

Media Release:

08.09.08

Saving Orphaned Emus

The Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport (NRETAS) Wildlife Management Unit together with local wildlife rescue group, Wildcare Inc Alice Springs have reared and released 10 orphaned emus over the past 12 months in an attempt to bolster populations of the iconic outback species.

NRETAS Wildlife Management Conservation Officer Jonathon DeLaine said that 10 emus were released throughout the West MacDonnell National Park and the East MacDonnell area and many have been sighted since.

“Some of the emus we released have been sighted as recently as July this year, and they appear to be doing well, although it will still be some time before the animals fully mature and are capable of breeding,” Mr DeLaine said.

Mr DeLaine said that emus are listed as Vulnerable in the Northern Territory and have declined noticeably in Central and Northern Australia over the past decade.

“Emus have become increasingly scarce in the Northern Territory and have almost disappeared completely from some areas, such as the Alice Springs and West MacDonnell regions,” Mr DeLaine said.

“Emu chicks are easy targets for dingoes, eagles and people as they are large flightless ground birds, and in recent time foxes and firearms have added to the emus’ problems, resulting in wild stocks noticeably declining.

“Collaborative efforts between NRETAS and Wildcare are being made to reintroduce the species to these areas, as emus play an important role in seed dispersal for many plants.”

Mr DeLaine said emus brought to carers are predominantly received as chicks, however Wildlife Management and the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service have also dealt with adult emu relocation in the past three years.

“Emus that are received into care by Wildcare, usually as orphans, are raised and crèched together in large natural enclosures before being transferred and released into secret locations throughout the West MacDonnell National Park,” Mr DeLaine said.

“While Wildcare do the base work from rearing the chicks when small and collecting a lot of the ‘wild’ food items for the birds, Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service provide the facilities and expertise of transporting large or adult emus with specially built transport boxes and large open naturalistic enclosures for emus to prepare for ‘life in the wild’.

“Like any other animal that is being cared for until it can be released into the wild, the birds receive minimal human contact, but are also exposed to loud noises, vehicles and other things they must learn to avoid.”

The Wildlife Management Unit have also worked together with rescue groups to save other threatened species, including Australian Bustards, another ground bird that is facing similar threats to emus.

For more information on emu conservation please visit www.nt.gov.au/nreta/wildlife or check out the NRETAS publication, ‘LOST from our Landscape’ for information about threatened species.

Ends

Media Note – for more information contact Jonathon DeLaine on 8951 8283.

Image – the orphaned emus being released with a pink tag for recording their progress and movements

Issued: 9am Monday, 8 September 2008