

Western Ringtail Recovery Team
Annual Report

2002

By Kim Williams
for the
Western Ringtail Recovery Team

Summary

The Western Ringtail Possum Recovery Team, moribund for a number of years, was reformed in late 2002 in response to continuing development issues on the Swan Coastal Plain, concern over possible impacts of forest management practices and a need to conclude “unfinished business” left over from the previous team.

Immediate concerns/actions for the team are the development of a strategy to address the long term conservation requirements of the Busselton sub-population. This will need to include; analysis of adequacy of reservation, assessment of the level of risk posed by various threatening processes, mechanisms for influencing the outcomes of land use planning processes, formalising DCLM processes for dealing with displaced fauna and translocation requirements, and the exploration of funding mechanisms to conclude the experimental translocation work.

Introduction

The Western Ringtail Possum Recovery Team, inactive for a number of years was reformed in late 2002 in response to continuing development issues on the Swan Coastal Plain, concern over possible impacts of forest management practices and a need to conclude “unfinished business” left over from the previous team.

Specific high priority issues for the team are;

- review and update the IRP for the species,
- develop consistent and strategic methods to deal with land use planning and development proposals that may impact upon sub-populations of the species,
- review, and where required, complete/bring to a conclusion the experimental phase of translocation trials undertaken over the previous 10 years.

Team composition:

Kim Williams – R/Leader Nature Conservation, South West Region, Chair

Paul de Tores - Science Division,

Adrian Wayne - Science Division,

Barbara Jones - Ringtail Researcher and specialist Environmental Consultant

Keith Morris – Science Division

Ric How – WA Museum

Mark Pittavino - Blackwood District, Planning Officer

John Blyth - Director WATSCU

Peter Orell - Western Shield Zoologist, Nature Conservation Division

Roger Hearn - Regional Ecologist, Warren Region

Dave Mitchell - Regional Leader Nature Conservation, Swan Region

Peter Collins - Nature Conservation Officer, South Coast Region

Kirrily White – Environmental Officer, Shire of Busselton

Beth Hastie - Volunteer Carer FAWNA (Fostering Awareness for Wildlife Needing Aid)

John Blyth advised that Nicky Marlow will join the team during 2003 as his representative. Kirrily White resigned from the Busselton Shire in late December – a replacement will be sought.

The new team met once during 2002, the inaugural meeting being held on 6th Nov at which overviews of species distribution and conservation status, the results of 10 years of experimental translocation and an overview of land use planning processes were presented. A sub team was formed to investigate technical aspects of the translocation results with the aim of identifying what further work is required to conclude this process. A second sub team tasked with clarifying the likely number and scale of development proposals predicted in the Busselton area over the next few years.

A special meeting was called in Jan 2003 to familiarise the team with 3 examples of different types of development proposals in the Busselton area.

Goals for 2003

- 1) Develop a strategy to address the long term conservation requirements of the Busselton sub-population. This will include; analysis of adequacy of reservation, mechanisms to assess the level of risk of threatening processes for influencing the outcomes of land use planning processes, formalising DCLM processes for dealing with displaced fauna and translocation requirements, exploring mechanisms for 'offset funding' (at least cost recovery). The resulting strategic document may have application to other populations (Albany).
- 2) Re-invigorate the relationship and processes for managing volunteer wildlife carers who specialise in Ringtail Possums.
- 3) Commence review and updating of the Interim Recovery Plan for the species.

Recovery Actions (contained in the 1999 IRP)

3.1 Conservation of WRP in public lands managed by CALM.

WRP conservation requirements are routinely taken into consideration in the management of DCLM lands. Disturbance activities such as fuel reduction burning and recreation site developments are routinely modified where practicable to achieve desirable WRP outcomes. Similarly, fox baiting operations include a number of WRP populations. Ongoing work by Science division is investigating the potential impacts of forest management activities on WRP.

3.2 Minimising impacts of land developments

Region and District staff have a long history of actively negotiating with development proponents to maximise the outcomes for conservation within their projects. These staff are currently working jointly with shire and planning agencies to develop amendments to various town planning schemes to assist with the recognition and protection of WRP conservation requirements within developments.

3.3 Management of "derelict" ringtails

This action was formally addressed during the year via an amendment to the CALM Act ??????. JB ring Peter Mawson In conjunction with Wildlife Branch development of a practical implementation process will be undertaken in 2003.

3.4 Translocation

One translocation was undertaken during 2002, of animals displaced by development, to Karakamia Sanctuary. It is of note that this was undertaken by an approved environmental consultant funded through the development process.

The three Science division experimental translocation projects have not been active for a few years, though monitoring has been maintained at Yalgorup and to a lesser extent at Leschenault Peninsula. The Leschenault project was thought to have been approaching a successful conclusion, but during the most recent 2 year period between monitorings the population appears to have dramatically declined, possibly associated with a 3 month gap in the monthly baiting program. Further field work is likely to be required to investigate the reasons for, and amelioration of, this decline.

3.5 Education, liaison and communication

While principally an ongoing task, the main component of this action relates to the production of a 'living with possums' brochure. This has been completed and circulated by the community wildlife carers group FAWNA.