

## Logging Hurts Swift Parrot Breeding

**The swift parrot of Tasmania proves more valuable than lumber.**

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Logging has severely affected the swift parrots breeding area.

It's a story that's heard over and over again. Forward-moving developments for humans take a devastating toll on an animal species. In this particular variation of the familiar tale, the setting is Tasmania and the victim is the swift parrot.

The swift parrot's summer home and breeding grounds in the blue gum trees of eastern Tasmania have been severely affected by logging in the area. According to the Australian government website, 370 hectares of forest where the swift parrot breeds were cleared between 1996 and 2001, often removed for human safety concerns.

According to Tasmania's Department of Primary Industries and Water website, both the Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act 1995 and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 recognize the swift parrot as an endangered species.

The forests of Tasmania, particularly those in the southeastern portion of the state, nurture the growth of nectar-producing blue gums that the swift parrot feeds on and also houses hollow trees where they can nest and breed. Loggers cut down the old trees that produce more flowers that the birds can feed on and contain more hollows for the birds to nest, said DPIW.

"Although the species faces other threats such as clearing for residential development and collisions with man-made structures in suburban environments, logging of critical breeding habitat is undoubtedly the primary threat that it faces," said Chris Tzaros of Birds Australia. Forestry Tasmania stated this fall that it will defer harvesting in Wielangta State Forest, which is part of the swift parrot's breeding area, pending further monitoring. With only an estimated 1,000 parrot pairs breeding in the wild — that translates to about 2,500 total parrots — the already endangered species could see a serious population decline if the logging resumes.

However, preserving just one location for the birds to breed does not assure their ability to reproduce and survive. According to Tzaros, the parrots follow a cyclical pattern of breeding and might breed in a particular location only once every five years. Couple this with the precise rain conditions necessary to grow the correct vegetation, and the perfect swift parrot breeding habitat can be a tricky find.

So when the loggers destroy the delicate conditions, the swift parrot greatly suffers. According to the Australian government website, the number of breeding parrots declined by 29 percent between 1988 and 1996 and continues to decline.

"Once numbers are so low, it is very precariously placed and the likelihood of extinction is amplified considerably," Tzaros said.

Even a migration to a region with a similar climate seems to be out of the question, according to conservationists like Tzaros. The swift parrot has invested thousands of evolutionary years adapting to the specialized conditions that Tasmania offers, and other parts of the world don't provide it with livable options.

In an effort to put a halt on the falling breeding rates, Birds Australia has focused on preserving multiple breeding locations for the parrots, Tzaros said. Other conservation organizations, such as the World Wildlife Foundation and the Wilderness Society, have supported efforts to reduce Tasmanian logging. For now, it's unclear for how long the logging deferment in the Wielangta State Forest will last.

The possibility of raising swift parrots in captivity could serve as a backup plan for conservationists, but habitat preservation remains the main focus, because, as Tzaros explained, without a nurturing environment to release the parrot, the efforts of raising the parrots in captivity prove fruitless.