NO SAFER PLACE FOR A BILBY

The plight of Australia's most endangered marsupial, the bilby, highlights the debate on whether animals should be kept in zoos.

I began my mission by holding a fundraising barbecue at OfficeWorks. This went brilliantly, raising $900. Later, I ran a school stall selling milkbar aka and Easter Bilby chocolates (yes! Easter Bilbies, not Bunnies!), contributing over $900 to the SBF, helped by generous donations of supplies from Coles.

My latest effort was competing in the Gold Coast Bulletin Skin Fun Run, so far receiving more than $400 in sponsorship from friends, family and businesses. Meanwhile, I've been working on the awareness side of my project by channeling my creative skills into writing and illustrating a children's bilby picture book.

I'm taking art classes to illustrate my book and will publish it soon. Having the SBF CEO, Kevin Bradley, speak at school assembly was another great way to spread the message about bilby conservation.

During my journey I've been lucky enough to get up close to the amazing bilby and I can say nothing has given me greater satisfaction than knowing I'm doing my bit to keep this adorable marsupial around for generations to come.

Some may think making a donation won't make much difference, but I know every dollar towards captive breeding programs and predator-proof fences in places like Currawinya National Park, Queensland, is vital to preventing the extinction of one of our most precious native species.

SHOULD ANIMALS BE IN ZOOS? I THINK YES

Although some people argue that animals should not be kept in zoos, I believe 2005 has a valuable role to play in animal preservation.

Unfortunately many animals are threatened with extinction and can no longer survive in the wild due to habitat destruction, poaching and predators. Zoos provide a valuable opportunity for education, research and captive breeding programs.

One example of this I have experienced first hand is the work done by 2005 and wildlife parks to save the bilby, Australia's most endangered marsupial.

Zoos around Australia including Taronga and other local centres such as Dreamworld, and the Frank Manthey Bilby Burrow in Ipswich, work in conservation partnerships with the Save the Bilby Fund and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy to help boost wild populations.

During a recent visit to the Frank Manthey Bilby Burrow, I spoke to a ranger, Jessica, about the centre's breeding program.

One interesting fact I learned was that every single bilby in captivity is recorded on a register to regulate breeding and ensure genetic diversity is maintained within the small remaining population.

Breeding animals in a controlled setting prevents inbreeding. Captive-bred bilbies are often released into protected habitats to rebuild wild populations.

I discovered how successful this program is, watching Holly, one of two babies born there at Christmas time, actively digging and climbing around her habitat near her parents.

Holly's brother, Claus, is now located at Dreamworld, being reared for educational work in schools.

I support the work of 2005 in providing a unique learning experience for visitors, as well as research and breeding opportunities and most importantly, rebuilding and restoring the natural populations of endangered animals in the wild.

Henry's all grown up

SEA World's resident polar bear cubie Henry recently celebrated his 2nd birthday in his Gold Coast enclosure. Henry is the second polar bear to be born in Australia and the first to be born at Sea World.

Director of marine sciences Trevor Long said Henry's "wild" genetics will be crucial to the international polar bear breeding program. "Henry has grown from 600g at birth to his current weight of 295kg and has started his natural weaning process from mum Lyra, which marks an important step in his development," he said.

"Henry will eventually play a vital part in the international polar bear breeding program because of his wild genetics from his father Nelson and uncle Hudson."