



MEDIA RELEASE

World's First Captive Kept Beach Curlew Chicks

In a world first the Territory Wildlife Park (TWP) has collected three curlew chicks from the Darwin region that will become the newest residents at the park.

The three six-week-old beach curlews (*Esacus neglectus*) will be the first of their species to be kept in captivity anywhere in the world at the TWP.

TWP zookeeper Damien Stanioch said the chicks will become part of an ongoing research and breeding project that aims to learn more about their breeding biology.

“The breeding program and the display of the birds next year will highlight the plight of species such as the curlew,” Mr Stanioch said.

“While beach curlews are common in the NT they have become endangered on the east coast of Australia due to habitat loss, human disturbance and predation.

“These large and charismatic birds have several quirky characteristics and their quantity in the Top End provides us with an opportunity to study their particular life style and responses to predators.

“Beach curlews lay their one and only egg directly on the sand in a small depression, just above the high tide mark and have to contend with a great deal of environmental pressures.

“They must not only fend off birds of prey, egg stealing monitors and other predators, but must lay their egg between the king tides to ensure an incubation period of 30 days.”

Mr Stanioch said because curlews have never been kept or breed in captivity, TWP zookeepers have a lot to learn about keeping these animals.

“We know that curlews are very particular about their habitat and will only live and nest in areas with the right balance of mangroves, sand and rocks to assist the survival of the chick,” Mr Stanioch said.

“The chicks will soon live in a purpose designed enclosure that is the perfect balance of mangroves, sand dunes and rocks to provide them with a habitat to thrive in at the park.

“Once born the chicks rely on this habitat for camouflage and protection.

“The chicks either lie flat or wedge themselves amongst the rocks until the threat has passed.

“While the chicks hide the parents call/wail from a separate location to attract the threat away from the hiding place of their off spring.

“Curlew chicks in the wild remain with their parents for twelve to eighteen months, so the young chicks are still being hand feed mealworms, prawns, mussels and other seafood by keepers every two to three hours.”

Ends

Media Note – For more information contact Damian Stanioch on 8988 7200.

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Note: They are often heard rather than seen and call at night when they are most active perusing their food or a mate. Their call sounds like a loud, haunting, mournful wail similar to their cousins the Bush curlews.