



Mounds have been found on slopes such as this.

Research

HAMERSLEY is working closely with the Department of Conservation and Land Management to ensure that management procedures appropriate to sustaining viable populations of the Pebble-mound Mouse can be developed. Research commissioned by Hamersley is being directed towards providing the fundamental knowledge on the species' distribution and ecology required for management planning. This programme is also co-operating

with research being undertaken by the WA Museum by providing specimens from locations in the Pilbara where populations of the mouse are found.

At the conclusion of these programmes, not only will we be better able to care for the future of the Pebble-mound Mouse but there will be a general improvement in the understanding of the conservation of small mammals in arid environments.



**HAMERSLEY IRON
PTY. LIMITED**

ACN 004 558 276

P.O. Box 42
GPO Perth WA 6001

The Pebble-mound Mouse

(Pseudomys chapmani)



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A Pebble-mound Mouse at an entrance to its mound.

Background

AT PRESENT, little is known about the Pebble-mound Mouse, *Pseudomys chapmani*, and its life history. Only recognised as a distinct species in 1980, populations appear to be confined to the Pilbara Region. The classification of the Pebble-mound Mouse as a Schedule 1 species (ie, rare or likely to become extinct) under the Wildlife Conservation Act results partly from these factors.

Description

The Pebble-mound Mouse is a true rodent with a typical mouse-like appearance. It has a body of light brown hair, fawn sides and back and a darker head. The paws, throat and belly are a cream-white colour. The length of the head and body combined is about 60mm, and the tail is longer than this - about 75mm. The mouse weighs about 10g. It had originally been distinguished from a

similar native mouse, the Sandy Inland Mouse, *Pseudomys hermannsburgensis*, only by its shorter tail, ears and feet and past reports have frequently confused the two. Recent work by the WA Museum has given a description of differences in the pads of the hind feet which provide a ready means of identifying *P. chapmani* in the field.

Habitat

Typical Pebble-mound Mouse habitat occurs in spinifex grassland on gravelly spurs or lower ridge slopes. Mounds have also been found on ridge tops, and flatter lower areas. Occasional Eucalypts or scattered shrubs are often present.

Range

While mounds have been recorded over a large area of WA, as far south as the Murchison district, pebble-mound

mice have been trapped only in the Pilbara Region. Initial thoughts that the mouse was confined only to a small section of the Central Pilbara have been disproven, with more recent research showing that they are present from the Chichester Range in the north-west to the Rudall River in the east. So far, pebble-mound mice have not been trapped south of the Hamersley Range.

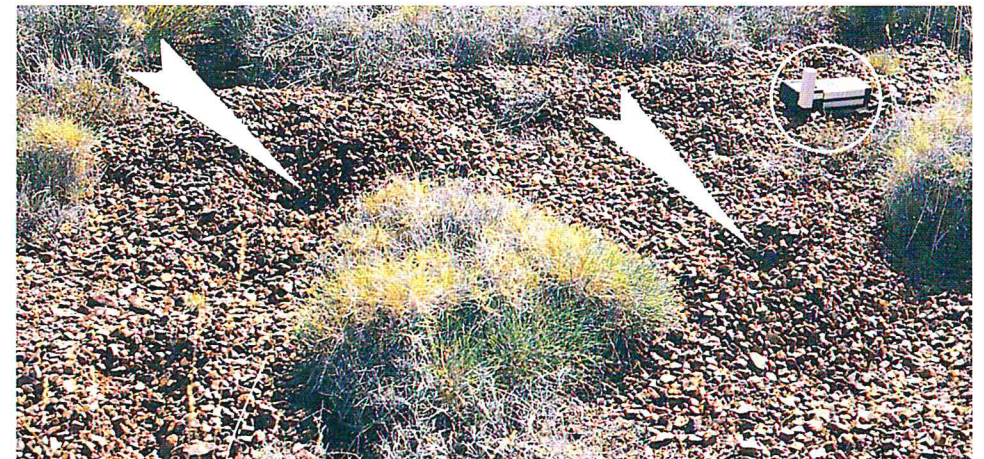
Food

The Pebble-mound Mouse is known to eat seeds of native grasses, herbs and shrubs as well as plant material in general and insects when they can be obtained.

Mounds

The Pebble-mound Mouse constructs mounds above ground using its mouth and feet to move the pebbles which may weigh as much as half its body weight.

Mounds are usually around 2m diameter but this may vary from 0.5m to 5m and reach up to 0.5m above the surface. Burrows beneath the surface can extend for several metres and to a depth of 30 or 40cm.



Mounds and their entrances (arrowed) are often hard to spot among the spinifex. The instrument circled provides a satellite fix of the mound's location.

Closed entrances to mounds do not mean that they are unoccupied. It is thought that the mouse closes the entrance with pebbles to keep out predators. Even so, reptiles have been found in mounds that have appeared to be occupied. Active mounds have raised "volcano" structures on them.

Breeding

The Pebble-mound Mouse is not a marsupial but a placental mammal like other rodents. Although little is known of the breeding patterns of the Pebble-mound Mouse and what influences it, present information suggests that breeding may occur during several months of the year and follows quickly after good rains.

Numbers of young born are uncertain but litters of up to four have been recorded.

Predators

There is little information at present about the mouse's predators. However they probably include snakes, goannas, quolls, birds of prey and some feral animals.