

# Threatened Species of the Northern Territory

## BURROWING BETTONG (inland subspecies) BOODIE

### *Bettongia lesueur graii*

#### Conservation status

Australia: The subspecies *Bettongia lesueur graii* is Extinct

Northern Territory: Extinct



(J Gould © Museum Victoria)

#### Description

The burrowing bettong is a small thickset macropod (body mass 0.9-1.6 kg). It is yellow-grey above and paler grey below. The ears are short and rounded, and the tail relatively robust.

#### Distribution

Burrowing bettongs once lived in burrows excavated in sandy, calcareous and lateritic country over a range that encompassed nearly half of the continent, including most of Western Australia (with the exception of the north Kimberley) and South Australia, western New South Wales and the Victorian mallee. In the Northern Territory, the burrowing bettong was found extensively in the dune and sandplain deserts of the southern arid region.

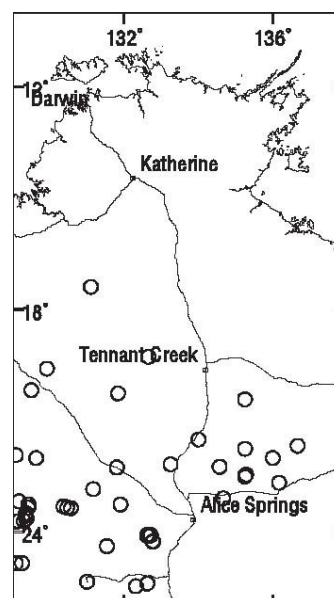
Early naturalists noted that it was common and, in many areas, the most abundant mammal. The mainland subspecies is now extinct; however, two subspecies occur on islands off the coast of Western Australia; one subspecies on Boodie and Barrow Islands off the Pilbara coast; the other on Bernier and Dorre Islands off Shark Bay. Both these subspecies are listed nationally as vulnerable. The decline of this species on the mainland

commenced in the nineteenth century. It disappeared from Victoria in the 1860s, but persisted in the central and western deserts until the mid-twentieth century.

Old bettong warrens are still readily observed in central Australia, particularly in calcareous country where excavated stones and gravels form humps or mounds around the entrance of long abandoned warrens.

#### Conservation reserves where reported:

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



Known locations of the burrowing bettong.  
○ = pre 1970;  
● = post 1970

## Ecology

In arid and semi-arid NT, the burrowing bettong occurred in a broad range of habitats, other than ranges (Burbidge *et al.* 1988). It dug extensive and distinctive warren systems, in which it would rest during the day.

## Conservation assessment

The burrowing bettong 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 (Finlayson 1961; Burbidge *et al.* 1988).

## Threatening processes

The disappearance of the burrowing bettong from central and Western Australia seems to have coincided with the establishment of the fox and the feral cat. Interestingly, bettong numbers were probably not seriously affected by rabbits, because both species sometimes shared warrens.

## Conservation objectives and management

The subspecies is presumed extinct. No conservation management plan can offer further help.

However, other subspecies persists; and Parks Australia and the Mutijulu Community intend to establish a captive colony of subspecies from WA within the predator-proof enclosure at Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park that currently houses mala.

## Compiled by

Chris Pavey  
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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.