

Threatened Species of the Northern Territory

BUSH-TAILED BETTONG WOYLIE

Bettongia penicillate

Conservation status

Australia: Not listed

Northern Territory: Extinct



(J Gould © Museum Victoria)

Description

The brush-tailed bettong is a small macropod (body mass 1.0-1.6 kg), yellow-grey above and paler below. The tail is well-furred, with a black crest most pronounced near the tail tip.

Distribution

The species is now restricted to dry sclerophyll forest with a dense understorey in southwest Western Australia. Translocated populations are located in conservation reserves in Western Australia and New South Wales and on islands off the South Australian coast.

In the NT, it occurred in the Great Sandy and Tanami Deserts (Finlayson 1961; Burbidge *et al.* 1988).

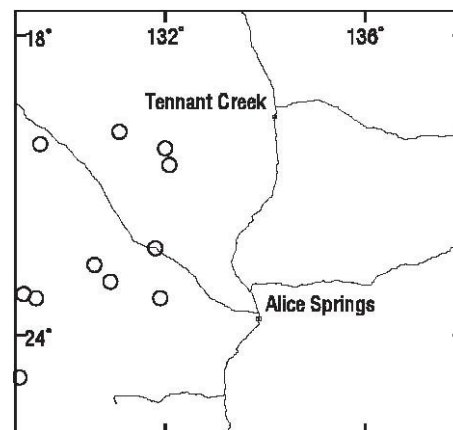
Conservation reserves where reported:

None.

Ecology

Brush-tailed bettongs inhabited a wide range of habitats from desert spinifex grasslands to forests. During the day they sheltered in grass-lined nests in spinifex hummocks or grass tussocks.

In the NT, elderly Aboriginal people recall this species occurring on sand plains and dunes supporting spinifex grasslands (Burbidge *et al.* 1988). Both the burrowing and brush-tailed bettongs feed heavily on the fruit-bodies of underground fungi and, therefore, are likely to have played an important role in the dispersal of fungal spores within desert ecosystems.



Known locations of the brush-tailed bettong
o = pre 1970; ● = post 1970

Conservation assessment

The brush-tailed 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 (Burbidge *et al.* 1988).

Threatening processes

Habitat degradation, changes to fire regimes and predation by foxes and cats are thought to account for the decline of this species from its previous extensive range.

Conservation objectives and management

There are no imminent plans to reintroduce this species to the NT. Some individuals are on display in the nocturnal house of the Alice Springs Desert Park.

Compiled by

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References

- Burbidge, A.A., Johnson, K.A., Fuller, P.F., and Southgate, R.I. (1988). Aboriginal knowledge of animals of the central deserts of Australia. *Australian Wildlife Research* **15**, 9-39.
- 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.