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## WESTERN RING-TAILED POSSUM

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Pseudocheirus occidentalis*

**IDENTIFICATION:** Usually very dark brown above, occasionally dark grey, with cream or grey fur below. Ears short and rounded. Tail slender, strongly prehensile with terminal white tip of variable length.

Head and body length 300–400 mm, Tail length 300–400 mm

Weight 0.82–1.13 kg

**HABITAT:** The Western Ringtail Possum was once located in a variety of habitats including, Coastal Peppermint, Coastal Peppermint -Tuart, Jarrah-Marri associations, Sheoak woodland, and eucalypt woodland and mallee. Present populations mostly inhabit Coastal Peppermint -Tuart associations from Bunbury to Albany. Along the Swan Coastal Plain near Busselton the highest densities occur in habitats with dense, relatively lush vegetation.

**DIET:** Diet is variable . Peppermint (*Agonis flexuosa*) leaves form the basis of the Western Ringtail Possum diet in coastal areas, but when unavailable, the dominant myrtaceous species are preferred. In the inland forest, Jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*) and Marri (*Corymbia calophylla*) are the main food source. In urban areas such as Bunbury and Busselton, Ringtails will often feed on a variety of garden species including rose bush leaves and flowers, and a variety of cultivated fruits.

**STATUS:** Vulnerable. Once widely distributed throughout the south-western forests of Western Australia from 120 kilometres south-east of Geraldton to the southern edge of the Nullarbor Plain, with inland records as far as Tutaning Nature Reserve but in decline since around 1909. The pattern of decline has been local and patchy. Local extinctions have been most extensive in inland areas, occurring as recently as 1950-1970. Most populations are now restricted to near coastal areas of peppermint (*Agonis flexuosa*) woodland and peppermint - tuart associations from the Australind/Eaton area to the Waychinicup National Park. It is relatively common and abundant in a small part of the lower Collier River valley and the proposed Perup Nature Reserve and surrounding forest blocks near Manjimup. Viable groups also live in some parts of urban Busselton.

