



Australia Zoo

MEDIA RELEASE

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Iconic Palm Cockatoo Threatened with Local Extinction

Palm Cockatoos will become locally extinct across many thousands of hectares of the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve if a bauxite mine proposed for that area goes ahead according to the Ranger in Charge of the Reserve, Barry Lyon.

“The handsome Palm Cockatoo, often called the ‘*Palmie*’, is Australia’s largest Cockatoo species and is found only in northern Cape York where it has become the region’s iconic bird species amongst appreciative locals and visitors alike,” Barry said.

“The ‘*Palmie*’ is listed as “rare” under Queensland’s Nature Conservation Act and has very specific habitat requirements to survive,” he said.

Professor Craig Franklin from the University of Queensland said that the Palm Cockatoo needs a special mix of woodland and rainforest trees for both food and nesting sites, and recent research work has found that Stringybark and Bloodwoods are the favoured nesting species.

“Palm Cockatoos feed on a ‘calendar’ range of fruits and nuts that occur in these tall woodlands and rainforests,” Professor Franklin said.

“They forage across the landscape as the fruit and nuts of each plant species ripens in turn and become available.

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"When one tree type finishes fruiting, the Cockatoos move onto the next one that becomes available," he said.

"This is the third year that Australia Zoo Wildlife rangers and visiting scientists have been documenting the occurrence of Palm Cockatoos on the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve," Barry Lyon said.

"We have found that the mosaic of tall stringybark woodlands, perched spring rainforests, and spring fed streams that occurs across the bauxite plateau provides ideal habitat for healthy populations of Palm Cockatoos.

"Many pairs of these cockatoos we see almost on a daily basis, and they have become quite used to our presence. As locals will tell you, *Palmies* are very curious, friendly birds and quite often they fly into trees above us check us out and show off.

"Hot dry season fires are generally regarded as a major threat to the survival of Palm Cockatoos as these can destroy the "old growth" nesting trees that feature their special nesting hollows.

"Australia Zoo Rangers have been undertaking early dry season protective burns and taking action against any wildfires to help protect the extensive landscape that Palm Cockatoos need for their survival.

"However loss of habitat is the major threat to any wildlife species and the proposed bauxite mine on the Reserve will see thousands of hectares of Palm Cockatoo habitat totally destroyed.

"All food and nesting trees will be eliminated by strip mining within the mining area, which currently covers over 12,000 hectares," Barry said.

"The Palm Cockatoos living there will either starve or be forced to move to adjacent areas and compete with resident birds there for food and nesting sites.

"Chicks in nests will be killed as their nesting trees are bulldozed down.

"Further, the crucial Palm Cockatoo nesting habitat will be lost forever as areas revegetated following mining do not feature the necessary old growth trees with their special nesting hollows.

"It is not feasible to think that man can rebuild such an extensive and ecologically diverse landscape that took nature millions of years to evolve, and the loss of such a key Palm Cockatoo population will be highly detrimental for this rare species," said Mr Lyon.

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NOTE: This is a field telephone and messages need to be left but will be responded to as soon as possible.