

# Tunnels of love set to raise heirs

**Brian Williams**  
ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

QUEENSLAND has another VIP baby.

Scientists monitoring critically endangered northern hairy-nosed wombats at a new colony they set up near St George in southwest Queensland have found that a third wombat is pregnant.

Of two born last year, one has already done the wombat equivalent of moving into a flat, having set up a bachelor pad in one of his mum's burrows.

Acting threatened species manager David Murphy said the births and the fact the animals had settled in well was evidence the long-awaited translocation had worked.

In 2009, wombats were returned to their former habitat on a cattle station near St George after being wiped out there about 100 years ago.

Man-made burrows were dug to take wombats from central Queensland's Epping Forest

National Park, their last stronghold and in one of the world's most important species-saving exercises, 15 animals were translocated.

Mr Murphy said five of those had died from issues ranging from suspected snake bite to disease and bullying. The colony now had seven females, three males and three joeys.

About 140 remain at Epping and scientists are using infra-red cameras at St George to learn as much as possible about them.

Mr Murphy said some of the discoveries about the usually solitary, nocturnal and subterranean animals were surprising. Mothers socialised more than expected and the young tended to play. All showed markedly different characteristics.

All the wombats had benefited from two good wet seasons; some look portly and there are no plans for supplementary feeding.

"This is a big stepping stone for the entire species," Mr Murphy said.



**NOSING AHEAD:** A man-made colony at St George is proving a breeding success for the endangered hairy-nosed wombat with a new joey on the way and one young buck setting up home to start a family.

Pictures: Environment Dept