



Invasive weeds targeted on islands to promote sea turtle nesting

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When you imagine what a threat to turtle nesting sites might look like, most people would think of four-wheel-drives tearing up the beach or feral animals digging up the nests.

But there is another lesser-known threat which is present even in island locations where people and animals don't reach – invasive weeds.

Reef Catchments and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) have been working together to remove invasive weeds from Turtle Beach on St Bees Island, most notably prickly pear and lantana.

The SV Whitehaven headed over to St Bees three times, each trip lasting four days and taking 10 different volunteers each time, removing weeds and marine debris from the island.

Reef Catchments project officer Steve Fisher said that an earlier field trip to the island identified that Turtle Beach was an active nesting site.

“Earlier this year, we counted 49 nests as having emerged on that beach, which was amazing because we had nothing recorded there for a long time.

“Invasive weeds are a problem because they encroach into sea turtle nesting habitat, reducing available nesting space. There have been weed control programs in the past which removed a significant amount of weed, allowing foreshore habitat to replenish, in turn supporting sea turtle nesting. These programs ceased several years ago.

“The beach scrub where the lantana and prickly pear is is itself an endangered ecosystem, so it was important to remove all of the invasives to restore the natural balance.

“The beach scrub is important to maintain an environment which is right for the eggs to incubate successfully and ultimately hatch out,” Mr Fisher said.

This project is funded through the Queensland Government's Reef Assist Program and delivered by Reef Catchments. This Reef Assist Project supports some commercial vessels to undertake conservation projects in the Whitsunday and Mackay area.

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