



Welcome to the Friends of the Western Ground Parrot Newsletter

No. 77

Get up-to-date information about the latest efforts to save this critically endangered parrot unique to Western Australia

German parrot association pledges \$200,000 for recovery project!



Western Ground Parrot Fifi on the nest

UPDATE FROM PERTH ZOO

by Arthur Ferguson

continuation of breeding season update

Unfortunately eggs #3 and #4 from clutch #1 that were removed for incubation showed no signs of development/fertility. This was disappointing however being early in the breeding season and with the opportunity to encourage double clutching, we were well positioned to increase the odds of producing further eggs.

Following consultation with the Western Ground Parrot captive management team and in light of Fifi displaying signs of good health, we agreed that we should encourage her to double clutch. We removed the dummy eggs and nest on the 7th of September. Two days later, Fifi and Joy were observed mating and over the next few days we watched intently to identify where Fifi would select her new nest site. By the afternoon of the 14th of September we were confident that Fifi had settled on a new nest site and so we entered the aviary the following morning to reposition the spy camera. Upon inspection, the nest was only a shallow scrape in the sand with no vegetation lining and we were uncertain if she would continue to focus her nesting efforts at this location. Fortunately we were able to set up the spy camera with excellent views and knowing the depth of the previous nest,

we set up the camera from a slightly higher and closer vantage point so that if eggs were to be laid we could see the eggs in the nest and track their progress closely. With the spy camera in place, we continued to watch and we were delighted to see Fifi visit the site and continue to work on and prepare the nest. At times male Joy would visit Fifi at the nest site to offer mate feeding, consolidating their commitment to the nest.



First view of Fifi's new nest site from spy camera 15th September

On the afternoon of the 18th September Fifi's weight had increased similar to that seen prior to her laying the first egg of her first clutch. The following day just after mid-day Fifi was observed to lay the first egg in her new nest. Fifi showed no signs of concern when laying the egg which was great. Based on the view of the egg in the nest from the CCTV spy camera, the egg looked to be a good shape and slightly larger in size than the eggs she produced in her first clutch, so we were very pleased. Knowing that we didn't intend on encouraging any further clutches of eggs to be produced by Fifi this season, we agreed that we would leave this clutch of eggs with her to attempt incubation. With the spy camera in place we could gather great detail on incubation behaviour and parental care of the eggs which would be highly valuable to further our knowledge in this area. If in the event any concerns were identified that could jeopardise the eggs then we could move the eggs to the Western Ground Parrot incubator facility.



Fifi looking at her egg shortly after it was laid 19th September 2017



Fifi's egg #1 from her second clutch 20th September 2017



Joy (right) and Fifi (left) at the new nest site

On the 21st September we were expecting that Fifi would be getting close to laying egg #2 of her second clutch. We watched the live CCTV camera views constantly to monitor progress. During the day Joy visited Fifi in the nest on nine occasions and during each nest visit Joy was observed to pull at Fifi's leg with his beak to the point that Fifi would be forced to leave the nest. Joy looked to be holding Fifi's leg very gently with his beak, however the frequency and persistence he displayed with this behaviour didn't appear normal. At 2:27pm while Fifi was sitting on the nest she showed signs of her first contraction. By this stage we were still hopeful that egg #2 was on track to be passed without complications. At 3:02pm Joy visited Fifi in the nest again and he again displayed the leg pulling behaviour which forced Fifi off the nest. Fifi moved back into the nest and Joy pulled at her leg again at 3:05pm. At 4:03pm Joy visited Fifi again which lead to her leaving the nest at 4:05pm. On the 21st of September we were expecting that Fifi would be getting close to laying egg #2 of her second clutch. We watched the live CCTV camera views constantly to monitor progress. During the day Joy visited Fifi in the nest on nine occasions and during each nest visit Joy was observed to pull at Fifi's leg with his beak to the point that Fifi would be forced to leave the nest. Joy looked to be holding Fifi's leg very gently with his beak, however the frequency and persistence he displayed with this behaviour didn't appear normal. At 2:27pm while Fifi was sitting on the nest she showed signs of her first contraction. By this stage we were still hopeful that egg #2 was on track to be passed

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Joy pulling Fifi's leg 11:01am 21st September 2017. Egg #1 from clutch #2 visible in nest

After this, Fifi only returned to the nest briefly at 4:12pm and this lead to concerns that Fifi may have issues with passing the egg. At this time Fifi looked to be otherwise in good spirits and she was showing no signs of being egg bound. As time progressed however, it became clear that Fifi's usual pattern of behaviour had changed. She didn't return to the nest and she was refusing the mate feeding being offered. Later that evening, Fifi went under one of the Lomandra tussocks at the front of the aviary where she was out of view of cameras. Male Joy, was observed to visit this area a number of times however no interaction with Fifi could be seen, and Joy's behaviour pattern was also noticed to have changed. At this point, we had concerns that Fifi may be egg bound so an emergency meeting was called and key staff convened at Perth Zoo to monitor the CCTV cameras and discuss the situation. Not long after this, Fifi emerged from the Lomandra tussock but wasn't showing any clear signs of being egg bound. At 9:44pm Fifi moved into the large Lomandra tussocks not far from where the nest was located. Unfortunately the spy camera doesn't have night vision capability so we were unable to confirm if she had moved into the nest. The decision was made to leave Fifi in the aviary overnight and check her at first light and be prepared to intervene and provide supportive treatment if necessary. The following morning we checked the cameras and confirmed that Fifi hadn't laid a second egg in the nest. Fifi wasn't displaying her usual behaviour so we decided to intervene and remove her from the aviary for veterinary assessment. Fifi's weight had dropped significantly so we expected that she had laid the second egg in the aviary overnight, which was discovered in the large lomandra tussock approximately 1 meter away from the nest. The egg was covered in faecal matter which further suggests that it was passed under atypical circumstances. With Fifi's weight low, the decision was made to place her into a warm hospital box under close observation and veterinary support.

With Fifi now under care, we decided it would be best to remove egg #1 from the nest and transfer it into the incubator. Egg #2 was also cleaned up following advice from Daryl Eason (the Technical Advisor for the Kakapo recovery program with the Department of Conservation in New Zealand) and placed in the incubator. These two eggs from Fifi's second clutch, were a similar size to egg #2 from Fifi's first clutch, and although they were good sized eggs for Fifi, they were still on the small side when compared with other Ground Parrot eggs.

On the morning of the 24th of September Fifi had passed a 3rd egg. The egg was very small and when found it had four ~2mm diameter holes and four smaller cracks in the delicate shell. Unfortunately it was beyond salvaging. Upon reviewing the CCTV footage, Fifi had attempted to role the egg minutes after it was laid which lead to the holes in the shell. Fifi's demeanour improved rapidly after she had

passed egg #3 and so was transferred back into the aviary with male Joy. Unfortunately eggs #1 and #2 from Fifi's second clutch failed to show any signs of development after seven days of incubation and were confirmed to be infertile.

Within minutes of returning Fifi back into the aviary, male Joy was observed to offer mate feeding and two days later they were observed mating again! Nest site #3 was selected in the middle of a large Lomandra tussock and started out as being the most elaborate nest constructed so far, however on the day when the first egg was due to be laid she moved the nest onto the ground at the base of the large Lomandra tussock. The third nesting attempt between Joy and female Fifi resulted in a further four eggs being laid commencing 9th October. Due to concerns with the leg pulling behaviour identified in the previous clutches it was decided to move male Joy into the aviary next door after the first egg was laid to leave Fifi to lay the remainder of the clutch and attempt to incubate the eggs without the harassment of the male. Fifi responded well following the separation of Joy and she continued to feed well, tend to the nest and incubate the eggs. At nine days into incubation the eggs were candled to check for signs of development but unfortunately these eggs showed no signs of development and were also infertile.

Following the third nesting attempt no further pairing opportunities were enacted to encourage Fifi to regain body condition in preparation for moult. This draws the 2017 breeding season to a close and provides the opportunity to evaluate the data collected from this year breeding efforts.



Fifi's 4 eggs in nest from clutch #3



Fifi tending to and incubating eggs from clutch #3

Although we have not yet achieved the result we are after with the production of nestlings, we have gained a great deal of information from the breeding attempts this season. We reviewed over 1000 hours of CCTV footage/Western Ground Parrot behaviour with the support of our volunteers Delia and Sherrilyn and dedicated team of staff. We have continued to refine our management strategies that promote nesting and we have achieved this over two consecutive seasons. The behaviour identified with Joy grabbing at Fifi's leg while she was on the nest, leading to her leaving the nest, was an unexpected discovery, and it's possible that this behaviour has also contributed to complications with previous nesting attempts. Once again the CCTV cameras have enabled us to gain new insight into Western Ground Parrot behaviour which we can use to develop more effective management strategies that edge us ever closer to achieving a successful breeding result. We have confirmed for the first time that Fifi is at least capable of producing a fertile egg and this brings a glimmer of hope that Fifi is capable of producing a viable egg that is capable of developing full term and hatching.

With egg #2 of Fifi's clutch #1 being fertile, but not continuing to develop during incubation we decided it was important to validate our Grumbach incubators and incubation procedures to make sure this wasn't a contributing factor with egg failure. With a small population of breeding Elegant Parrots *Neophema elegans* also maintained at the Zoo, the eggs of this species was the most suitable analogue we could use. A number of Elegant Parrot eggs were removed from the nest box and incubated using the same procedures as those used for the Western Ground Parrot eggs. These eggs developed very well and confirmed that our incubation procedures are sound. The viable Elegant Parrot eggs were transferred back into the nest box at the first signs of external piping for the female Elegant Parrot to hatch and raise the chicks.

With a total of 11 eggs produced by female Fifi this season from three clutches, this demonstrates the egg-laying potential of the species. Our efforts in the lead up to the 2018 season will focus on strategies that will aim to improve Fifi's egg quality and fertility.

Note from the editor: Part one of the breeding season update can be found in the September edition of our newsletter.

UPDATE FROM PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

by Sarah Comer & Allan Burbidge, Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA)

Spring 2017 has seen some big changes for the south coast ground parrot recovery program, with Lucy Clausen and Saul Cowen moving to other parts of the state to take up new jobs. They will both be missed from the south coast team, as their contribution towards ground parrot conservation has been significant, but we wish them well in their new positions.



Banksia speciosa flowering prolifically at Cape Arid National Park
(Photo credit: S Comer / DBCA)

This spring a small team of volunteers joined DBCA staff Steve Butler, Emma Massenbauer, Wayne Gil and I, who had to juggle access to Cape Arid and Nuytsland Nature Reserve with rain and access issues. The Nuytsland ARUs were retrieved in October, and data from these are currently being reviewed by volunteers. Call numbers were low during the three nights camped at Pasley, and as a result we were allocated some additional funds from the SW Fauna Recovery Project to deploy ARUs throughout the two parks. Jeff Pinder returned from long service leave to help Abby Thomas deploy 31 units throughout the park. These will give us some idea of where ground parrots are, and provide important information prior to the 2018 monitoring period.



Rough track at Cape Arid National Park



Survey team at Cape Arid National Park

(Photo credit: S Comer / DBCA)

Two focussed survey efforts have also been conducted following compelling reports of ground parrots. We get many potential sightings, and it is important that these are acted on. While many can be eliminated by learning more about the location or sighting, there are some reports that warrant further work. There were two such observations in the last six months, and both of these have resulted in an array of ARUs being deployed to conduct acoustic surveys of the area where there has possibly been a ground parrot encounter.

The first of these records (a reported ground parrot call) was in the Waychinicup area, where a ground parrot was last heard in 2004. Despite a number of comprehensive surveys over the past 13 years we have not found ground parrots in this area, so it was with some excitement DBCA staff and volunteers from the Albany Bird Group deployed eight ARUs in October. These have now been collected, and the initial cluster analysis using Kaleidoscope software did not detect any ground parrots on the 57 nights and 456 recordings. More on Kaleidoscope later.

The second reported ground parrot (also a call) was heard by an observer with some experience in surveying for ground parrots in Cape Arid, while walking the length of the Fitzgerald River National Park. A single call was heard before dawn, and given the location overlapped with the last known location of ground parrots in the Fitz Wilderness it was decided that units needed to be deployed to survey this area. Access is restricted to walking, and in October DBCA ranger Mal Grant, and volunteer Darcy Martin joined me in a long walk into the wilderness. Eight units were deployed, and these will be retrieved in January 2018.



Volunteers Raeline, Shaun and Anne deploying ARUs in heathland at Cheynes Beach



Ranger Mal Brown and Volunteer Darcy Martin in Fitzgerald River National Park deploying ARUs.

(Photo credit: S Comer / DBCA)

We are still optimistic that birds might be found in Fitzgerald River National Park, and would encourage anyone who thinks they have seen or heard a ground parrot to contact us. More details on how to identify a Western Ground Parrot from other parrot species can be found at this link: https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/images/documents/plantsanimals/animals/have_you_seen_a_western_ground_parrot.pdf, and reports of sightings can be made to sarah.comer@dbca.wa.gov.au or wgparrot@gmail.com. We will follow up all reported sightings in due course.

The processing of data collected by the ARUs is a laborious job. Each single 30 minute recording generates a wave file of around 300MB, and if we have a unit deployed for 2 months there are around 60 of these recordings. To identify calls we have a well-tested method of manually scanning files, but with the dwindling human resource, we've been trialling other methods of scanning the large number of files. Using software to scan the files has had minimal success over the past few years, but the Kaleidoscope software recently purchased for us by the Friends of the Western Ground Parrot and the Rotary Club of Albany Port is showing some promise in being able to scan the large volumes of data and detecting parrots. We are working on advanced software recognisers to improve this process and anticipate that for detecting presence this software has a lot of potential. Early trials suggest it is not likely to replace the need for manual scanning for counting calls, which are key to monitoring the remaining population, but alleviating some of the scanning for survey effort and following up on sightings is a huge improvement on the manual scanning methods. As we develop these techniques further we will provide updates.

Unfortunately, our attempts to secure funds from the Threatened Species Fund were unsuccessful, but we will continue to look for opportunities to continue with the intensive field work which supports ground parrot recovery. Plans for 2018 are taking shape, with monitoring of the Cape Arid and Nuytsland reserves the main activity where volunteer help will be essential. Feral cat and fox control will also be conducted through the Western Shield program and SW Fauna Recovery Project in autumn next year.

Note from the editor: Federal funding for staff on the Southwest Fauna Recovery Team ran out at the end of June and was not renewed.



Chirpings from the Chair

Anne Bondin

It was very disappointing to return from a lengthy overseas journey to find out that the only new government funding announced for the recovery of the Western Ground Parrot was an \$80,000 grant to Perth Zoo to enable the extension of the custom-built aviaries. Both state and federal governments have also been very slow to respond to our letters of concern about the inadequate funding of the recovery project. However, we have since met with our local members of parliament, Mr Peter Watson, member for Albany and Mr Rick Wilson, member for O'Connor, and hope the Western Ground Parrot will not be completely forgotten in next year's budget. We also looked into grants to help finance some of the unfunded recovery measures, but found it next to impossible to find sizable grants that would cover the estimated expenses.

Our own efforts to raise funds for the capture of additional birds to boost the captive breeding trial at Perth Zoo have had some success. At the time of writing close to \$30,000 have been raised through generous donations from the public and proceeds received from the screening of "Secrets at Sunrise" as well as the sale of the DVDs. Surprisingly, there has been a considerable interest from outside Western Australia with quite a number of the DVDs being shipped to the eastern States and even as far away as the United States and Europe. By the way, film-maker Jennene Riggs sent the first copy of the DVD to Sir David Attenborough who has inspired generations of nature lovers and last week Jennene received a handwritten reply from the world's best known naturalist and film-maker stating that he would most gladly view "Secrets at Sunrise". If you are based in Albany, the documentary will be screened again during the South Coast Festival of Birds in March next year. During the festival there will also be an opportunity to join an afternoon field trip to Waychinicup on the 12th of March to learn more about Western Ground Parrot monitoring. Please send us an e-mail if you are interested in participating.

The breeding season has come and gone without any Western Ground Parrot chicks having been produced at Perth Zoo. While this is disappointing, it is best to remember that successful captive breeding projects such as the Kakapo recovery program have also taken a while to get up and running. Perth Zoo's sole female bird produced an astounding eleven eggs in her three attempts to breed. This gives hope as it appears the species will breed readily given the right conditions. During the breeding season Perth Zoo supplemented the parrots' diet with native vegetation from the south coast. To ensure the weekly delivery reached Perth Zoo without delay, regional airline Rex Express offered to help transport the parrot food free of charge on their flight between Albany and Perth if needed.

At our recent AGM a new committee was elected. We can assure you that we will do our utmost to provide the Western Ground Parrots with a brighter future.

With the holiday season just around the corner I would like to take this opportunity and wish everyone a happy festive season. And if you need some gift ideas, we have gift memberships available or you can make a donation in lieu of a gift.

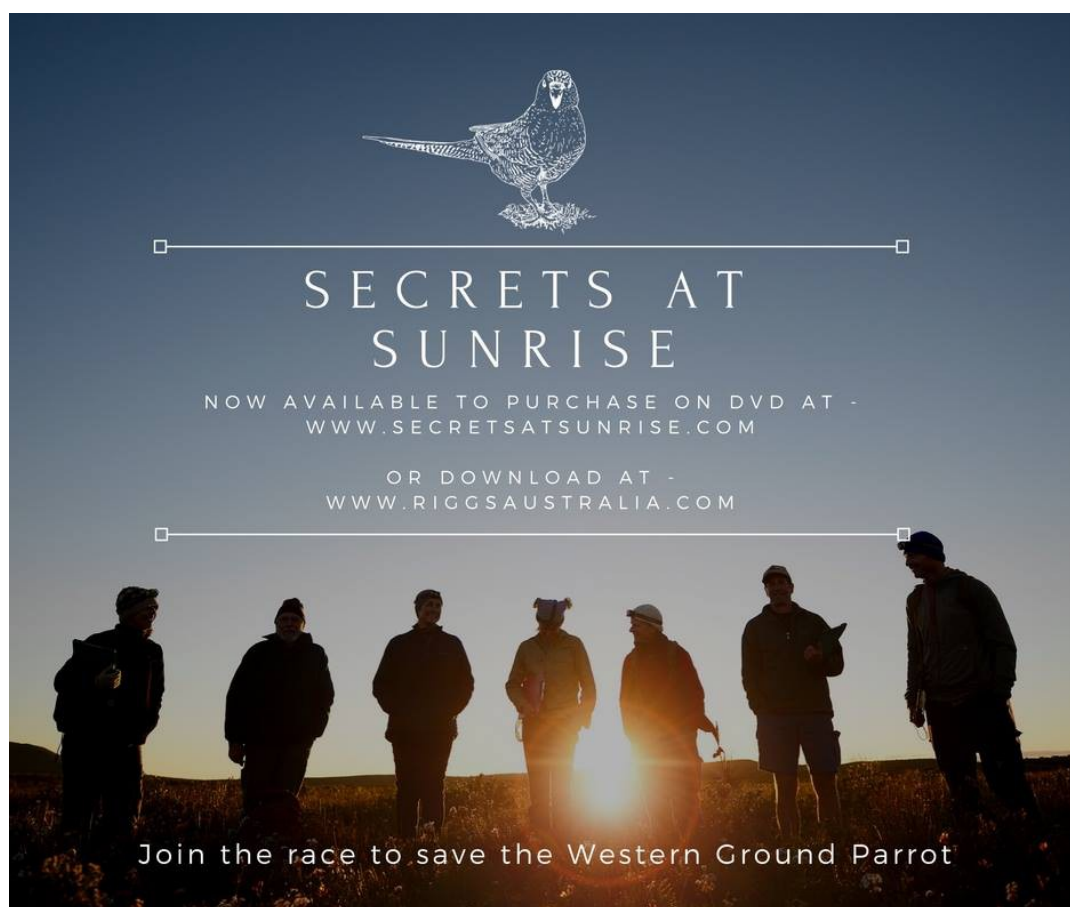
NEWSFLASH

The Association for the Conservation of Threatened Parrots e.V. (ACTP), a non-profit organisation from Germany, has committed \$200,000 over two years and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) to support the ongoing protection of the Western Ground Parrot. Chair of the South Coast Threatened Birds Recovery Team, Sarah Comer, said she welcomed the ACTP's investment in assisting with recovery efforts for the parrot. "The funding will help to support the western ground parrot program at Perth Zoo, and ongoing recovery of wild populations on the South Coast, both of which are important in improving our knowledge of Western Ground Parrots," she said.

"It will also be invaluable in helping more broadly with the recovery program, which has the potential to see Zoo-bred birds used to establish new populations in the wild. The ACTP will also share the knowledge it has gained through breeding threatened parrots, including Spix's Macaw, a Brazilian parrot considered to be extinct in the wild.

Note from the editor: This generous financial support from Germany means that the capture of additional birds from the wild to supplement the number of birds held at Perth Zoo will be able to go ahead. Our organisation will donate the \$30,000 raised in our recent appeal towards this project.

If you haven't yet seen "Secrets at Sunrise" or need a Christmas present,
the film is now available for download or as a DVD.



In Albany and Esperance the DVD is also available at a number of local outlets.
Please contact us for details

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