

# Threatened Species of the Northern Territory

## NUMBAT

### *Myrmecobius fasciatus*

#### Conservation status

Australia: Vulnerable

Northern Territory: Extinct

#### Description

The numbat is a medium-sized marsupial (body mass of 300-715 g) with a pointed muzzle and bushy tail, and characteristic upper body pattern consisting of a reddish back and banded hindquarters.

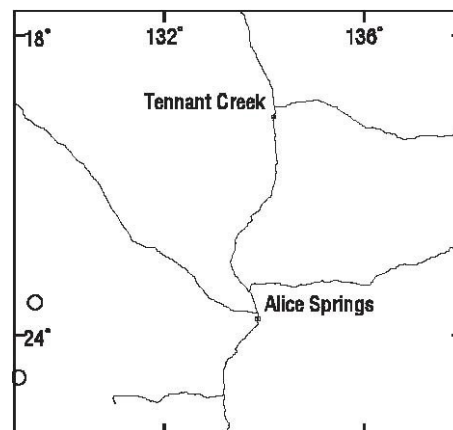
#### Distribution

The numbat formerly occurred across southern and central Australia, but is now restricted to a few remnants of woodland in southwest Western Australia.

In the NT, it occurred widely across arid and semi-arid areas, mostly in the far southwest (Parker 1973; Burbidge *et al.* 1988).

#### *Conservation reserves where reported:*

None (although it formerly occurred in areas that are now included within Uluru Kata-Tjuta National Park.)



Known locations of the numbat  
o = pre 1970

#### Ecology

In central Australia, it occupied areas of Mulga woodland with an understorey of spinifex or soft grasses on sand plains and lateritic plains, and was also observed on sand dunes (Burbidge *et al.* 1988).

The numbat is diurnal and terrestrial. Its diet consists only of termites. It rests at night in fallen logs and hollow trees and digs burrows up to 2 m deep. The species is solitary and territorial with animals defending home ranges of 25-30 ha. Breeding occurs only once per year.

## **Conservation assessment**

The numbat is presumed to have become extinct in the NT in the 1950s, following a broad-scale decline extending over at least the previous 50 years (Burbidge *et al.* 1988).

## **Threatening processes**

The reasons for the numbat's decline in central Australia are not known, but the most likely cause is predation by foxes and feral cats (Finlayson 1961), with further problems associated with vegetation change caused by exotic herbivores and by changed fire regimes.

## **Conservation objectives and management**

There are no imminent plans to re-introduce this species to the NT. A captive colony is housed in the nocturnal house of the Alice Springs Desert Park.

## **Compiled by**

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## **References**

- Burbidge, A.A., Johnson, K.A., Fuller, P.F., and Southgate, R.I. (1988). Aboriginal knowledge of animals of the central deserts of Australia. *Australian Wildlife Research* 15, 9-39.
- Finlayson, H.H. (1961). On central Australian mammals, Part IV. The distribution and status of central Australian species. *Records of the South Australian Museum* 41, 141-191.
- Parker, S.A. (1973). An annotated checklist of the native land mammals of the Northern Territory. *Records of the South Australian Museum* 16, 1-57.