

Fight for Tasmanian devils as critical breeding program faces financial crisis

Mercury, July 31, 2014, By: ANNE MATHER

<http://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/fight-for-tasmanian-devils-as-critical-breeding-program-faces-financial-crisis/story-fnj4f7k1-1227007907358>



THE future of one of Australia's foremost Tasmanian devil breeding programs is in jeopardy.

The Devil Ark, which is dedicated to breeding disease-free devils, is facing a financial crisis and has issued an urgent appeal for help.

Devil Ark general manager Tim Faulkner says the future of the operation is at "terrible risk" because of a recent grant knock-back.

"Without funds, we can't continue operating and performing the vital work we're doing at Devil Ark," Mr Faulkner wrote in a public appeal.

The Tasmanian Government said the Devil Ark was the main contributor to the devil insurance population, which has now grown to 600 disease-free devils across Australia.

The Tasmanian devil population has been decimated by the devil facial tumour disease and building up disease-free devils in captivity has been a major part of the strategy to guard against extinction.

Wildlife experts fear the Tasmanian devil is struggling to attract fundraising dollars in the face of waning popular and political interest in the endangered species.

Tasmanian devil expert Nick Mooney said the iconic animal was at the mercy of "fickle and fashionable" fundraising interests, but there were hopes that a growing international awareness program may attract charity from abroad.

The privately owned Devil Ark has 500ha at Barrington Tops, in NSW, and is home to more than 120 healthy and wild Tasmanian devils and hopes to breed the population up to a 360 by 2016.

But failed fundraising efforts means its future is in jeopardy, and general manager Tim Faulkner sent out the appeal for help in the Ark's winter newsletter.

"Our success as Tasmanian devil breeders continues to be outstanding, but our success as fundraisers isn't as positive," Mr Faulkner said. "We were recently informed that our funding application to the New South Wales Environment Trust was unsuccessful and this puts Devil Ark's future at terrible risk."

The Devil Ark is facing a lack of funding. *Source: Supplied*

Tasmanian devil advocate Bruce Englefield said the situation was "tragic".

"It seems the Tasmanian devil is no longer the high political priority it once was," said Mr Englefield, a former Tasmanian of the Year and founder of the Devil Island Project.

Mr Faulkner said the Australian Reptile Park continued to be the Ark's main financier, funding over \$1 million, but that was not enough.

"The park is a private zoo, with no ongoing government funding and now that government has refused our application, we're looking at a real financial crisis," he said.

Mr Faulkner said there seemed to be government grants available for research and infrastructure, but no support for operational costs.



“There has been tens of millions of dollars devoted to research projects for the devil, but it’s my fear that it will become the most researched extinct animal ever known.”

The Tasmanian Government said the Devil Ark was an important part of the success of building up the insurance population.

The Save the Tasmanian devil Program has given \$496,000 in grants to Devil Ark between 2010-13. Future support is still being finalised.

Mr Kelly, who is an adviser to the national breeding program, said funding was becoming difficult.

“At this point in the program funding is getting really tight,” he said.

Mr Englefield said he was also struggling to attract funding for devils, and was unable to create the much needed enclosure for the 100 disease-free devils remaining in the wild at Woolnorth in the state’s North West.

Mr Mooney said he hoped the international Devil Ambassador Program, which was increasing the presence of Tasmanian devils in zoos around the world, could help attract funding to help save the disease-ravaged animal species.

“It’s a national and international problem,” he said.