



All about Albus

Albus the Maremma is almost two years old and is an ambassador for our Guardian Dog Program which will trial whether Eastern Barred Bandicoots, protected by specially trained Maremma Guardian Dogs, will be able to form self-sustaining populations in areas not enclosed by feral proof fences.

He lives at Werribee Open Range Zoo with Project Coordinator Dave Williams. Dave has been involved in a similar program working with Maremmas and protecting penguins from foxes.

Ambassador dog Albus is learning all about the zoo environment and spends his time getting used to all of the faces, smells and sounds of Werribee Open Range Zoo. Albus also has a very important job in helping people learn about this innovative program and this is big part of his training as he works on his manners.

Albus has very specific needs, is very territorial and can bark a lot, which means he's not well suited to city life. Luckily he spends his days living in a large area at the Zoo alongside bandicoots and a group of Blackheaded Dorper Sheep. The sheep act as the Guardian Dogs' primary social companion so the dogs will grow up with both bandicoots and sheep and view them as a normal residents in their territory and not intruders.

What to do when you meet Albus?

Albus is starting to enter his teenage phase so is starting to settle down a bit but he still needs to be treated like a dog in training.

Here's our top five tips of how to stay cool around him:

- Be calm and gentle
- Check in with his handler first to see if it's ok to approach
- Just like us, Albus doesn't like being patted on the head
- Let Albus approach you
- Stop and say hello but remember he is out on the job and he likes to keep his handlers moving!

A bit about the bandicoot

Eastern Barred Bandicoots were once widespread across the basalt plains of south-western Victoria. As a result of introduced predators such as foxes and habitat loss, this amazing native marsupial is currently extinct in the wild of mainland Australia, existing only predator-proof-release sites and zoos.

They are small, nocturnal and shy and found in grassland habitats, relying heavily on native grasses for cover and nest building.

A captive breeding program was established using Eastern Barred Bandicoots from the last known population at Hamilton. Since then, a coordinated Recovery Program has focused on captive breeding, habitat management and predator control.