

Reintroduction of the Eastern Barred Bandicoot in Australia

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"No, they are not rabbits, they are more like a big mouse" Rachel – Director of Victoria Zoos - tells the kids. "They are called the Eastern Barred Bandicoot". These individuals would like to come and live here on your island, as your island is the only fox-free place in the whole country. This animal was almost extinct sometime ago and thanks to the efforts of a small heroic group of scientists and volunteers it was rescued. They had found 17 survivors and started a breeding program to save the animal. That was some forty years ago. Today we are aiming at having in the next five years 2.500 bandicoots in Australia. And your island can play a key role in reaching that target. If all goes well you can later tell your grandchildren we were the ones who released the bandicoots on our island."

The kids are standing in the afternoon sun around the cages with 32 bandicoots on a grassland patch surrounded by the forests of French Island National Park in the Bay of Melbourne. Some of their parents are there in the background and also listen intently. Rachel explains the history of the bandicoot, its habits and how they would love to live and make their nests on this island. She tells about the reasons for the almost extinction: habitat loss (grasslands), and non-native species such as foxes and cats.

She tells that in other parts of the state where there are foxes and cats, they have programs to train dogs to become protection dogs for the reintroduced bandicoot. *"So we are all part of a greater effort to give these animals again a right to live here in Australia. It is like our moral duty, as every creature is worth to be cared for. And if we will not do it, who will? Such efforts are something we all can be proud of, as it is the right thing to do. Love is one of our most important emotions in life. And you show that by taking part today in this auspicious moment to release the bandicoots here. You can now open the doors to help us release the new island residents."*

The kids return home excited. They tell stories about the release and what they have learnt. In the process the reputation of Victoria zoos is boosted as is the reputation of conservation in general as a way to practice morality and love your neighbour. An awareness important to gain enough community support for the vote in one year's time whether or not to continue with the project to reintroduce the bandicoot on the island.