

Media Release

The Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Acting Minister for Environment
Minister for Climate Action
Minister for Energy and Resources
Minister for the State Electricity Commission



Sunday, 9 July 2023

DETECTION DOG SQUAD DISCOVERS RARE CHUBBY CHEEK RODENT

A new population of rare, native rodent has been unexpectedly discovered by Zoos Victoria's Wildlife Detection Dog Squad in the Coranderrk Bushland next to Healesville Sanctuary.

Acting Minister for Environment Lily D'Ambrosio today announced the significant discovery of the previously unrecorded Broad-toothed Rat population was made by Detection Dog, Moss, and confirmed by Zoos Victoria's threatened species biologists.

Moss, a four-year-old Labrador, was participating in a blank area search without a target species when he alerted his trainer to grass filled and bright green animal scat. Scientists confirmed the scat was from the native Broad-toothed Rat, which is distinguished by its fluffy fur, short tail and chubby cheeks.

As part of Zoos Victoria's work to protect the precious rodents, Moss had been in training for the past two years to detect the smell of Broad-toothed Rat scat.

Researchers at Healesville Sanctuary recently conducted follow-up surveys in the grassy Coranderrk Bushland and found three Broad-toothed Rats. The species is largely nocturnal, notoriously shy, and difficult to detect on cameras, so had remained hidden from researchers during previous surveys of the area.

The discovery is significant because the population lives within a predator-free, fenced area, which will be important for the future conservation of the species. In July last year, Zoos Victoria and Parks Victoria rediscovered Broad-toothed Rats at Wilson's Promontory for the first time in more than three decades.

Broad-toothed Rats have been declining due to predation by cats and foxes, habitat destruction, fragmentation, bushfires and climate change. In Victoria, the species has been lost from more than 50 per cent of the areas in which they were previously found before 1990, and populations were significantly affected by the recent fires.

Since 2014, the Andrews Labor Government has invested more than \$582 million into protecting biodiversity – more than any other in Victorian Government in history – and is halting the decline of Victoria's plants and animals through its landmark plan Biodiversity 2037.

Zoos Victoria is committed to fighting the extinction of 27 local threatened species and a further eight watch list species, including the Broad-toothed Rat. Financial support for this conservation work includes donations to Zoos Victoria's Bushfire Emergency Wildlife Fund and generous philanthropic contributions.

Quotes attributable to Acting Minister for Environment Lily D'Ambrosio

"It is thrilling that the team at Zoos Victoria has discovered Broad-toothed Rats at Healesville Sanctuary, which will help to further protect this rare species."

"This rodent discovery shows that investing in biodiversity and protecting habitats creates opportunity for our native animals to thrive."

Quotes attributable to Zoos Victoria CEO Dr Jenny Gray

"It is wonderful to be able to celebrate such a significant conservation win for the threatened Broad-toothed Rat, thanks to the Wildlife Detection Dog Squad working in tandem with our threatened species experts."

Media Contact: Alex Woods 0422 572 228 | alex.woods@minstaff.vic.gov.au