

Media release

Precious Bustard Brood Destined For South Australia

Four orphaned Australian Bustard chicks, rescued by Wildcare Inc Alice Springs, will be transported to South Australia this Monday, as part of a captive breeding program.

Department of Natural Resources, Environment and The Arts', Wildlife Officer Jonathon DeLaine has been kept busy playing foster carer to the four orphaned chicks for the past seven days.

The chicks will be transferred to Zoos SA, which operate Adelaide and Monarto Zoo, where they will form a new breeding group and hopefully contribute to a captive breeding program.

"Bustards have only been bred in captivity once over the past ten years, which isn't a good sign for a species that is classified as Vulnerable in the NT," Mr Delaine said.

"A lot more effort is required to unlock the secrets of this species and hopefully these four birds will contribute to that effort through this breeding program in South Australia.

"Mature male Bustards can measure over one metre tall and weigh up to 10 kilograms; these chicks have a long way to go until they reach that size - with the smallest chick weighing in at just over 100g."

Mr Delaine said Australian Bustards normally produce one chick per year, with the female birds solely responsible for the care and rearing of the chicks.

The four chicks have all come from remote communities several hundred kilometres west of Alice Springs.

"These Bustards were lucky they were found and sent to the appropriate organisation in Wildcare Inc Alice Springs, as they have very demanding requirements at a young age," he said.

"Thanks must also go to the 'mail plane' pilots who agreed to fly the birds into Alice Springs where they could receive proper care."

Mr Delaine said the number of Bustards in the Territory had declined noticeably in Central and Southern Australia over the past decade – with the species now listed as Vulnerable in the Northern Territory.

"A lot of people call these birds turkeys as they still form an important part of remote communities' traditional dietary intake," he said.

"Bustards are easy targets for dingos, eagles and people as they are large ground birds that prefer open areas.

"In recent times, foxes and firearms have added to the Bustard's problems, with local Alice Springs populations all but disappearing."

Members of the public who find injured or orphaned wildlife in or near Alice Springs are urged to contact Wildcare Inc Alice Springs on 0419 22 11 28.

Ends.

Media Note: For more information or to arrange a vision/photo opportunity of the Bustards, contact John Delaine on 8951 8283.

The Bustards will leave the Territory at 10.30am Monday 28 May 2007.