

The use of Western Australian islands for fauna reconstruction

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Fauna translocation has become an important management tool for reversing the decline of many native species, and within Western Australia, translocations to islands have been more successful than those to the mainland or to fenced enclosures. Most of the 12 translocations of native fauna to WA islands have involved single species with the primary aim of improving the conservation status of the species. The reintroduction of a suite of “ecosystem engineers” to assist in restoring island ecological function has been promoted as an additional benefit of fauna translocations. While there have been programs underway for several years to reintroduce (and introduce) native mammals to WA islands, it is only more recently that the opportunity to reintroduce several species has arisen. The Montebello Islands group, off the Pilbara coast, formerly had three mammal species and two bird species that went extinct following the introduction of feral cats, black rats and atomic explosions. Two mammal species and two bird species have been returned successfully to the island, and another mammal species will be re-introduced in 2018/19 to complete this fauna reconstruction project. Planning is now underway for a more ambitious island fauna reconstruction project. Over the next 13 years, 12 species of mammal and one bird species will be translocated to Dirk Hartog Island in Shark Bay. In addition to improving the conservation status of several threatened species, and returning ecosystem processes to help restore soil profiles and promote vegetation regrowth, this project offers unique opportunities for conservation research and ecotourism.



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