

ZOOS VICTORIA'S PRIORITY SPECIES PLAINS-WANDERER

Pedionomus torquatus

Critically Endangered



In July 2015 the Australian Government upgraded the conservation status of the Plains-wanderer to Critically Endangered. Populations continue to decline due to the loss and fragmentation of suitable grassland habitat throughout its distribution. Zoos Victoria is part of the National Recovery Team, formed in an emergency effort to save this species from extinction. We will work alongside partners to improve habitat conditions in the wild and establish a captive-breeding population of Plains-wanderers to provide insurance and a source of birds for release into the wild.

Zoos Victoria is committed to Fighting Extinction

We are focused on working with partners to secure the survival of our priority species before it is too late.



Plains-wanderers were once relatively widespread throughout the grasslands of eastern Australia. However numbers have declined dramatically, and are now restricted to strongholds in the Northern Plains of Victoria, including Terrick Terrick National Park, and the Riverina region of New South Wales. Even here, populations are critically low. The species requires grasslands with sparse cover and no dense vegetation or trees. Cultivation of grasslands and grazing can both degrade habitat but conversely, an appropriate grazing regime can be an important tool to create the grass density preferred by the birds. Severe population decline including 95% in Victoria since 2010 has triggered the establishment of a captive insurance population in NSW and Victoria. This program aims to not only prevent extinction, but also support future recovery efforts by breeding animals for reintroduction.

KEY PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- + Working with project partners, develop recovery targets for the Plains-wanderer in Victoria and New South Wales.
- + Support project partners to improve habitat conditions in the wild.
- + Establish captive population at Werribee Open Range Zoo, one of several throughout Australia, to develop husbandry and breeding techniques as an insurance against extinction.
- + Identify suitable release sites for captive-bred chicks to increase numbers in the wild.
- + Raise community awareness about the Plains-wanderer and its habitat requirements.

THE SPECIES

Plains-wanderers are small grassland birds, standing 20cm in height and weighing less than 100g. Their plumage gives them extremely good camouflage in grasslands, making them extremely difficult to locate.

Despite their similar appearance to a quail, the Plains-wanderer is highly unique in an evolutionary sense, being the sole member of its Family and having no close relatives.

In contrast to many bird species, females are larger and more colourful than the males, with a broad black collar with white streaks or spots around the neck and a red-brown (rufous) patch on the upper breast. They compete for the male's attention and, after laying a clutch of eggs, they leave the males to complete the incubation and raising of the chicks. The females remain in the breeding territory, where they may mate with a second male.

THE PLAN

Zoos Victoria has committed to saving the Plains-wanderer by developing a conservation captive-breeding program, working in conjunction with Taronga Conservation Society, Featherdale Wildlife Park and Zoos SA. Zoos Victoria is currently undertaking the following actions:

- + Construction of a breeding facility at Werribee Open Range Zoo comprising of 22 aviaries by Spring 2017. \$345,000
- + Setting up a camera surveillance system, heat-lamps and automatic watering required to monitor and care for Plains-wanderers. \$42,000
- + Working with partners to identify suitable release sites and monitor the wild population. \$27,000 p.a
- + Concentrating on increasing community awareness about Plains-wanderer conservation and land management
- + Proof-of-concept trial to investigate the application of Detection Dogs to support field conservation.

HOW CAN I HELP?

We are only just embarking on this critical conservation intervention to save this species and need all the assistance we can get. You can support our efforts to secure a future for the Plains-wanderer by donating at: zoo.org.au/donate

FIND OUT MORE

zoo.org.au/conservation

IMAGES

FRONT: Plains-wanderers prefer short and sparse grasslands with little vegetation. Photo by Mark Antos. BACK TOP: Plains-wanderer plumage provides perfect camouflage in grassland habitats. Photo by David Morgan. BACK BOTTOM: The male Plains-wanderer (left) lacks the striking black and white banding on the neck, bright yellow beak and red breast patch that are characteristic of the female. Photo by David Baker-Gabb.



PROGRAM PARTNERS

Birdlife Australia

birdlife.org.au

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

delwp.vic.gov.au

Dr. David Baker-Gabb, Ecologist.

Australian Government Department of Environment and Energy

environment.gov.au

NSW Office of Environment & Heritage

environment.nsw.gov.au

North Central Catchment Management Authority

nccma.vic.gov.au

Featherdale Wildlife Park

featherdale.com.au

Northern Plains Conservation Management Network

facebook.com/northernplainscmn

Parks Victoria

parkweb.vic.gov.au

Taronga Conservation Society

taronga.org.au

Trust for Nature Victoria

trustfornature.org.au

Zoos South Australia

zoossa.com.au



Zoos Victoria is a not-for-profit, zoo based conservation organisation. We are Fighting Extinction through our local and global conservation programs, research projects and community conservation campaigns.

For more information, visit zoo.org.au/fighting-extinction

