

BOOM IN THE BUSHVELD

MABULA GROUND HORNBILL PROJECT 'CAPTIVE BREEDING PROGRAMME'

To ensure the safety of a species that is dramatically declining in the wild there must be breeding birds in captivity.

In Africa until the 2004/2005 breeding season this just had not happened.

Of course there were a few successful pairs in USA, UK and Europe, who had been breeding for years, but in South Africa it had not happened.

San Diego Zoo sent Wendy Ranger who spent hours pairing birds in Pretoria Zoo, and maybe previously the birds were too young or incompatible, but after a shuffle about there was a race between Umgeni River Bird Park in Durban, who hand-reared, and Delecia at Loskop whose birds parent-reared. They were all 10 year old harvested chicks from Kruger.

In the Northern Hemisphere summer of 2004 it was the turn of the UK, and at Marwell Zoo Jane Lockyer hand reared their first chick – she thought this was easy! But it took two more years to safely hatch the next which is in the incubator now. Then in 2006, at Cricket St. Thomas, Jane Finch double clutched and hand reared 4 chicks. There is now a close link between the Mabula Project and the two Janes, because of the dramas and difficulties of keeping these chicks alive through the initial 18 days, and the release back to their parents.

The San Diego Wild Animal Park of course lead the way.....

Once the genetics have been finally sorted out there is a plan for captive bred overseas ground hornbills to be sent back to Africa to join the Mabula wild release programme.

On fledging the hand/parent-reared juveniles join the Mabula group before they are paired with older birds for 'soft' releases, or single augmentation with non-viable groups that has been tested for 6 years now.

The Genetic sampling is now on a major roll, led by the Mabula Project, searching for blood samples from the captive birds around the world, and the collection of blood from fledglings in wild nests and feathers and egg shells - with precise GIS locations, which then go into the care of the Research Centre at the National Zoological Gardens in Pretoria, and our Genetic centres in USA and Europe.

If a disease killed the populations of Ground Hornbills in the high density protected areas of Africa it is the captive programme which would save the species.

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