
NEWS

Vista Gold: Environmental Program

The mining industry has been a power player in the world of production and technological advancement, despite being faced with some harsh criticism. Many have claimed the industry, as a whole, has turned a blind eye to the negative impact mining has had on the environment.

At Vista Gold we understand that life, as we know it, would be impossible without mining. We also understand that it is crucial to do our part to lower our environmental impact and, in the case of Mt Todd, to do what we can to improve environmental standards before, during, and after mining operations.

Vista Gold at Mt Todd

At Mt Todd we have established ourselves as leaders in the management and treatment of acid rock drainage, a challenge that we inherited when we acquired the Mt Todd project. Our innovation has allowed us to gain the trust of the community and to demonstrate our commitment to protecting the environment.

As part of this commitment, we have worked hard to acquire not one, but two major environmental authorizations. The first was the approval of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which was awarded in September of 2014 by the Northern Territory Environmental Protection Agency. An EIS is issued to companies who have an anticipated environmental impact and have developed appropriate plans for minimizing and mitigating the impact.

Shortly after receiving the first approval, Vista Gold was contacted by the Australian Commonwealth Department of Environment and Energy. The agency wanted Vista Gold to seek approval for a second environmental authorization. The Australian Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act of 1999 (EPBC) focuses on protecting certain species of flora and fauna. In the case of Vista Gold at Mt Todd, this was referring to the protection on the Gouldian Finch.



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It took close to a year to complete the additional paperwork and monitoring required to submit the original request for authorization. Vista Gold received many requests for additional information and started monitoring and conservation efforts in December 2015. Vista Gold has worked closely with the Australian Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments to put together a team of recognized experts and academic institutions who share our interest in protecting the Gouldian Finch. We have worked together to collect data, develop monitoring programs, and create protocols that will allow the detection of changes in the health of the bird. Recently, Vista Gold received the approval of its request for authorization of a controlled activity as required under the EPBC.

Gouldian Finch

The Gouldian Finch is a small bird and is considered a threatened species in Australia. It is naturally occurring in the Northern Territory and in Queensland. The bird is easy to recognize due to the bright-colored plumage of the males. They are one of the most common species bred in captivity by aviculturists around the world.

It just so happens that Mt Todd is located adjacent to an area that the Gouldian Finch use as a breeding and nesting ground. Though these birds are transient, it is possible to see them on and off throughout any given year.

Vista Gold has worked hand-in-hand with Charles Darwin University to develop reliable monitoring techniques to ensure the Gouldian Finch in the area stay happy and healthy. Vista Gold's CEO Fred Earnest said, "We are committed to protecting this transient population and its habitat."

Vista Gold Environmental Protocols at Mt Todd

Vista Gold wanted to ensure there were protocols in place that would



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include prevention, enhancement, and diagnostic capabilities. These included:

Dust Monitoring,
Habitat Protection, and
Health Diagnostics

Dust Monitoring

Dust is potentially one of the Gouldian Finch's biggest threats. There are many parts of a mining operation that could be sources of dust. Evidence suggests that captive birds subjected to high levels of dust experience long-term health impacts. Field observations also suggest that wild birds move from one area to another, seeking the best habitat possible.

In our step towards prevention, Vista Gold has implemented a dust monitoring system which will function throughout the life of the mine. In the design of the mine and the plant, Vista Gold has worked hard to minimize the potential generation of dust and to understand the prevailing wind patterns and how they affect the habitat around our operations. "The monitoring we have in place for that is very straightforward and includes PM-10/PM-2.5 sampling, ambient dust collecting stations, meteorological stations," CEO Fred Earnest says. "These allow us to measure and collect wind-speed and direction data. We also have a grid of samplers that collect meteoric dust and can measure ambient dust levels."

Habitat Protection

Vista Gold has worked locally with the Jawoyn aboriginal people to minimize the amount of undergrowth burning which is a part of their traditional land management practices. Gouldian Finch are attracted to specific species of grass as they go to seed in the wet season. The seeds from this grass are prime source of nutrition for the Gouldian Finch and their health depends on it. "By working with the Jawoyn so



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that we do less burning in the Yinberrie Hills (located to the west of Mt Todd) or eliminate it as much as possible, we're improving the habitat for the birds and providing a better source of forage for them."

Health Diagnostics

Together with Charles Darwin University, we have designed a monitoring system which measures the health of the Gouldian Finch. These tests are conducted by contracted, licensed staff, who safely capture birds, collect data and a blood sample, and then set them free. We collect the blood sample "to be analyzed for a certain enzyme which has been shown to be an indicator of the stress they are subject to... not instantaneous stress but habitat stress... whether its difficult for them to forage or get enough to eat." This is done to ensure that the birds are remaining healthy in their environment.

Conclusion

In addition to doing our part to protect the Gouldian Finch habitat near Mt Todd, Vista Gold is committed to improving other areas through offsetting environmental activities. We believe that through prevention, enhancement, and diagnostics, we can make a difference for the Gouldian Finch and continue to provide them with a safe, healthy environment to call home.