

endangered

by Manda Page and Kay Bradfield



Sunset frog

The sunset frog (*Spicospina flammocaerulea*) was discovered in 1994 and officially described and named in 1997. With its almost black back, the frog is relatively inconspicuous when viewed from above in its swampy environment. However, it has a brilliant orange and blue underbelly.

The species is known to exist at only about 30 locations within a 300-square-kilometre area north and north-east of Walpole. It lives in poorly drained peat-based swamps at the headwaters of drainage systems that are vulnerable to climate change and habitat disturbance. Because of its restricted distribution and dependence on a specific type of habitat—a relict of an ancient environment—the sunset frog is considered at risk of becoming extinct.

The sunset frog has been given a helping hand thanks to a partnership between the

Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), Perth Zoo and local residents. Thirty frogs and 251 tadpoles were bred and reared mostly at Perth Zoo as part of its Native Species Breeding Program. The frogs were translocated and now reside in their new home on a private property in the Mount Frankland area.

This world-first attempt to breed and rear this species started in 2007 when a number of animals were translocated from the wild to Perth Zoo's dedicated facility. After some trial and error, Perth Zoo has determined how to breed and rear this species, providing an additional tool for conservation of the species.

The next step was to determine if the frogs and tadpoles could be translocated back into the wild and establish a new population. In December 2011, the adult frogs were placed into purpose-designed containers for transport and the tadpoles were put into oxygenated bags of water, then driven to a private property in Walpole. On

arrival, DEC and Perth Zoo staff, the property owners, their family and other enthusiastic locals helped carry the frogs and tadpoles to a pre-selected site. Small burrows were dug for the frogs and the tadpoles were released into ponds once they were acclimatised to the water temperature.

The owners of the property on which the animals were released will take a lead role in protecting and monitoring the frogs with assistance from staff in DEC's Frankland District. Monitoring is very important to determine if this inaugural translocation was successful.

While the future of the sunset frog is not yet secure, the ability to captive breed and translocate the frog back into the wild is crucial to its survival. In addition, this project is an excellent example of cooperation between agencies and the community.

Photos by Grant Wardell-Johnson and Perth Zoo

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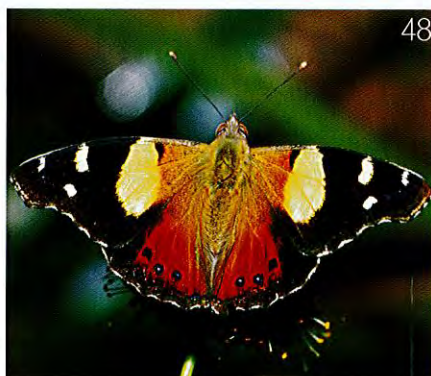
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