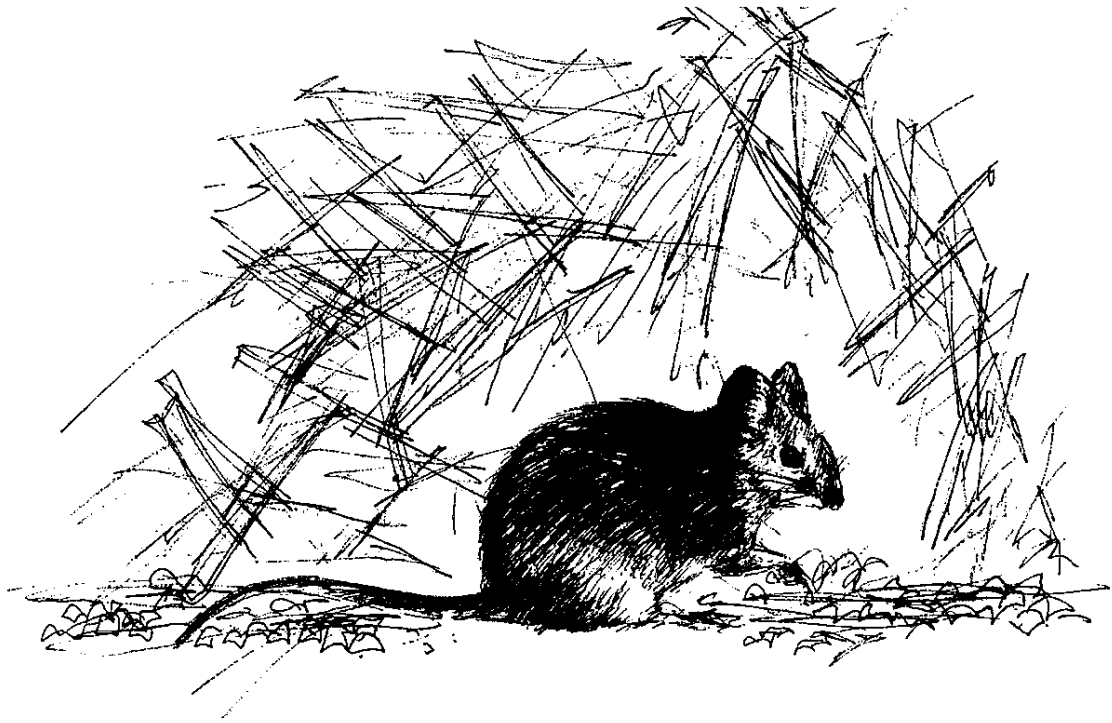


BACK TO THE WILD



One of the main aims of all zoos is the conservation of animal species. For many of these species the ultimate goal is their eventual release into their natural habitat. Adelaide and Monarto Zoos, or Zoos South Australia, have been involved in the breeding and release of native and exotic species.

The first step of any reintroduction program is the successful captive breeding of the species. This starts with either the capture of wild individuals for breeding or the use of animals already in captivity. The breeding is carefully monitored to make sure that genetic diversity is maintained and the offspring are genetically healthy. Species management will also ensure that the release group of animals are unrelated, have no history of inbreeding and are in good health to give them the best possible chance of survival.

Zoos in Australia and the rest of the world are involved with species management programs. They co-operate regionally and internationally so that all

the animals of a species in zoos worldwide can be treated as one population and breeding can be co-ordinated. This can involve an individual animal being sent to another zoo allowing the exchange of genetic material to maintain a healthy animal population.

Australian zoos also are part of an organisation called the Australasian Regional Association of Zoo's, Parks and Aquaria (ARAZPA) which helps zoos to focus their resources on certain species. These are usually species for which a national recovery plan has been established.

EXAMPLE 1:

The Zoos SA assists the South Australian Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) manage the only captive population of Pygmy Bluetongue Lizards. When nobody saw this small lizard for a number of years they presumed it was extinct. The Pygmy Bluetongue was rediscovered north of Adelaide in 1995 and is now considered

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to be among the most Threatened Species in South Australia. A small colony of wild Pygmy Bluetongues was bought to the Adelaide Zoo for research and breeding purposes. It is hoped that we can learn enough about this species to save it from extinction.

EXAMPLE 2:

The reintroduction program for the Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby was developed in 1994. Before an animal is reintroduced to an area, it is important to find out the reasons for its initial disappearance. The Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby can still be found in the wild in the Flinders Ranges, however it was last seen at Aroona, near Leigh Creek, South Australia, the selected release site, in 1982. Predation by foxes and competition for food by goats and rabbits eliminated the species from this area. These introduced species have now been eradicated from the Aroona site, allowing native plants to grow, providing food and shelter for the reintroduced wallaby.

Yellow-footed Rock-wallabies have been kept at the Adelaide Zoo since 1883. In 1988 the wallaby group was split up, with most being sent to Monarto Zoo and a small group remaining at the Adelaide Zoo. At Monarto Zoo the wallabies are able to feed on a wide variety of native plants to allow them to adapt to their eventual release conditions. A group of ten wallabies (eight females and two males) was released at Aroona sanctuary in 1996. Before release each animal was checked by a vet and fitted with a radio collar. Each collar has a different frequency, which will change in tone if the collar hasn't moved for six hours indicating either the death of the animal or that the collar has become detached from the wallaby.

Two wallabies died from natural causes within six months of release, one of which was a female with a three and a half-month-old joey. A year after the first release another reintroduction took the founder population back up to 10 animals.

For the first 40 days after release the animals were tracked three times a day. As time has gone on the population has adapted to its new surroundings and monitoring has been reduced to an expedition twice a year. Feral animal control has also continued four times a year to ensure the survival of the released wallabies.

The population of Yellow-footed Rock-wallabies in Aroona Sanctuary is now well established.

EXAMPLE 3:

Two of the exotic species that the Adelaide Zoo has been assisting with conservation of are species of small monkey, the Golden-lion Tamarin and the Black-lion Tamarin. Adelaide Zoo first participated in an international breeding program for the Golden-lion Tamarin. Animals bred at Adelaide Zoo have been sent to other zoos to improve the genetic health of their populations. Offspring of these individuals have been successfully returned to a reserve near Sao Paulo in Brazil. Adelaide Zoo also organised a long-term fundraising project, which contributed to employing a field assistant at the reserve.

EXAMPLE 4:

National Parks in Tasmania, the Adelaide Zoo and Healesville Sanctuary in Victoria have worked together to develop a recovery plan to save the wild population of the Critically Endangered Orange-bellied parrot. This plan involves regular population monitoring, provisions of artificial nesting boxes at breeding sites and captive breeding of birds for release. Each year the Adelaide Zoo successfully breeds young for release into the wild group, situated in Tasmania. Along with the co-operating organisations over 100 birds have been released since 1997.

