

Media Release:

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Emus and Quandongs: Recipe for Success?

The Alice Springs Desert Park is embarking on a unique study to see if emus can assist seed dispersal and growth of the highly prized quandong tree (*Santalum acuminatum*).

ASDP Nursery Manager Tim Collins said the quandong tree is treasured by locals in Alice Springs for its brilliant red fleshy fruits eaten fresh or in sauces and jams.

“The quandong tree is listed as a ‘Vulnerable’ species in the Northern Territory due to threatening processes such as fire regimes, harvesting for wooden artefacts, mistletoe infestations and being a popular food source for camels all contributing to a decline in the wild,” Mr Collins said.

“The quandong tree, which occurs naturally south and west of Alice Springs, is not commonly cultivated because it is quite difficult to grow from seeds and cuttings.

“Anecdotal evidence suggests emus, which are also listed as ‘Vulnerable’ in the Northern Territory, ate the quandong fruit and dispersed the seeds through their faeces to re-germinate.

“Using the captive emus here at the Park along with our cultivated quandong fruit we’re trying to determine whether emus simply disperse the seeds when they eat the fruit or if they also improve the germination of the seeds.

“The study will also help determine whether feeding the emus quandongs is a useful part of captive emu management and environmental enrichment.

Mr Collins said although it is early days of the study some interesting observations have been made.

“Initially the emus did not recognise the quandong fruit as food and it took a few weeks for them to begin eating it,” Mr Collins said.

“Although we’re still trying to measure the time taken for the seeds to pass through the emu, it appears to take at least 1 – 2 days or even longer.

“We hope the research outcomes may provide insight into the relationship between emus and quandong trees in the wild.

“If the work is successful it may also prove to be the starting point for other difficult to germinate seeds, including the Emu Bush (*Eremophila longifolia*) to follow suit.”

Ends

Media Note – for more information contact Tim Collins on 8951 8757

Image 1. Quandong tree at ASDP (credit Dylan Ferguson)

Image 2. Emu eating quandong at ASDP (credit Dylan Ferguson)

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