

# Threatened species of the Northern Territory

## Fawn antechinus

### *Antechinus bellus*

#### Conservation status

##### Australia: Vulnerable

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

##### Northern Territory: Endangered

Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976



Credit: : I. Morris

#### Description

The Fawn Antechinus is a small dasyurid, weighing between 30 g and 60 g. It is pale to medium grey-brown above, sometimes with a brownish tinge, and cream or light grey below. The chin and feet are white and there is a pale eye-ring. The tail is uniformly brown, slightly darker above and shorter than the combined head and body length<sup>1</sup>. Females do not have a true pouch<sup>2</sup>. During the breeding season, the fur on the chest of males may be stained yellow to brown from a chest gland<sup>2</sup>.

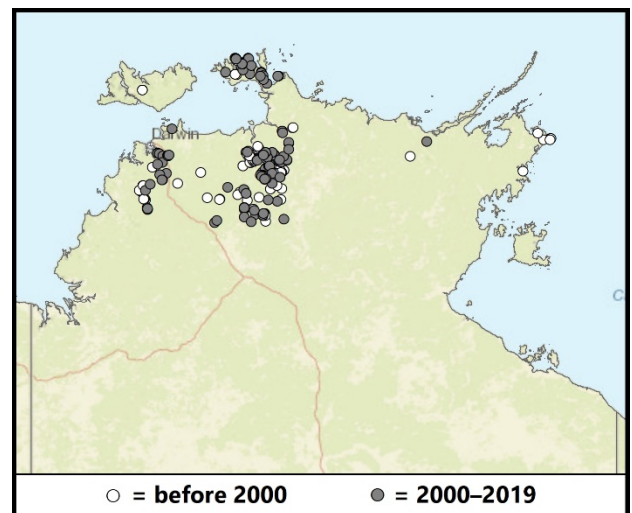
#### Distribution

The Fawn Antechinus is endemic to the Northern Territory (NT), where it occurs mostly on the mainland Top End. A single record was collected from the Tiwi Islands. The Fawn Antechinus is the only species of antechinus found in the savannah woodland and tall open forest of the Top End.

NT conservation reserves where reported: Garig Gunak Barlu National Park, Kakadu National Park and Litchfield National Park.

#### Ecology and life-history

The Fawn Antechinus is a terrestrial and arboreal insectivore, and is generally active at dusk and dawn<sup>1</sup>. Its diet mainly consists of insects, but small geckos are occasionally eaten<sup>2</sup>. Individuals shelter in tree hollows and fallen logs<sup>1</sup>. Much of the habitat is burnt during the dry season and the species shows a preference for areas exposed to cooler and less frequent fires<sup>3</sup>.



Caption: Known localities of the Fawn Antechinus in the NT ([nrmmaps.nt.gov.au](http://nrmmaps.nt.gov.au))

Breeding occurs around mid-June to late August, after which all the males die. Young are born from late September to October, and litter size can be as high as ten.

## Threatening processes

No single factor has been demonstrated to have caused the decline of the Fawn Antechinus.

The current NT-wide decline is probably due to ongoing inappropriate fire regimes affecting habitat suitability, and predation by feral Cats *Felis catus*<sup>3</sup>.

Altered fire regimes, weeds and grazing by livestock and feral animals may have changed the availability of preferred or vital food resources (e.g. particular insect species), and more frequent hot fires may have reduced the availability of hollow logs and tree hollows<sup>3</sup>.

## Conservation objectives and management

The Fawn Antechinus is one of a suite of mammal species exhibiting declines across the Top End in recent decades, with no clear explanation. There is no existing recovery plan or management program for this species.

In the interim, priorities for the conservation of the Fawn Antechinus species are to: i) conduct research to define cause(s) of decline; and ii) develop a recovery plan or management plan.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Cole, J., Woinarski, J., 2002. Field Guide to Rodents & Dasyurids of the Northern Territory. Surrey Beatty & Sons, Sydney.
- <sup>2</sup> Watson, M.L., Calaby, J.H., 2008. Fawn Antechinus (Thomas, 1904), in: Van Dyck, S., Strahan, R. (Eds.), The Mammals of Australia, third edition, p. 85. Reed New Holland, Sydney.
- <sup>3</sup> Woinarski, J.C.Z., Armstrong, M., Price, O., McCartney, J., Griffiths, T., Fisher, A., 2004. The terrestrial vertebrate fauna of Litchfield National Park, Northern Territory: monitoring over a 6-year period, and response to fire history. Wildl. Res. 31, 1-10.