

Zoos Victoria's Priority Species

# BAW BAW FROG

*Philoria frosti*

*Critically Endangered*



Photo: Damien Goodall

The Baw Baw Frog needs our help. Like many amphibians, the Baw Baw Frog has suffered massive population declines in the last 20 years. Zoos Victoria recognises that if something isn't done soon, it may just be too late for this species. Along with program partners we have successfully established a genetically robust captive insurance population to help

secure the species against extinction. Thanks to advances in amphibian husbandry we have been able to breed Baw Baw frogs in captivity and are now beginning to investigate reintroduction strategies. Our staff are committed to ensuring that the Baw Baw Frog chorus will once again be common across Mt Baw Baw.

**ZOOS**  
**VICTORIA**  
*Fighting Extinction*

# Zoos Victoria is committed to Fighting Extinction

We are focused on working with partners to secure the survival of our priority species before it is too late.

**In the early 1980s the Baw Baw Frog was thriving, but recent monitoring indicates a 98% decline in their abundance since this time. Zoos Victoria is committed to conserving this unique Victorian species. Research into the captive breeding and husbandry of this species will ensure the Baw Baw Frog has a long-term future. Zoos Victoria staff are committed to gaining a better understanding of the life history of this frog, sharing its unique story and securing its future.**

## KEY PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- Zoos Victoria will investigate and refine the husbandry techniques required to raise, maintain and breed Baw Baw Frogs in captivity.
- Targeted collection of female Baw Baw Frogs to help secure the genetics of the wild population.
- Establish an in-situ (semi wild) population and trial reintroduction of captive-bred individuals to the wild.

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- Research is underway to investigate habitat and husbandry requirements for this species.
- Melbourne Zoo amphibian keepers and the Amphibian Research Centre have developed highly successful husbandry techniques for rearing and breeding Baw Baw Frogs.
- Frogs reared from wild collected eggs have resulted in a large healthy captive population.
- In 2014 recovery team members unanimously agreed to enact an emergency collection phase targeting the collection of genetic material due to continued and rapid population decline.
- Collection of adult male and female Baw Baw Frogs.
- Successful captive reproduction from wild caught females.
- Experimental reintroduction underway.

## THE SPECIES

Baw Baw Frogs only occur on a restricted section of the Baw Baw plateau in Victoria. They are a cryptic species, finding natural soil cavities underground from which to call and lay their translucent eggs in a foam nest. Unlike most other frog species, developing Baw Baw Frog tadpoles may not swim or feed. The tadpoles are nourished by a yolk sac after hatching. They develop this way, hiding under vegetation until they metamorphose into frogs.

The reasons for the massive population crash of Baw Baw Frogs since the 1980s are unclear, however the most likely factors are:

- Chytridiomycosis – an infectious disease caused by chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*) which infects the skin susceptible of frog species. Chytrid fungus has been linked with amphibian decline and extinction worldwide, and appears to affect frogs in cool climates most severely. Once a population is infected, there is no effective way of controlling this disease.
- Introduced species – feral plants and animals occurring on Mt Baw Baw are having negative impacts on habitat quality.
- Climate change – warmer temperatures and decreased rainfall in the Baw Baw Plateau region could cause the subalpine and montane habitats of the Baw Baw Frog to shrink or entirely disappear.

## THE PLAN

The following critical next steps will enable Zoos Victoria, along with our partners to move forward knowing that we are doing everything we can to prevent the extinction of this species:

Maintain the captive insurance population at Melbourne Zoo.	\$85,000 p.a
Conduct Field Monitoring to better inform conservation actions.	\$290,000
Identify an environmental refuge for reintroducing Baw Baw Frogs to their wild habitat.	\$110,000
Create disease-free safe havens in wild habitat for re-introduction.	YEAR 4 & 5 \$100,000 p.a
Assist the Mt Baw Baw Alpine Resort to run programs with visitors to increase care and knowledge of the Baw Baw Frog and facilitate behaviours that prevent the spread of chytrid fungus.	\$10,000 p.a
Build on and celebrate the Annual Baw Baw Frog Day (November 18) aiming to measure an increase in community care and knowledge of the species and generate support for the conservation projects.	\$5,000 p.a
<b>Total cost over five years</b>	<b>\$1,100,000</b>

## How can I help?

We are currently developing husbandry and breeding techniques for this species, but we still need all the support we can get. You can support our Wildlife Conservation Master Plan 2019-2024 by donating at: [zoo.org.au/donate](https://zoo.org.au/donate)

## PROGRAM PARTNERS

Amphibian Research Centre  
[frogs.org.au/arc](https://frogs.org.au/arc)

Baw Baw Frog Recovery Team

Baw Baw National Park  
[australianalps.environment.gov.au](https://australianalps.environment.gov.au)

Baw Baw Shire Council  
[bawbawshire.vic.gov.au](https://bawbawshire.vic.gov.au)

Deakin University  
[deakin.edu.au](https://deakin.edu.au)

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning  
[delwp.vic.gov.au](https://delwp.vic.gov.au)

Mt Baw Baw Alpine Resort

University of Wollongong  
[uow.edu.au](https://uow.edu.au)