DNA testing of the samples is still underway.

"We will provide an update once the results are complete, shedding light on the species composition and their conservation implications within Alwal National Park."

She said they were excited to have found the Ghost Bat (Macroderma gigas) on Olkola National Park.

"Although only a handful of surveys have been conducted for this species, one particular fieldwork trip revealed the presence of over 400 bats in a single cave," she said.

"This finding indicates the largest known colony of Ghost Bats in Cape York.

"It emphasizes the ecological importance of Olkola National Park and reinforces our commitment to protecting and conserving this unique species."



# A meeting of minds in Melbourne - Nukakurra's cultural record on track

Olkola traveled to chilly Victoria to meet with Melbourne University researchers in early May, to see how their cultural knowledge recordings around the Nukakurra Walking Track were progressing after their on-Country visit in September last year.

Dr Rochus Hinkel and research assistant volunteers, Melissa and Mitch-ell, were pleased to report the possibilities were endless.

"From the 3D scans and video footage that were recorded, 3D printing machines have produced several multi-dimensional printed objects from images," CEO Deb Symonds said.

"The images we saw were taken from the scar trees on the trail, and they were also in the process of making a grinding stone from the campgrounds.

"We continued to trial and test the virtual reality experience around the trail, highlighting, for example, the cultural knowledge stories of the Blue Tongue Lizard Story clashing with the Freshwater Crocodile



and the Nukakurra Lagoon.

"Excitingly, Olkola's story-telling project was even showcased at an exhibition where we, the Corporation, and exhibition guests were warmly welcomed by Wurundjeri Elders."

She said the exhibition talks were about telling stories of Country using augmented reality, sound recordings, video and animation projections, accompanied by maps, texts and diagrams that outlined the processes, tools, technologies and

their potential future applications.

The project was presented at the 2023 Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies (AIATSIS) Summit held in Perth in June.

"The theme of the Summit was 'Navigating the Spaces in between', which was an opportunity for us to present this project, talk about the technologies used and discuss how we continue to ensure we bring Country to people who cannot otherwise access it."





# In a testament to their strong partnerships and commitment to innovation, the Olkola Aboriginal Corporation has made significant progress in the construction of the Cultural Centre.

Working closely with Melbourne and Monash Universities, and the Centre for Appropriate Technology, the Corporation has reached a fundamental stage in the development of the project.

"Thanks to these important collaborations, the Cultural Centre's foundations, including a roof overhead and remarkable Olkola rammed earth walls, were completed last year," CEO Deb Symonds said.

"Our strong and continuing collaborations with Melbourne and Monash Universities, and the Centre for Appropriate Technology have been crucial getting

us to this significant stage of the Cultural Centre's development."

She said the assembly of the Olkola rammed earth walls were a highlight.

"These walls not only embody our commitment to sustainability, they celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the Olkola community," she said.

She said the Cultural Centre had already turned heads, in some cases as far away as Switzerland.

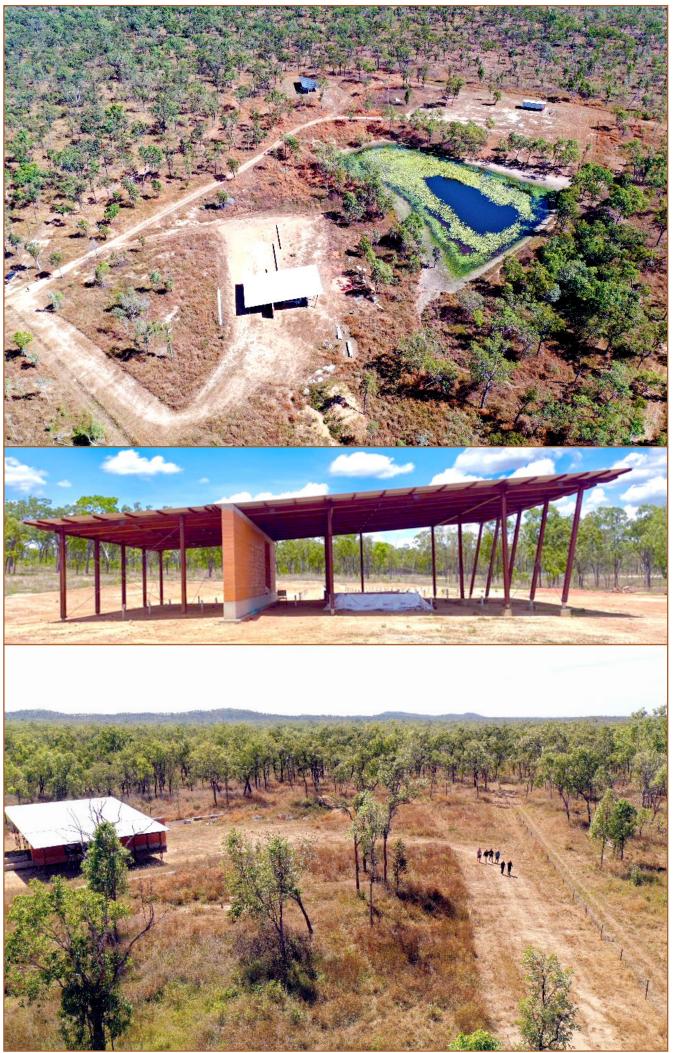
"We 'virtually' attended the 2023 Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies (AIATSIS) Summit held in Perth, where we presented a discussion about what we had learned from building the prototype with our partners.

"We are thrilled to see the widespread interest in this project, it demonstrates the global significance and appeal of what we've managed to achieve here."

She said they were busy gearing up for the next stage of construction, set to start in July.

"We will keep you informed about the progress of this project and continue to report on the upcoming milestones and advancements as they unfold," she said.





# **Introducing Ash Ross: Operations Manager**

More than a decade after the official handovers of Alwal and Olkola National Parks Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land (CYPAL), and an invitation from his dad to be a ranger on his Country, Ash Ross is the corporation's new Operations Manager.

He said he's learned a lot from his Dad and Elders along the way, and "on the ground".

"I started work with the Olkola Aboriginal Corporation as one of the first rangers and completed my first survey of Alwal (Golden Shouldered Parrot) on Olkola country," he said.

"This was a whole new experience for me, seeing firsthand, Alwal chicks successfully fledging their nest.

"For the next stage of the journey for the Corporation, we formed a family-like partnership with Bush Heritage Australia and the first collaborative survey trip was in 2015.

"During this time, I was able to participate in the exchange of twoway science where we combined scientific practices with the Olkola cultural practices.

"After many years of surveying and trips on country, I became very knowledgeable about the breeding season, migration habits, threats to the bird, the nature of the bird itself and became the specialist Alwal Ranger.

"Even though I did not do any prior studies for this type of field work, I became an expert first-hand.

"Since then, we have built up our database of Alwal on country and successfully established an Olkolaled Golden Shouldered Parrot Recovery Team in 2018."

He said he's now working with two junior rangers.

"Assisting me on the 'Bringing Alwal Home' Project, there are two Olkola junior rangers and we survey annually the population nests and breeding numbers, trialling new methods of decreasing predation on the nests and fighting against mining, which is the number one threat to our totem," he said.

"Being in the position, I feel I am leading the way for the next generation of Olkola people and members of the Corporation.

"I have two young daughters and am showing them what I know, how to protect the land and Alwal in hopes that they will continue the work I do when they grow up."





Our website has been completed and includes new features such as inquiring for employment and an Olkola Members Portal," CEO Deb Symonds says.

"You can create an account with your email and a password, select what Olkola clan group you are from, if known," she said.

"That information comes to the Olkola office, we review it and accept your account.

"After that Olkola People can check out all the photos, watch the videos and/or check out the Olkola Healthy Country Plan."

She said in future they hoped to offer a virtual reality experience of Olkola arrgi (country) by just clicking a link.

Watch this space: http://www.olkola.com.au

## **Contact us!**

Follow Olkola's social media to keep up to date on our latest news.

Instagram: olkolaaboriginalcorporation

Facebook: Olkola Aboriginal Corporation Cape York

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