

## Elusive curlews come a-calling

November 2 2015, by Snwa, Sciencenetwork Wa

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A bush stone curlew and baby. Credit: Perth Zoo

Eerie wailing calls at night are often the only sign that bush stone-curlews are about.

In fact, the distinctive calls of these [birds](#) have been responsible for phone calls to the police, from people thinking someone was screaming in the bush.

But for locals living near Whiteman Park they've embraced some new feathered residents and are helping researchers learn more about the movements of these stunning, yet often elusive birds.

As part of the Perth Zoo's Urban Renewal Program 12 bush stone-curlews have been released into Whiteman Park which joined 11 birds reared at Caversham Wildlife Park and are now enjoying life in the wild.

"Numbers of these wonderful, charismatic birds have declined across southern Australia due to the fox and cat predation and changes in land use," Perth Zoo Director of Animal Health and Research Dr Peter Mawson says.

"The releases of captive bred birds form part of Perth Zoo's strategy to re-wild metropolitan Perth.

"Ultimately we are aiming to return native species to their former ranges for future generations to enjoy, engage the community with native species and the conservation issues facing them and help rebalance the eco-system," Dr Mawson says.

And the collaborative project is working!

To date, three chicks have been hatched from a Perth Zoo and Caversham Wildlife Park pairing, with the birds currently sitting on more eggs.



A bush stone-curlew adult and baby. Credit: Perth Zoo

Apart from the breeding success, and as importantly, the community have taken the birds under their wing and providing invaluable information about the species' movements.

"We're regularly getting updates on the status and location of the birds from members of the public posting their sightings on Facebook, into bird watching forums or sending photos taken on their mobile phones," Dr Mawson says.

"These birds are experts at camouflage, and during the day easily blend into the native vegetation, so the updates from the community has been invaluable.

"Each bird is banded before it's released and some were fitted with small

radio-transmitters, so their extra 'jewellery' has helped prompt a lot of interest from locals and tourists alike.

In this new digital age, it is a brave new world with regard to how we can monitor wildlife," Dr Mawson says.

"For us at Perth Zoo it has helped us track the movements of some of the birds. Thanks to citizen scientists, we know there are two birds currently exploring various areas of Perth," he says.

One Perth Zoo bred curlew which was released in October 2014 was reported at Herdsman Lake in early November, then ventured to Challenge Stadium and Rous Head Ferry Terminal before navigating to Fremantle Aquatic Centre carpark.

During all this movement the curlew obviously worked up a thirst as it was then sighted at Bull Creek Shopping Centre outside of Dan Murphy's before moving onto Jandakot airport the next day.

The other Perth Zoo bird which has ventured further afield was recorded at Technology Park, Bentley two months after it was released.

"On each occasion, thanks to the assistance of the community we've been able to locate the birds, assess their condition, and in the case of two other birds that ventured away from Whiteman Park last year, we were able to return them to Whiteman Park," Dr Mawson says.

"They've been none the worse for their adventures, in fact the birds have been fit and well, and amazing little ambassadors for their species, prompting a flurry activity from interested members of the public.

"At Perth Zoo, this is exactly what we are aiming for, inspiring people to love their local wildlife."

When this bird is breeding or incubating eggs, they search for food close to the nest. At other times they search over vast distances. The female lays her eggs in a small scrape in the ground.

Major threats to the species include habitat destruction, as well as introduced predators such as foxes and cats.

As part of Perth Zoo's Urban Renewal Program apart from the curlews, to date, 55 dibblers (*Parantechinus apiclis*) and 11 water rats (*Hydromys chysogaster*) have been released into reserves around Perth, and a list of other potential candidates for this program has been compiled.

*This article first appeared on [ScienceNetwork Western Australia](#) a science news website based at Scitech.*

Provided by Science Network WA

Citation: Elusive curlews come a-calling (2015, November 2) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-11-elusive-curlews-a-calling.html>

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