

MEDIA RELEASE

Moonlit Sanctuary saving the rare orange-bellied parrot from extinction on Threatened Species Day

Moonlit Sanctuary is bringing awareness to the plight of one of the rarest and most endangered animals in the world on national Threatened Species Day this Monday 7 September 2015.

With less than 70 left in the wild, the survival of the charismatic and critically endangered orange-bellied parrot relies on captive breeding programs like those managed by Moonlit Sanctuary.

Moonlit Sanctuary has 10 orange-bellied parrots in their breeding program and an additional seven on display in the public aviary. To mark Threatened Species Day, one parrot will be released from their quarantine population into the aviary for visitors to view.

Threatened Species Commissioner Gregory Andrews said Moonlit Sanctuary plays an important role in educating the community about Australia's threatened species.

"Orange-bellied parrots are one of the species listed in the Threatened Species Strategy's 20 birds by 2020 target for emergency intervention due to the beak and feather disease crisis they endured last breeding season.

"Captive breeding programs like those at Moonlit Sanctuary are critical to the survival of this species," Mr Andrews said.

Director of Moonlit Sanctuary, Michael Johnson said they are hoping to boost their conservation breeding program with plans to apply for a government grant to provide aviaries for up to 50 birds.

"Each year approximately 20-30 birds from five Australian captive populations, including Moonlit Sanctuary, are released where the parrots breed in Melaleuca on the south coast of Tasmania," he said.

"Our specialised off-the-ground aviaries help prevent the spread of beak and feather disease and our aim is to expand our capacity to breed these parrots and release five into the wild later this year.

"We're fortunate to provide the perfect habitat for orange-bellied parrots near the native saltmarsh they feed on, and hopefully in the future we can offer a winter release site for these birds."

Orange-bellied parrots are green with a distinct orange patch on their bellies, slightly larger than a budgerigar and at only 45 grams are one of only three migratory parrot species in the world.

The parrots make the long journey across Bass Strait each year, breeding in Tasmania over summer and migrating in winter to the southern coastline of Victoria and South Australia, including the shores of Western Port Bay just 500 metres south of Moonlit Sanctuary.

On Threatened Species Day, Moonlit Sanctuary will host a public talk at 1pm where visitors can view the breeding facility and hear about these critically endangered birds.

Moonlit Sanctuary also contributes to other threatened species recovery and breeding programs including hairy-nosed wombats, bush-stone curlews, and spotted-tailed quolls to name a few.

Located on the Mornington Peninsula, Moonlit Sanctuary is non-government funded and home to 60 Australian species of wildlife – 70 per cent of which are endangered – and is known for its lantern-lit tours where visitors can see nocturnal animals in their natural habitat under the moonlight.

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