



DEREK HENDERSON

The Apudthama reserve in Cape York will benefit from a new partnership between Louis Vuitton and People for Wildlife, with, below, a focus on everything from estuaries to inlets and all creatures in between

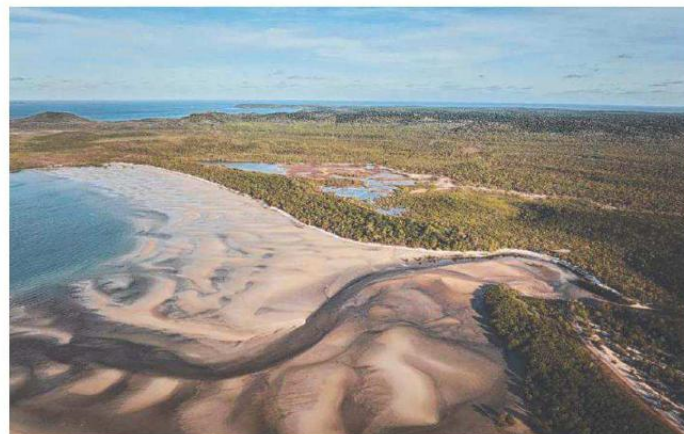
The Cape fits as Louis Vuitton tries conservation out for style

DAVID MEAGHER

Louis Vuitton, the world's biggest luxury brand, has partnered with an Australian NGO to protect a vast tract of land in the Cape York peninsula.

The groundbreaking biodiversity project is a partnership with People for Wildlife, which was established in 2020 to focus on the preservation of under threat environments around the world. To date People for Wildlife has managed environmental protection projects in the United States, Mexico and Zimbabwe. The partnership on the one-million-acre Apudthama reserve in Cape York – land spoken for by the Apudthama Land Trust, holders of the Aboriginal Freehold title of the area – is the NGO's first Australian project.

The partnership is a multi-million-dollar commitment from Louis Vuitton spread across a five-year period. It's also the first time the French luxury house has



undertaken a purely environmental project on this scale.

"In terms of the environment, it's definitely a first for us," said Christelle Capdupuy, the global head of sustainability at Louis Vuitton.

"One year ago we decided it was time for us to go beyond the borders of our value chain and to embrace larger projects and to be

more holistic and to have a positive impact beyond Louis Vuitton."

The area in Cape York is rich in biodiversity and includes habitats from tropical forests and woodlands to freshwater ecosystems along more than 300km of coastline. It's also an ecologically important one. The Apudthama reserve is home to one third of Australia's mammals, half of our birds and a



quarter of our reptile and amphibian species. It's an environment that is under significant threat.

"We know that many species have been decimated in other parts of northern Australia," said Daniel Natusch, founder of People for Wildlife. "And even in those areas that have been better studied than Cape York, we don't fully understand why." Louis Vuitton's

support will allow Natusch and his team to undertake critical scientific research to better understand the threat to the natural habitat and species in Cape York.

The partnership with Louis Vuitton is primarily about the protection of the natural environment in Cape York and is in line with the LVMH group's objective of conserving and rehabilitating five mil-



lion hectares of land around the world by 2030. The Apudthama reserve project represents eight per cent of LVMH's target.

There is, however, an aspect to the partnership that is tangentially related to the sourcing of raw materials, namely crocodiles and, to a lesser extent, sandalwood which is used in the production of fragrances. "We try to discourage close

cycle [farming] systems that have no links to nature," says Natusch.

"The systems that have proved very powerful and resilient in many of the places we work in, such as Zimbabwe and Louisiana, is where there is a harvest of a small number of crocodile eggs which will die naturally in the wild as a result of being eaten by ants or degradation from pigs or because of flooding. We

know this from 50 years of science, particularly from the Northern Territory, that you are able to harvest a large number of eggs, protect the nest and then those eggs go to farms where they are raised."

Another important aspect of the partnership is in helping with carbon sequestration. Wetlands, according to Natusch, make up about 6 per cent of the world's land area but sequester 35 per cent of its carbon. The funding from Louis Vuitton will enable People for Wildlife to do simple interventions including reducing the number of invasive species such as wild pigs and ensuring appropriate fire management.

"[By protecting this environment] Louis Vuitton is, therefore, sequestering massive amounts of carbon," he said. According to Capdupuy, the five-year project aims to sequester a minimum of 95 million tonnes of carbon.

The List: Green Power Players 2023 is in The Australian on Friday 24 February.