

# ZOOS VICTORIA'S 20 PRIORITY SPECIES

## BAW BAW FROG

*Philoria frosti*

Critically Endangered

The Baw Baw Frog needs our help. Like many amphibians, the Baw Baw Frog has suffered massive population declines in the last 20 years. Zoos Victoria recognises that if something isn't done soon, it may just be too late for this species. However, as they live deep in the mud and vegetation on the plateau of Mt Baw Baw, it is no easy feat to even find a Baw Baw Frog. Zoos Victoria worked closely with survey teams in 2011 to locate a calling male and subsequently collect an egg mass to raise in captivity. Our staff are committed to developing husbandry protocols and fighting the all-too-possible extinction of this species.

# Zoos Victoria is committed to Fighting Extinction

We are working to ensure that no Victorian terrestrial vertebrate species goes extinct on our watch.



In the early 1980s the Baw Baw Frog was thriving, but recent monitoring indicates a 98% decline in their abundance since this time. Zoos Victoria is committed to conserving this unique Victorian species. Research into the captive breeding and husbandry of this species will ensure the Baw Baw Frog has a long-term future. Zoos Victoria staff are committed to gaining a better understanding of the life history of this frog, sharing its unique story and securing its future.

## KEY PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Zoos Victoria will investigate and refine the husbandry techniques required to raise, maintain and breed Baw Baw Frogs in captivity. This will enable us to develop an insurance population and gives us the ability to supplement wild populations once wild habitat use is clearly understood.

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- + Research is underway to investigate habitat and husbandry requirements for this species
- + Permits and collection approval have been sought from the government
- + Field surveys have been conducted and Zoos Victoria staff have collected one egg mass in the 2011 season to kick start captive breeding and research
- + Melbourne Zoo is currently the only institution in the world that cares for this species in captivity
- + During December tadpoles began to hatch from the egg mass and initial data shows they are developing well. Each milestone passed provides critical insights that will better enable us to secure the species' future.

## SPECIES AT RISK

Baw Baw Frogs only occur on a restricted section of the Baw Baw plateau in Victoria. They are a cryptic species, finding natural soil cavities underground from which to call and lay their translucent eggs in a foam nest. Unlike most other frog species, developing Baw Baw Frog tadpoles do not swim or feed. The tadpoles are nourished by a yolk sac after hatching. They develop this way, hiding under vegetation until they metamorphose into frogs.

The reasons for the massive population crash of Baw Baw Frogs since the 1980s are unclear, however the most likely factors are:

- + Chytridiomycosis – an infectious disease caused by chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*) which infects the skin of frogs and other amphibians. Chytrid fungus has been linked with amphibian decline and extinction worldwide, and appears to affect frogs in cool climates most severely. Once a population is infected, there is no effective way of controlling this disease
- + Introduced species - feral plants and animals occurring on Mt Baw Baw are having negative impacts on habitat quality
- + Climate change – warmer temperatures and decreased rainfall in the Baw Baw Plateau region could cause the subalpine and montane habitats of the Baw Baw Frog to shrink or entirely disappear.

## PROGRAM PARTNERS

Department of Sustainability and Environment  
[www.dse.gov.au](http://www.dse.gov.au)

Baw Baw National Park  
[www.australialps.environment.gov.au](http://www.australialps.environment.gov.au)

Baw Baw Shire Council  
[www.bawbawshire.vic.gov.au](http://www.bawbawshire.vic.gov.au)

Baw Baw Frog Recovery Team

## IMAGES

**Front:** Baw Baw Frogs are not easily spotted in the wild as they prefer to reside in underground soil cavities. Photo: Claire Keely.

**Below top:** The tadpole stage of the Baw Baw Frog is nourished by a yolk sac, these young recently hatched at Melbourne Zoo. Photo: Damian Goodall.

**Below bottom:** An adult frog looks distinctly different from the metamorphlings, with much darker colouration. Photo Mike Swan.



FIND OUT MORE

[www.zoo.org.au/conservation](http://www.zoo.org.au/conservation)

