

DESERT DREAMING

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The Central Australian deserts have suffered massive and sudden loss of mammal fauna unparalleled in any relatively undisturbed area anywhere else in the world. Some 90 per cent of mammal species with an adult body weight between 35 and 5500 grams are either extinct or endangered. These declines and extinctions occurred relatively recently, most species persisted until 30-50 years ago.

Several theories have been advanced for this sudden and massive loss of mammal fauna:

- i) Change in the fire regime due to the depopulation of the deserts by Aborigines.
- ii) Predation by introduced predators.
- iii) Competition with introduced herbivores.
- iv) Disease.

This project aims to test these hypothesis by experimental re-introduction and monitoring of two former inhabitants of the desert, the Golden Bandicoot *Isoodon auratus* and the Burrowing Bettong *Bettongia lesueur* from Barrow Island.

Animals have been taken from wild populations on Barrow Island to an area in the Gibson Desert in Western Australia where fire management and predator and rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* control is being carried out.

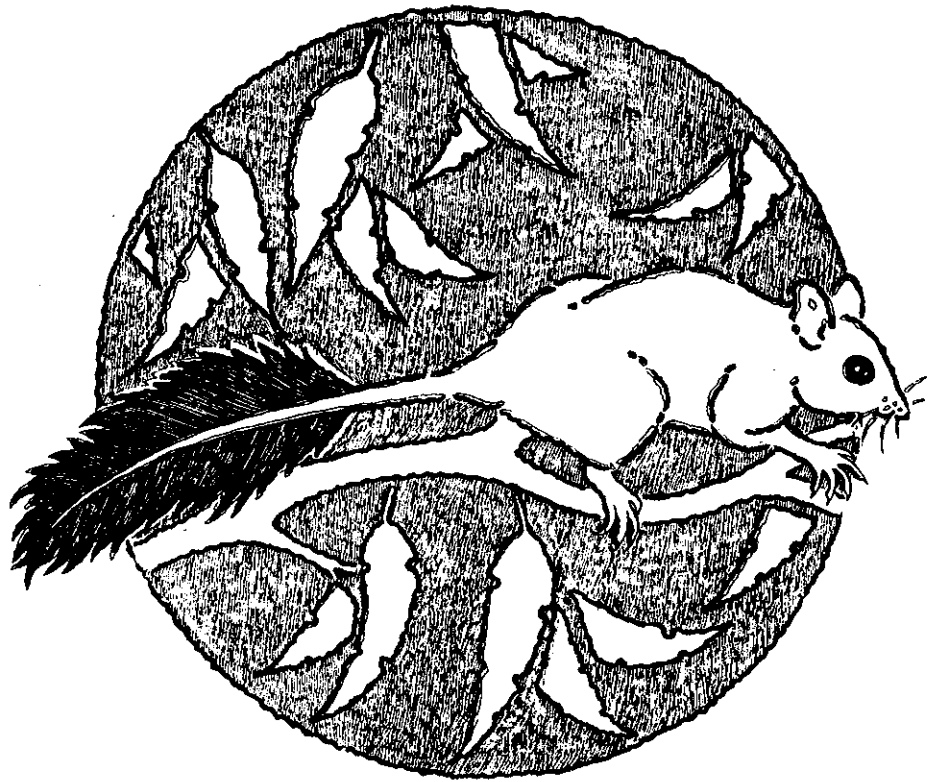
Preliminary results are presented and discussed.

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**CONFERENCE
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