

Threatened Species of the Northern Territory

FALSE WATER-RAT WATER MOUSE

Xeromys myoides

Conservation status

Australia: Vulnerable

Northern Territory: Data Deficient



Photo: Alex Dudley

Description

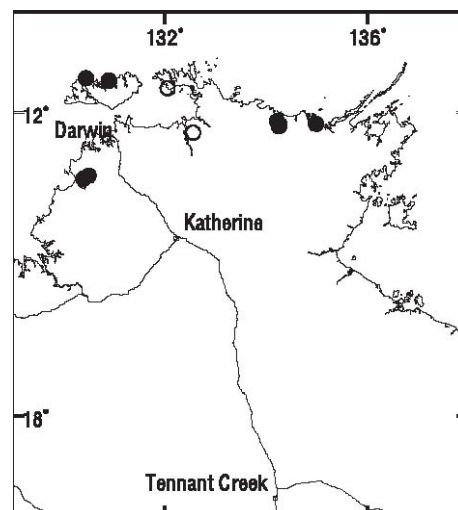
The false water-rat is a small (35-50 g) rodent of unmistakable appearance. The most distinctive external features are a broad relatively short face, and very short sleek fur. Fur colour is pale grey above and white below. The eyes and ears are relatively small.

Distribution

In the Northern Territory, it is known from only 10 records at 6 sites (South Alligator River in 1903, Daly River floodplain in 1972, two sites on the Tomkinson River in 1975, Melville Island in 1975 and Glyde River floodplain in 1998 and 1999) (Redhead and McKean 1975; Magnusson *et al.* 1976; Woinarski *et al.* 2000). Beyond the Northern Territory, it is also known from several sites in coastal south-eastern Queensland and one site in New Guinea.

Conservation reserves where reported:

Kakadu National Park (but this record is from 1903, well pre-dating the Park's establishment).



Known locations of the false water-rat
o = pre 1970; ● = post 1970.

Ecology

The ecology of the species is reasonably well known from a detailed study on North Stradbroke Island, Queensland (Van Dyck 1996). The false water rat is a nocturnal predator eating mainly marine and freshwater invertebrates, especially including crabs, pulmonates and molluscs. It forages entirely on the ground, and is an adept swimmer. It builds and shelters in either burrows or substantial earthen mounds. Its habitats comprise mangrove forests, freshwater

swamps and floodplain saline grasslands (Woinarski *et al.* 2000).

Conservation assessment

In the Northern Territory, the species can potentially be assigned the status of Vulnerable on the set of criteria B2ab

- area of occupancy less than 2000km²;
- known to exist at no more than 10 locations; and
- continuing decline, observed, inferred or projected in area of occupancy, area, extent and/or quality of habitat, and number of locations or subpopulations.

However, conservation assessment is hampered by the lack of precise information on range, population size and trends, to such an extent that it may qualify best as **Data Deficient**.

It is not known what proportion of the Territory's mangroves and floodplains is suitable for (and/or occupied by) the species or what impact a range of factors (including saltwater intrusion, spread of weeds (especially *Mimosa pigra*, olive hymenachne and para grass) and grazing of the floodplains by domestic and feral water buffalo and cattle) are having on habitat quality.

Threatening processes

There is insufficient information available to assess the impacts of possible threatening processes. There may be some predation by feral cats. However, the most plausible threatening processes relate to broad-scale habitat changes, especially those due to saltwater intrusion, spread of weeds and impacts of grazing. However, it is not clear that these changes necessarily reduce habitat quality for this species, and they are unlikely to diminish the extent of mangrove communities.

Conservation objectives and management

The main priorities are to better define the distribution and status of this species and to assess the impacts of a range of putative threatening processes. Such information is needed before management prescriptions can be formulated appropriately.

Complied by

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References

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- Woinarski, J.C.Z., Brennan, K., Dee, A., Njudumul, J., Guthayguthay, P., and Horner, P. (2000). Further records of the false water-rat *Xeromys myoides* from coastal Northern Territory. *Australian Mammalogy* **21**, 245-247.