

23 September 2014

Baby Idnya (Western Quolls) born through Flinders Ranges trial reintroduction

The SA Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) and the Foundation for Australia's Most Endangered Species (FAME) are pleased to announce the arrival of up to 60 baby Idnya (Western Quolls) to the Flinders Ranges.

The news of the babies – the first in the Flinders Ranges for more than 150 years – is a terrific milestone in this ambitious trial reintroduction, which saw 41 Idnya released in their former homeland in April-May.

“The news is a significant achievement for our 22-year *Bounceback* conservation program,” said Mr Stuart Paul, Regional Manager, DEWNR-SA Arid Lands. “It is early days, with cats providing the only setbacks, but we remain hopeful that the Idnya might join the Yellow-footed Rock Wallaby as a species that is now thriving in the region under the protection of a dedicated fox and goat control program.”

Cheryl Hill, FAME Chief Executive, who is leading the drive to raise approximately \$1.7 million to support the recovery of the species is also hopeful: “We are very excited about this latest development – the return of the Idnya to the Flinders Ranges is our largest and most ambitious project to date and we are hopeful that this second generation of Idnya will survive and help establish a sustainable population.”

The new arrivals were first discovered in June and July when the reintroduction team discovered that 12 females had an average of six pouch young each.

Since then the team has been tracking the female Idnya which have now deposited their pouch young in dens, where they will be weaned at between five and six months.

FAME and DEWNR are hopeful that the population will grow faster than the number which are lost through predation and accidents.

Feral cats have been the main cause of mortalities to date with one quarter of the Idnya taken by cats since their release in April.

“Our intensive monitoring throughout this trial has shown that cats have been the main cause of death and have the potential to affect the success of reintroductions,” said Mr Paul.

Indeed seven juvenile Idnya were rescued from their nest hollow after their mother was killed by a feral cat. They are being hand-reared with the help of the Adelaide Zoo and will be released back into the wild before Christmas.

While the death of the Idnya is disappointing, some deaths were expected as the animals adapt to their new habitat and predation is a natural and necessary process in sustainable natural populations.

“We are also collecting useful knowledge about interaction between quolls and feral cats, breeding habits, food and habitat preferences, critical information for conserving this species in our state,” said Mr Paul.

Donations to the Western Quoll project can be made by visiting fame.org.au/projects/western-quoll or contact fame@fame.org.au for more information.

For further information contact Jenny Barker, Senior Communications Officer, Natural Resources SA Arid Lands, DEWNR, on 0402 695 193. Photos of baby Idnya are available on request.

BACKGROUND

ABOUT THE IDNYA (WESTERN QUOLL)

The Idnya (or Western Quoll) is a small reddish-grey coloured carnivorous marsupial with white spots on its body and legs. The male has an average weight of 1300 grams and the female weighs around 900 grams.

They make their homes in hollow logs, tunnels under rocks, tree hollows and other animal burrows. They are mostly nocturnal, becoming quite active at dusk and before dawn - however, they can sometimes be seen during the day when climbing trees to forage or escape predators.

Their diet is varied but mainly consists of small mammals up to rabbit size, lizards, frogs and invertebrates. Importantly for the Flinders Ranges, the Idnya has a special place at the top of the native food chain and may have a positive impact on reducing populations of small pest animals (mice, rats and rabbits) if their re-introduction is successful. Their presence is also an indicator of environmental quality as their survival relies on a healthy food chain.

The female Idnya breeds in its first year, with lower reproductive success in older animals, and they usually give birth to up to six offspring per pouch. Young Idnya are weaned in around five and a half months and their life span in the wild is mostly less than three years.

The Idnya is threatened mainly by foxes and feral cats and they occupy exclusive home ranges of 1500 hectares for males and 400 hectares for females. Some mothers and daughters may overlap in their home ranges.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The trial release of 41 Idnya to the Flinders Ranges is made possible through South Australia's first public/private environmental partnership.

The Foundation for Australia's Most Endangered species (FAME) is leading the drive to raise approximately \$1.7 million over a five year period to support the recovery of species.

Through the 22-year Bounceback program, South Australia's Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources' and collaborators have been controlling foxes and goats, protecting the habitat in the Flinders Ranges that is needed for the Idnya's long-term survival.

FAME has successfully funded more than 30 major endangered wildlife and habitat projects since 1993 through their fundraising efforts while Bounceback has been instrumental in the revival of echidna, Yellow-footed Rock Wallaby and several species of native birds.

DEWNR and FAME also acknowledge the Adnyamathanha people for whom the Idnya is a significant totem; Dr David Peacock, who initiated the trial reintroduction project; the work of Ecological Horizons and students in managing the project on the ground; Western Australia's Department of Parks and Wildlife and Alice Springs Desert Park for the supply and translocation of Idnya to South Australia; WA's Native Animal Rescue organisation, a not for profit wildlife refuge; and the Adelaide Zoo for its work in hand rearing the juvenile Idnya.

It is hoped by all project partners that, in time, the Idnya will establish a self-sustaining population in the Flinders Ranges.



High resolution versions of these photos are available. Credit: Hannah Bannister