

Threatened Species of the Northern Territory

RED-TAILED PHASCOGALE

Phascogale calura

Conservation status

Australia: Endangered

Northern Territory: Extinct

Description

The red-tailed phascogale is a medium-sized carnivorous marsupial (body mass of males, 60 g; females, 43 g) that formerly occurred in central Australia and inland southern Australia. The species has a brown body and long tail (longer than the head-body length), that is black and bushy at the tip and has a red base.

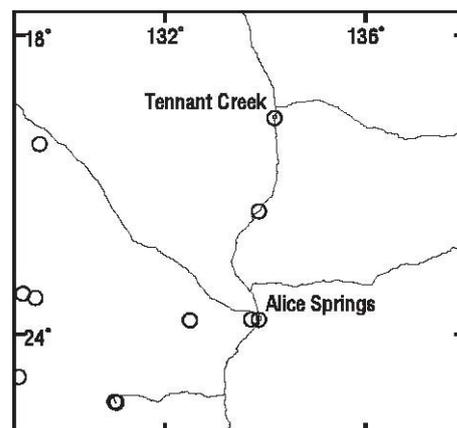
Distribution

It is now restricted to pockets of woodland in southwest Western Australia.

In the NT, it occurred widely across arid and semi-arid areas, extending as far north as Tennant Creek (Parker 1973; Burbidge *et al.* 1988). A recent unconfirmed report has been obtained in the vicinity of the Wallace Rockhole community.

Conservation reserves where reported:

None (although it formerly occurred in areas that are now included within Uluru Kata-Tjuta National Park and West MacDonnell National Park.)



Known locations of the red-tailed phascogale.
o = pre 1970

Ecology

In central Australia, the red-tailed phascogale occupied sandhills and hilly country and sheltered in hollow limbs in eucalypts (especially bloodwoods) (Burbidge *et al.* 1988).

The species is strictly nocturnal and mostly arboreal, although it feeds extensively on the ground. The diet consists of insects and other invertebrates, small mammals and birds. The red-tailed phascogale had a reproductive strategy that is typical for a carnivorous marsupial in featuring a die-off of all males in spring following an intense three week mating period in July. Average male lifespan is 11.5 months and that of females is 2 or 3 years.

Conservation assessment

The red-tailed phascogale is presumed to have become extinct in the NT in the 1950s, following a broad-scale decline extending over at least the previous 50 years (Burbidge *et al.* 1988). The limited historical evidence suggests that it was probably uncommon or localised even before the advent of European settlement (Finlayson 1961; Burbidge *et al.* 1988).

Threatening processes

The decline of the red-tailed phascogale in central Australia is attributed to predation by cats and foxes and frequent burning of suitable habitat that prevented the establishment of climax vegetation communities.

Conservation objectives and management

The species is on display in the nocturnal house of the Alice Springs Desert Park and a trial reintroduction within the Park is planned for 2007.

Compiled by

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References

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- Finlayson, H.H. (1961). On central Australian mammals, Part IV. The distribution and status of central Australian species. *Records of the South Australian Museum* 41, 141-191.
- Parker, S.A. (1973). An annotated checklist of the native land mammals of the Northern Territory. *Records of the South Australian Museum* 16, 1-57.