

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 south-eastern Australia. 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
Fighting Extinction

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 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. Severe population decline including 95% in Victoria since 2010 has triggered the establishment of a captive insurance population in NSW, Victoria and South Australia.

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 a captive-breeding program at Zoos Victoria's Werribee Open Range Zoo, one of several captive populations, to provide insurance against extinction while improved habitat management practices are implemented.
- 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.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- Construction of a purpose-built 22-aviary captive breeding facility at Werribee Open Range Zoo.
- Collection of crucial data to fill knowledge gaps and refine husbandry.
- Successful breeding of Plains-wanderers in captivity.
- Support given to partners to secure Plains-wanderer habitat under conservation covenants.

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 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

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:

Expanding Zoos Victoria's captive breeding population.	\$800,000
Increasing the number of enclosures to expand the captive breeding program.	\$640,000
Maintaining population monitoring in the wild.	\$25,000 p.a
Identifying release sites.	\$12,000 p.a
Undertaking genetic monitoring.	\$5,000 p.a
Undertaking habitat monitoring and management.	\$620,000
Increasing the area of habitat protected.	\$130,000 p.a
Conducting trial release of captive birds.	\$115,000
Undertaking surveys at additional localities to identify new founders for captive breeding.	\$45,000
Increasing community engagement in partnership with the Conservation Management Network and Friends of Terrick Terrick.	\$100,000
Erecting signage at strategic locations along major roads to raise awareness in the local community about critical habitat areas.	\$60,000
Activations at our zoos and online that aim to increase community care and knowledge.	\$20,000
Total cost over five years	\$3,260,000

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 Wildlife Conservation Master Plan 2019-2024 by donating at: zoo.org.au/donate

PROGRAM PARTNERS

Australian Government Department of Environment and Energy
environment.gov.au

Birdlife Australia
birdlife.org.au

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

Dr. David Baker-Gabb

Elanus Consulting

Featherdale Wildlife Park
featherdale.com.au

NSW Office of Environment & Heritage
environment.nsw.gov.au

North Central Catchment Management Authority
nccma.vic.gov.au

Northern Plains Conservation Management Network
northernplainscmn.com.au

Parks Victoria
parkweb.vic.gov.au

Plains-wanderer National Recovery Team

Taronga Conservation Society
taronga.org.au

Trust for Nature Victoria
trustfornature.org.au

Zoos South Australia
zoossa.com.au