

Wildlife Fact Sheet # 3

Long-nosed Potoroo *Potorous tridactylus*

This small member of the Rat-kangaroo family has a distinctly long nose and broad head. With dark brown to grey fur, they stand about 20cm tall and tend to have a 4-legged pottering motion, but when startled, can hop on their hind legs for short burst. Unlike other kangaroos, Potoroos have a short tail which does not act as a counter balance for efficient hopping.



Conservation Status:

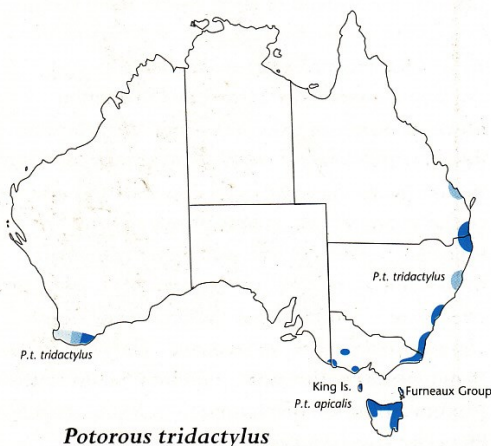
The federal conservation status listing for Long-nosed Potoroos is “Vulnerable” due to their populations fragmented and isolation from one another. The Long-nosed Potoroo has suffered greatly from land disturbance by livestock grazing and urban development along the coastal areas. Though some populations are stable, their isolation from other colonies puts them at risk from disease, fire, and climate change.



Habitat, Diet & Breeding:

Long-nosed Potoroos utilise a wide variety of habitats from wet forest to dry scrub, preferably where there is dense understorey. Being an omnivorous forager, Long-nosed Potoroos eat many types of roots, tubers, fruits, seeds, insects and larvae, all depending on seasonal availability. Studies have shown that fungi form a major part of their diet, eating over 50 different kinds of sporocarps - the fruits of underground fungi like truffles. These fungi live in association with the roots of various Eucalypts and Acacias, helping the trees to absorb more water and nutrients, and are sometimes essential for seedling survival. Potoroos therefore improve the health of the forest by helping to disperse a host of beneficial fungi spores as they move about.

Potoroos are normally solitary, but not territorial, with males occupying a fairly stable home range of 2ha and females around 1.5ha. There is usually a high degree of overlap in ranges, with regular sightings of males following females or females with a joey at foot.



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Breeding occurs all year round, peaking in late winter to early spring and again in summer. After a gestation period of 38 days, a single young is born where it suckles from one of four teats in the pouch for 120-130 days. Before being weaned at 170 days, the young continues to suckle while at foot. Sexual maturity is reached at one year and females' reproductive potential is 2.5 young per year. Potoroos are remarkably long-lived for their size, living on average 5-7 years in the wild.

Interesting Facts:

Potoroos are from an ancient branch in the evolution of kangaroos and represent a living fossil, having remained relatively unchanged for around 10 million years. All the larger kangaroos evolved from a common ancestor much like the Potoroo. The fossil record indicates Potoroos were much more common when Australia was covered by a dense temperate rainforest, as being small made it easier to move about. As Australia drifted north over the ages and the climate became drier, the vegetation changed and became more open. It was then a greater advantage for larger kangaroos as they could travel further to exploit more of the resources, more quickly. Thankfully, the Potoroos still occupy an important niche in the environment. As part of a contingent of herbivorous marsupials, they act as nature's gardeners by turning the leaf litter and surface soil over whilst foraging. This activity also aids the nutrient and water cycles, the formation of soil, and dispersal of beneficial soil microbes.



The future:

As Long-nosed Potoroos play a very important part in maintaining the health of the Australian environment, the Australian Ecosystems Foundation Inc is breeding the species within feral-free environments for eventual reintroduction into their former ranges.

How you can help:

You can support the Long-nosed Potoroo 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