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MEDIA STATEMENT

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

20/11/98

Bilby release marks conservation milestone

Western Australia reached a milestone in wildlife conservation today with the release of bilbies into [Dryandra woodland](#).

Environment Minister Cheryl Edwardes said it was the first release of the threatened species in this State.

Mrs Edwardes said the release of captive-bred bilbies into Dryandra was a major step forward in recovery plans for the species and for the Department of Conservation and Land Management's (CALM) [Western Shield](#) program.

Western Shield, the biggest wildlife conservation initiative ever undertaken in Australia, is working to bring native animals back from the brink of extinction by controlling introduced predators such as the European fox and feral cat.

The Minister said four captive-bred bilbies, three from Kanyana Native Fauna Rehabilitation Centre and one from a breeding program at the Alice Springs Desert Park, would be released into a 10ha feral proof enclosure at Dryandra, north-west of Narrogin in the Wheatbelt region.

"The three females and one male will be released into specially constructed burrows, from which they will start exploring," Mrs Edwardes said.

"All will be radio collared to enable extensive post-release monitoring to be undertaken.

"The ability of the bilbies to survive and breed in this wild natural environment will lay the groundwork for further bilby reintroductions in other parts of the State."

The Minister said the landmark release acknowledged the years of research CALM scientists had put into controlling introduced predators and conserving native fauna such as this charismatic species.

"It also recognises the great contribution the community has made through the purchase of chocolate Easter bilbies from Coles Supermarkets, which has funded the vital bilby captive breeding program at Kanyana and Peron Peninsula," she said.

The Kanyana program is a joint initiative between CALM and Kanyana and is one of several breeding programs CALM has under way as part of Western Shield wildlife recovery plans.

The program at Kanyana has been a great success, with more than 15 bilbies born since it was established in late 1996. There are now 22 bilbies in the breeding program.

The bilby (*Macrotis lagotis*) was once distributed throughout arid and semi-arid Australia, but now is confined to northern deserts, including parts of the Pilbara and Kimberley.

Bilbies have long rabbit-like ears, a long pointed snout and a long black tail, which is white on the latter half. They are covered with a soft bluish-grey fur. Males may grow up to half a metre long, with a tail up to 290 mm, but females are much smaller.

Mrs Edwardes said the State Government was committed to restoring WA's native wildlife populations to the level they were before the onslaught of introduced predators.

"Foxes and feral cats have wreaked havoc on our native wildlife," she said. "These animals have already contributed to the extinction on 10 mammal species with dozens more fighting for survival."

Through the use of a naturally occurring poison '1080' in dried meat baits to control predator numbers, CALM has begun to reverse this decline. While this poison is lethal to introduced animals, it is harmless to native animals which have evolved with the poison found in the native plant genus *Gastrolobium*, commonly called poison peas.

CALM baits more than 3.5 million hectares of conservation lands throughout the State from as far north as Burrup Peninsula near Dampier, to inland Wheatbelt regions and to the South Coast from Esperance to Walpole.

The next aerial baiting program will be carried out in December and January. All baited areas are sign-posted. Dog owners should be aware that though the poison is harmless to native wildlife, it is lethal to domestic pets.

People entering baited areas are advised to leave their pets at home.

Mrs Edwardes said that through Western Shield, CALM was working to ensure WA's diverse and unique native wildlife was conserved for future generations.

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