

Threatened Species of the Northern Territory

DUSKY HOPPING-MOUSE

Notomys fuscus

Conservation status

Australia: Vulnerable

Northern Territory: Endangered



Photo: P. Canty

Description

The dusky hopping-mouse is characterized by its strong incisor teeth, long tail, large ears, dark eyes, and extremely lengthened and narrow hind feet, which have only four pads on the sole. The head-body length is 91-177 mm, tail length is 125-225 mm, and body weight is about 20-50 g. Coloration of the upper parts varies from pale sandy brown to yellowish brown to ashy brown or greyish. The underparts of dusky hopping-mice are white. The fur is fine, close and soft. Long hairs near the tip of the tail give the effect of a brush. The dusky hopping-mouse has a well-developed glandular area on the underside of its neck or chest. Females have four nipples.

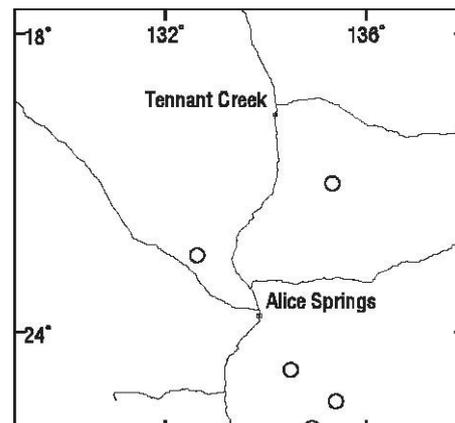
Distribution

The current distribution of the dusky hopping-mouse appears to be restricted to the eastern Lake Eyre Basin within the Simpson-Strzelecki Dunefields bioregion in South Australia and Queensland. An intensive survey in the 1990s located populations at eight locations in the Strzelecki Desert and adjacent Cobbler Sandhills (South Australia) and in south-west Queensland (Moseby *et al.* 1999). The species was formerly found across a much wider range that stretched as far west

as Ooldea in South Australia and east to the Victoria/New South Wales borders.

The species has not been recorded in the Northern Territory since 1939 when it was collected in sand dunes on Maryvale Station and on Andado Station. An earlier record is from Charlotte Waters.

Conservation reserves where reported:
None.



Known locations of the dusky hopping-mouse (o = pre 1970).

Ecology

The dusky hopping-mouse occupies a variety of sandy environments that are characterized by the presence of consolidated dunes and perennial vegetation (Moseby *et al.* 1999). Most sites are close to lakes or drainage lines,

and these are the only locations where relatively dense populations are known.

Little is known of the breeding biology of this species in the wild other than that it is an opportunistic breeder. In captivity, its breeding pattern is polyestrous, with no evidence of seasonality; thus it breeds throughout the year. Both sexes reach reproductive maturity at 70 days.

Conservation assessment

It is unclear whether the dusky hopping-mouse still occurs in the Northern Territory. The species has not been recorded in the NT for more than 60 years. No records were obtained during extensive trapping as part of the Finke Bioregion survey (which included Maryvale Station) (Neave *et al.* 2004) and intensive trapping at sites on Andado Station and at Mac Clarke Conservation Reserve. These surveys were carried out during favourable climatic conditions that resulted in unusually high population densities of other rodents. However, the surveys did not specifically target the sandy habitat occupied by the dusky hopping-mouse. As a consequence, a large amount of suitable habitat in the Northern Territory has not been surveyed. In particular, the area around Charlotte Waters, where a specimen was collected in 1895, should be resurveyed before the species is regarded as extinct in the NT. The species is classified as **Endangered** in the Northern Territory (under criteria C2b) based on:

- population size estimated to number <2500 mature individuals;
- a continuing decline in numbers of mature individuals; and
- extreme fluctuations in number of mature individuals.

Threatening processes

Factors that caused the species' decline have not been positively identified but are likely to include habitat degradation and predation by introduced carnivores (cats and foxes).

Conservation objectives and management

There is no existing management program for the species in the Northern Territory.

Research priorities are:

- i. to undertake targeted searches for the species in the Stony Plains bioregion in the Northern Territory; and
- ii. any reliable potential sightings should be followed up as soon as possible.

Compiled by

Chris Pavey
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References

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