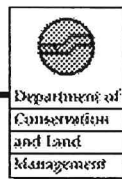


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News

R E L E A S E



06/16/1999

WA and SA join forces to save the bilby

Western Australia has joined forces with South Australia to bring the native bilby back from the brink of extinction.

WA's Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) has swapped captive-bred bilbies with SA to ensure diversity and new blood in their captive-breeding programs, supporting the recovery of this charismatic species.

CALM Executive Director Dr Syd Shea said CALM has provided privately-owned Yookamurra Sanctuary in SA with a male and female bilby from the captive-breeding program it runs jointly with Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre in Perth, with support from Coles Supermarkets Save the Bilby Fund. In return, Yookamurra will give CALM a male and female bilby.

Dr Shea said the animal swap followed the unprecedented success of CALM's breeding program, which has seen more than 40 bilbies born since it began in 1997.

"The success of the breeding program acknowledges the years that CALM's research scientists have put into controlling introduced predators and conserving native fauna under the Western Shield program.

"Western Shield, the biggest wildlife recovery program ever undertaken in Australia, aims to bring native animals back from the brink of extinction by controlling introduced predators, the fox and feral cat."

Dr Shea said the cooperative approach with Yookamurra was part of CALM's ongoing relationship with Earth Sanctuaries - a relationship that had seen both organisations support and assist each other in wildlife recovery.

"Yookamurra Sanctuary is a 1100 ha fenced reserve run by Dr John Wamsley, Managing Director of Earth Sanctuaries Ltd., in South Australia's Murray mallee region," he said.

"The sanctuary was established with the aim of reintroducing species now

extinct in the mallee, but surviving elsewhere.

"It is surrounded by an electric fence to prevent fox, cat and rabbit invasion, and has so far seen success with woylie and stick-nest rat reintroductions, as well as numbats and boodies translocated from Western Australia in partnership with CALM in 1993 and 1995 respectively."

Dr Shea said the bilbies flew out today on a commercial flight from Perth to Adelaide and would be transported by road to Yookamurra Sanctuary.

"The animals will be transferred from Kanyana to their new home at Yookamurra within 12 hours, to minimise stress and improve their chances of a successful transition," he said.

"This exchange is a prime example of how government and private enterprise can work together to further nature conservation.

"If the bilbies are successfully integrated into Yookamurra's breeding program, we will have another population to draw on for reintroductions in WA."

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 soft bluish-grey fur, long rabbit-like ears, a long pointed snout and a spectacular black and white tail. Males may grow to over half a metre long, including a tail up to 290 mm, but females are much smaller.

Bilbies are also one of the candidates for eventual reintroduction in CALM's Project Eden wildlife conservation program on Shark Bay's Peron Peninsula.

Media contacts: Dr Syd Shea on 9442 0325 Dr Tony Friend on 9842 4523

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