

Zoos Victoria's Fighting Extinction Species

SWIFT PARROT

Lathamus discolor

Critically Endangered



Photo: Nicole Brooker

The Australian Government upgraded the conservation status of the Swift Parrot to Critically Endangered in 2016 after population viability analyses estimated a high probability of extinction in the next twenty years. Land clearing has dramatically reduced nesting and foraging habitat for Swift Parrots. Predation by sugar gliders – which are introduced to

Tasmania – is significantly hampering Swift Parrot breeding success, and is now considered a major threat to the species. The Swift Parrot is a new addition to Zoos Victoria's Fighting Extinction priority species list. We will work with partners to support field actions to increase nesting success, identify important mainland habitat and investigate the need for captive breeding.

ZOOS
VICTORIA
Fighting Extinction

Zoos Victoria is committed to Fighting Extinction

Photo: Nicole Brooker

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

The Swift Parrot is one of only two truly migratory parrots in the world. The species spends the winter on the mainland, searching far and wide for nectar from flowering eucalypts, before migrating across the Bass Strait to their main summer breeding grounds in eastern Tasmania. Land clearing has dramatically reduced landscape cover of nesting and foraging habitat for Swift Parrots. More than 70% of the forests and woodlands that the species once relied upon for foraging during winter and nesting over summer is no longer present. Nest predation by sugar gliders (introduced to Tasmania) is now recognised as a major threat to the species, as it severely limits breeding success.

KEY PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- Increase nesting success in the wild.
- Identify important habitat.
- Investigate the need for captive breeding.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

This is a newly prioritised Zoos Victoria Fighting Extinction species, we aim to achieve the objectives above and annually report on outcomes through Zoos Victoria communication channels.

THE SPECIES

The Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*) is a small, brightly-coloured, nectarivorous parrot that is streamlined for speed. Restricted to forests and woodlands in south-eastern Australia, it is one of only two truly migratory parrots in the world (the other being the Orange-bellied Parrot). Each autumn, the entire wild population migrates from their main summer breeding grounds in eastern Tasmania across the Bass Strait to the Australian mainland. During winter, birds disperse throughout Victoria and NSW in search of nectar from flowering eucalypts. In Victoria, most Swift Parrots forage in the dry forests and woodlands associated with the inland slopes of the Great Dividing Range.

Swift Parrots breed in tree hollows, generally in close proximity to flowering eucalypts. The extent of eucalypt flowering can be an important determinant of breeding success. Recent research has identified that nest predation by the Sugar Glider, which was introduced to Tasmania, is resulting in high rates of nesting failure and elevated mortality rates for adult females sitting on eggs.

A recent population viability analysis by researchers at the Australian National University predicted severe population declines in the coming two decades. These findings prompted the Australian Government to upgrade the species' conservation status to Critically Endangered in 2016. Unless measures to elevate nesting success can be found, the most recent modelling results indicate a 31% likelihood of extinction over the next 20 years. In addition to supporting actions in the field to locate the most important habitat for these parrots and minimise the threat from Sugar Gliders, we will also assess the need for a captive insurance population and construct a breeding facility if required.

THE PLAN

The following critical next steps will enable Zoos Victoria, along with our partners to move forward knowing that we are doing everything we can to prevent the extinction of this species:

Support field actions to increase nesting success by reducing predation from Sugar Gliders.	\$40,000 p.a
Identify important mainland habitat through modelling and implementation of new survey methods.	\$160,000
Investigate the need for captive breeding and initiate a program if required.	\$880,000
Welcome this new species onto Zoos Victoria's priority list establishing the Swift Parrot's presence at our zoos and online as part of our local threatened species commitment.	\$15,000
Total cost over five years	\$1,255,000

How can I help?

You can support our efforts to secure a future for the Swift Parrot by supporting our Wildlife Conservation Master Plan 2019-2024 at: zoo.org.au/donate

PROGRAM PARTNERS

Birdlife Australia
birdlife.org.au

Department of Environment,
Land, Water and Planning
delwp.vic.gov.au

Swift Parrot Recovery Team