FAWN ANTECHINUS

Antechinus bellus

Description

The fawn antechinus is a small (30–60 g) dasyurid, that is pale to medium grey-brown above, sometimes with a brownish tinge, cream or light grey below. The chin and feet are white and there is a pale eye-ring (Menkhorst & Knight 2009). The tail is uniformly brown, slightly darker above and is shorter than the head-body length (Cole and Woinarski 2002). Females do not have true pouch (Watson & Calaby 2008).

Distribution

The fawn antechinus is the only species of Antechinus found in the savannah woodland and tall open forest of the Top End of the Northern Territory (NT) (Watson & Calaby 2008). The species is restricted to the NT, largely to the mainland but there is one record of the species from the Tiwi Islands.

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

Ecology

A terrestrial and arboreal insectivore that is generally active at dusk and dawn (Cole and Woinarski 2002). Diet mainly consists of insects although it may occasionally take small geckos (Watson & Calaby 2008). The fawn antechinus shelters in tree hollows and fallen logs (Cole and Woinarski 2002). Much of the habitat is burnt during the Dry season and this antechinus shows a preference for areas exposed to cooler and less frequent fires (Woinarski et al 2004).

Breeding occurs around mid June to late August after which the males die. Young are born from late September to October and litter size can be as high as ten. During the
breeding season males may have the fur on the chest stained yellow to brown from a chest gland (Watson & Calaby 2008).

Conservation assessment

This species qualifies as Endangered in the NT (under criterion A2a), based on:

- Population reduction of >50 per cent over the last three generations (10 years) where causes of reduction have not ceased; based on direct observation

Threatening processes

No single factor has been demonstrated to have caused the decline of fawn antechinus.

The current Territory wide decline is probably due to ongoing inappropriate fire regimes affecting habitat suitability, and predation by feral cats (Woinarski et al 2010).

Changed 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 (Woinarski et al. 2004).

Conservation objectives and management

The fawn antechinus is one of a suite of mammal species exhibiting declines across the Top End over the past ten years, with no clear explanation. There is no existing recovery plan or management program for this species.

In the interim, priorities for the recovery of this species are to:

i. conduct research to define cause(s) of decline; and
ii. develop a recovery plan or management plan.

Complied by

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References


