

Naples Zoo Premieres Animals Once Declared Extinct

Naples, FL – Three Parma wallabies including a baby just out of the pouch can now be seen at Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens as part of a national breeding program to ensure the future of this endangered species. Parma wallabies were once thought extinct. They are one of the smallest of the kangaroo family being more than 15 times smaller than the Red kangaroos which can be seen along with two other kangaroo species at Naples Zoo.

Parma wallabies, a small marsupial from Australia, were unknown to the scientific community until the 1840s. But just over a century later they were declared extinct in 1957 because of over-hunting, clearing of forests, and predation by the foxes and cats introduced by Europeans. But unlike the dodo bird or Javan tiger, the tale of the Parma wallaby doesn't end sadly there.

For the reason why, we turn to tiny Kawau Island, located northeast of New Zealand. In the 1860s, a wide assortment of exotic plants and animals were introduced to the island with the vision of creating a unique place for visitors. Lost to the outside world, one of those species was the Parma wallaby.

But life on Kawau for Parma wallabies was a dream island vacation turned nightmare. Wallabies happily ate away at first, but just as rabbits had done on Australia, the wallabies began wreaking ecological havoc by contributing to the loss of hundreds of native plant species and the animals that depended on those plants. And so, in a desperate act to preserve the island's own flora and fauna, the government began a systematic extermination of wallabies.

Not knowing what they had, two thousand or more Parma wallabies were killed in less than a decade. But in 1965, the true identity of this marsupial was discovered and the extermination efforts were put on hold while many of these endangered animals were secured from Kawau Island and dispersed to facilities around the world for breeding. "It's as if rabbits went extinct across Europe and no one knew that Australia was littered with them," explains Tim Tetzlaff, the Zoo's director of conservation.

The renewed interest in Parma wallabies brought about a historic surprise – much like the recent sighting of the formerly thought extinct ivory-billed woodpecker in Arkansas. A remnant population of secretive Parma wallabies was discovered back in Australia in the forests of New South Wales in the 1960s. "Were it not for the Kawau discovery, I wonder if the mainland population would have quietly faded away without protection," said Tetzlaff.

Still facing environmental issues after all these years, the New Zealand Department of Conservation determined in 2002 that all wallabies must be removed from the island and a final opportunity was given to a new generation of zoo conservationists to preserve this endangered species.

Through the cooperative efforts of many institutions accredited by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, a new group of Parma wallabies was rescued. One of the Zoo's wallabies was part of the last exodus in 2003. The

future of this endangered species now rests in its limited range in New South Wales and in the hands of accredited zoos that care for these amazing animals resurrected from extinction.

So just what is a Parma wallaby?

Parma wallabies are marsupials which live in rainforests and dry forests with thick undergrowth and grassy areas. Adults resemble tiny kangaroos with rich brown fur and weigh between 8 to 12 pounds. As herbivores, more than 90% of their diet is grass. Parma wallabies are the most nocturnal, have the longest tail length relative to its body size, and are the most endangered of all wallaby species. Like other marsupials, Parma wallabies carry their young in a belly pouch. After just a 35 day gestation period, the joey makes its way to the mother's pouch where it remains for another seven to eight months. Wallabies, like other macropods, often give birth to a second offspring while the first is still nursing.

Meet the Naples Zoo's newest residents

Byron was born on Kawau Island near New Zealand. He was brought to the San Antonio Zoo in 2003 where he has lived for the past two years. He is named for Byron Bay in New South Wales. **Noosa** was born at the Fort Worth Zoo in Texas on June 25, 2004. Noosa gave birth to Sydney in spring 2005. Noosa is named after an area in Queensland. **Sydney** was born in spring 2005 to Noosa. Named for the famous Australian city, the gender of the infant has not yet been determined. Sydney is now spending its time outside of mom's pouch and is rapidly growing.

Based on recommendations from the AZA, Naples Zoo plans to breed Byron and Noosa to contribute to the long-term viability of this endangered species. Breeding outside the wild is just one critical conservation role that AZA accredited institutions participate in. AZA's recently released *Annual Report on Conservation and Science 2004* reports AZA accredited zoos and aquariums participated in and contributed to over 1,800 conservation, research and education projects in 125 countries/regions, investing tens of millions of dollars for wildlife and wild lands. Locally, Naples Zoo supports projects here in Collier County all the way to countries like Madagascar and Thailand.

Collier County residents: Meet the new wallabies for free this Saturday!
Remember, on the first Saturday of every month (12 times a year), Collier County residents entering the Zoo by 11 a.m. receive free Zoo admission. No coupon required, just proof of Collier County residency for adults. Come meet the new wallabies this Saturday, August 6!

Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens is nationally accredited by the prestigious American Zoo and Aquarium Association. The Zoo is located at 1590 Goodlette-Frank Road in Naples across from the Coastland Center mall. In addition to innovative presentations like Serpents: Fangs & Fiction and Planet Predator, the Zoo offers a historic botanical garden and many rare animals. Guests board the Primate Expedition Cruise to glide by islands inhabited by monkeys, lemurs, and apes live in natural habitats. Admission (\$15.95 adult/ \$9.95 children) includes all shows and the boat ride. Visitors can also pick up a healthy lunch and snacks at the SUBWAY® Cafe and shop for wild gifts at tame prices in The ZOO Gift Shop. The Zoo welcomes guests daily from 9:30 to 5:30 with the last ticket sold at 4:30. To learn more, click www.napleszoo.com or call (239) 262-5409.

Print resolution image available via e-mail from denise@napleszoo.com