

Threatened species of the Northern Territory

Crest-tailed mulgara

Dasycercus cristicauda

Conservation status

Australia: Not listed

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Northern Territory: Vulnerable

Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976

Description

The Crest-tailed Mulgara is a robust, carnivorous marsupial with a maximum body mass of ~190 g, and a maximum combined head and body length of ~18 cm. The body is tan to ginger above and creamy white below. The tail is relatively short, slightly enlarged at the base, tapers to a point and bears a narrow crest of long black hairs distally.

The Crested-tailed Mulgara differs from the similar Brush-tailed Mulgara *Dasycercus blythi* by having: a dorsal crest of black hairs on the terminal half of the tail, rather than a more uniform brush; three, instead of two, upper premolars; and eight, instead of six, teats in females¹⁻².

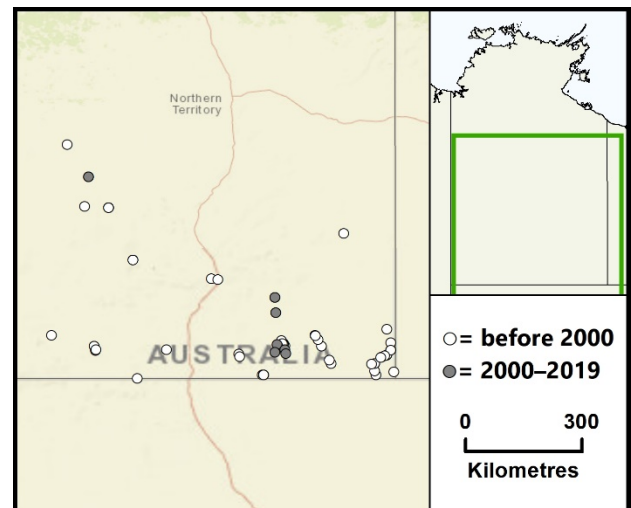
Distribution

There is some uncertainty about the distribution of the Crest-tailed Mulgara because of past taxonomic confusion within the genus *Dasycercus*. Most records of this species are from the Simpson Desert and northern South Australia. However, it may occur far more widely across semi-arid and arid Australia, with (old) records from the Canning Stock Route in Western Australia and the Nullabor Plain.



Credit: P. Canty

NT conservation reserves where reported: None



Caption: Known localities of the Crest-tailed Mulgara in the NT (nrmmaps.nt.gov.au)

Ecology and life-history

The Crest-tailed Mulgara appears to prefer sand dune habitats in the Simpson Desert, especially those vegetated with canegrass *Zygochloa paradoxa* and with *Triodia basedowii* in the interdunes⁴.

The ecology of the Crest-tailed Mulgara is not well understood, but it is probably broadly similar to that of the Brush-tailed Mulgara. Individuals of both species shelter in burrows, are primarily

nocturnal, and feed on invertebrates, reptiles and small mammals³.

Threatening processes

The cause of decline in the Crest-tailed Mulgara is unknown and, therefore, it has not been possible to identify threatening processes. However, it is likely that the processes of environmental degradation and habitat homogenization that have occurred throughout arid Australia following European settlement have negatively affected the species. Altered fire regimes, grazing by livestock and introduced herbivores, including European Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, and predation by introduced predators are all likely threatening processes⁵.

Conservation objectives and management

There is no current conservation management program for the Crest-tailed Mulgara in the NT.

Research and management priorities for the species in the NT are to: i) better define the abundance, distribution and habitat preferences of this species; and ii) establish regular monitoring programs in at least one representative locality.

References

- ¹ Woolley, P.A., 2005. The species of *Dasycercus* Peters, 1875 (Marsupialia: Dasyuridae). Mem. Mus. Vic. 62, 213–221.
- ² Woolley, P.A., 2006. Studies on the Crest-tailed Mulgara *Dasycercus cristicauda* and the brush-tailed mulgara *D. blythi* (Marsupialia: Dasyuridae). Aust. Mammal. 28, 117–120.
- ³ Wood Jones, F., 1923. The Mammals of South Australia. Part I. Government Printer, Adelaide.
- ⁴ Masters, P., 1997. Interim Recovery Plan for Ampurta *Dasycercus hillieri*. Report to ANCA Endangered Species Program.
- ⁵ Maxwell, S., Burbidge, A.A., Morris, K. (Eds.), 1996. The 1996 Action Plan for Australian marsupials and monotremes. Wildlife Australia, Canberra