

Wildlife Fact Sheet # 6

Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby

The Brush-tailed Rocky-wallaby is a native marsupial perfectly adapted to their rocky habitat. It has a distinctive 60cm long bushy black tail with dark brown fur on its back, shading to red on the rump. Their face has light coloured cheek stripes and a thin black dorsal stripe which runs between the eyes to the back of the head. An adult male weighs up to 11kg and is 55cm tall, while the smaller female weighs up to 8kg and stands 50cm high. This small member of the kangaroo family is one of the more beautiful of the Australian wallaby species.

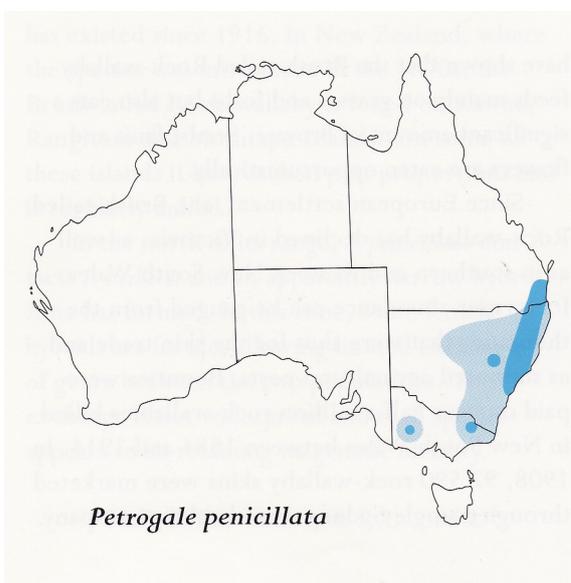


Conservation Status:

This once abundant species of rock-wallaby claimed rocky areas throughout south-eastern Australia, but since European settlement their numbers and range has undergone significant reduction. They are listed nationally as “Vulnerable” whereas in NSW they are classed as Endangered. In Victoria where they have suffered dramatic declines they are now “Critically Endangered” in Victoria with less than 30 individuals left in the wild.

The ongoing extinction of small and isolated regional populations, such as their recent disappearance from around Lithgow, is due to a combination of factors. Catastrophic events, like the bushfires experienced in 1997, have a massive impact on the overall population size when there are so few colonies left. After these fires feral animals moved in and directly preyed upon or competed with any remaining animals. Predation by foxes is a major reason why numbers declined and studies show that feral cats take a high proportion of juveniles. Competition with feral grazers like goats and rabbits, as well as domesticated stock, lowers the carrying capacity of the rock-wallabies’ habitat and further decreases population numbers.

Two exotic diseases also cause mortalities in this marsupial, including Toxoplasmosis that is carried by cats, and Hydatidosis with foxes, dogs or sheep as hosts. Historically, there was unrestricted hunting and thousands were shot for their fur and because rock wallabies were considered an agricultural pest.



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Habitat, Diet & Breeding:

Brush-tailed rock-wallabies live on cliffs and rocky escarpments in sclerophyll forest, where crevices, ledges, or caves provide protection from predators and the weather. They usually prefer rocky slopes which usually have a northerly aspect, so the rock-wallabies have ample opportunity to sun themselves during the day. They have been found to forage over a home range of about 15ha where they have a broad diet, eating a variety of plants including grasses, orchids, ferns, shrubs and trees, as well as flowers and some fruits. Capable of breeding all year round and after a gestation of 30 days, Brush-tailed rock-wallabies give birth to a single joey. It remains in the pouch for 6 – 7 months, suckling from 1 of 4 nipples. Young are sexually mature at 18 – 24 months, and can survive for up to 15 years.

Interesting Facts:

To assist in bounding over cliffs and rock escarpments, Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies have a granulated sole on their feet which gives them high levels of grip. When hopping, they use their long tail as a counter balance. If they are hopping up rocks, they arch their tail over their head, allowing them to lean forward, and when hopping down steep areas they will stretch their tails out behind them to stop them from falling.

The Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies at Secret Creek have had an interesting history of conservation. They were saved due to their Blue Mountains ancestors being transported to an island off New Zealand over 140 years ago. Here they were safe from predators and soon increased in numbers. Several years ago they were becoming pests so members of the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby Recovery team and current members of AEFI assisted in their repatriation to Australia. After being successfully bred for 3 years in Victoria, AEFI was able to safely transport a breeding colony to Secret Creek Sanctuary.



The Future:

The Secret Creek colony will be used primarily for education and research, helping us to learn more about the species ecology in its natural habitat as well as to inform people about the importance of bringing this beautiful little animal back to the wild.

How you can help:

You can support the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby conservation programs by the Australian Ecosystems Foundation Inc through animal sponsorship, donations, or visiting our reserves. Visit our website for more details.

www.ausecosystems.org.au