

THREATENED SPECIES OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

BLACK-FOOTED ROCK WALLABY

Petrogale lateralis



Conservation status

Australia: Vulnerable.

Northern Territory: Near Threatened.

Description

The black-footed rock-wallaby is a moderately-sized macropod with a body mass of 2.8-4.5 kg. As in other rock-wallabies, the tail (mean length of 56 cm) is longer than the head-body (mean length of 49 cm).

Northern Territory animals belong to a currently undescribed subspecies, centred in the MacDonnell Ranges. A dense coat of dark grizzled brown fur passing to grey on the shoulders distinguishes this subspecies. The chest is grey; the belly buff. The face is marked by a sandy cheek stripe. The ears are dark brown near the tip fading to fawn at the base. A dark brown to black dorsal stripe extends from between the ears to behind the shoulders. The feet are grey brown and the digits are black. The forearms are sandy dorsally and darker ventrally and the paws are dark brown to black. A distinct white stripe with wider dark brown stripe immediately ventral extends from the axillary patch to the thighs. The tail is dark grey proximally, becomes browner distally and ends in a dark brown to black brush.



Black-footed rock-wallaby.

Distribution

The distribution of the MacDonnell Ranges subspecies is centred on the MacDonnell Ranges bioregion of the southern Northern Territory. In the Territory, its range extends north to the Davenport and Murchinson Ranges, east to the Jervois Range, west to the Western Australian border and south to the South Australian border. Outside the Territory, it occurs in the Gibson Desert of Western Australia (Eldridge *et al.* 1992; Pearson 1992) and in the Anangu-Pitjatjantjara lands of northern South Australia.

In southern parts of its range this wallaby has declined in density and distribution or become locally extinct. However, with the exception of recent extinctions at the Granites (Tanami Desert) and at Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Park, the population size and distribution of the black-footed rock wallaby has remained stable in the Northern Territory.

Other subspecies of black-footed rock-wallabies occur in Western Australia, and islands off the coast of South Australia (Eldridge and Close 1995).

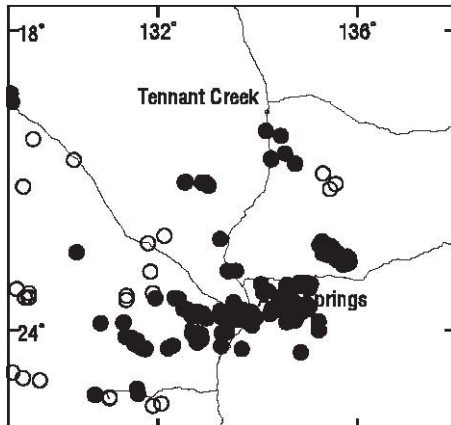


Northern Territory Government

Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts

Conservation reserves where reported:

Alice Springs Telegraph Station Historical Reserve, Arltunga Historical Reserve, Davenport Range National Park, Emily and Jessie Gap Nature Park, Finke Gorge National Park, Kuyunba Conservation Reserve, Ruby Gap Nature Park, Trepina Gorge Nature Park, Watarrka National Park, West MacDonnell National Park.



Known locations of the black-footed rock-wallaby. O = pre 1970; • = post 1970.

Ecology

Black-footed rock-wallabies occur in rocky outcrops and associated steep rocky slopes. They feed on grass, but some herbs and some leaves and fruits are also eaten (Eldridge and Close 1995). Though occasionally drinking when water is present they can survive without water. Water requirements are reduced by sheltering during the day in caves and under boulders where relative humidity is higher and air temperatures cooler. They usually emerge in the late afternoon or early evening to feed. After a cold night animals may bask in the sun during the early morning.

Breeding is potentially continuous but may be influenced by seasonal factors. Embryonic diapause is a feature of reproduction.

Conservation assessment

A recent comprehensive assessment by Gibson (2000) provided strong evidence that this species retains much the same distribution in the Northern Territory as it had at the time of European settlement and that numbers in conservation reserves have remained stable or increased over the past 20 years. The extent of occurrence within the Territory is estimated at 37 000 km² (Gibson 2000).

Although populations in the extreme south of its range have declined or become locally extinct over the past 20-30 years, the species has disappeared from only 21 of 400 sites surveyed (5%) in the Territory. Further, most of these sites were small, isolated hills that supported small populations. Based on this information the black-footed rock-wallaby qualifies as **Near Threatened** in the Northern Territory.

Threatening processes

Major threats faced by isolated populations in Western Australia and South Australia and parts of the Northern Territory include predation by introduced (European fox, feral cat) and native (wedge-tailed eagle) predators, and habitat degradation caused by grazing by introduced herbivores. The decline of local populations in southern regions correlates with time of arrival of foxes after establishment of rabbits. Circumstantial evidence from work on another subspecies of the black-footed rock-wallaby in the Western Australian Wheatbelt and Rothschild's rock-wallaby in the Dampier Archipelago strongly supports the contention that foxes have played a major role in the decline of the species.

Conservation objectives and management

There is no existing management program for the species in the Northern Territory. A national



Recovery Plan for five species of rock-wallaby, currently being prepared by the Western Australia Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), will include the MacDonnell Ranges subspecies of the black-footed rock-wallaby.

Management priorities in the Northern Territory are to:

- (i) continue to monitor key populations of the species both on and off park; and
- (ii) protect key populations by carrying out fox and feral cat control where populations appear threatened by predation.

Compiled by

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References

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