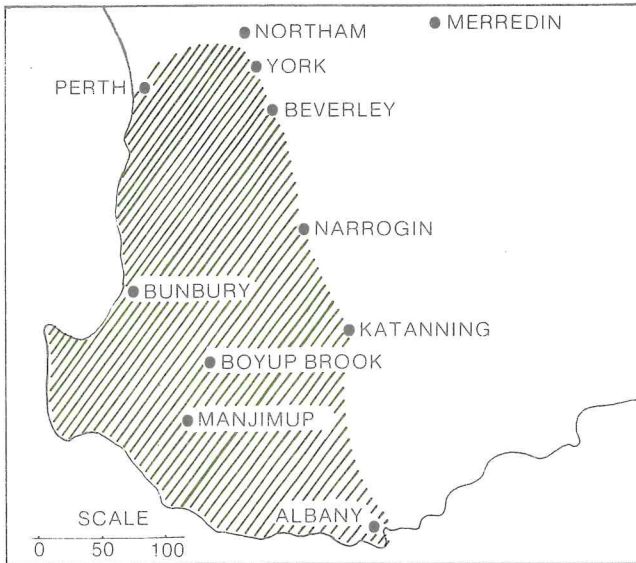


LIBRARY

Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions

This PDF has been created for digital preservation. It may be used for research but is not suitable for other purposes. It may be superseded by a more current version or just be out-of-date and have no relevance to current situations.



Distribution of Wambengers in the South West

Distribution

Distribution of the wambenger ranges from Perth to Albany, and from the West Coast to the Great Southern Highway. It previously occurred in parts of the Wheatbelt but is now extinct there. It also occurs in the extreme north of W.A. (the Kimberley) and in parts of south-eastern South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and in Queensland in the south-east and the tip of Cape York Peninsula.

The northern wambenger is smaller than the southern form, and is a paler smokey grey colour. It is recognised as a different subspecies.

Wambengers prefer open dry forest with little ground cover but they have been found living in varying habitats with rainfall between 500-2000 mm.

Breeding

During the breeding season in winter, an adult male will cover a range of 80-90 ha. Copulation lasts for several hours, and birth occurs after a gestation period of about 30 days. Although the female has 8 nipples, more than 8 young may be born. Instead of a pouch, an area of soft tissue surrounding the nipples covered by long sparse

hairs enlarges rapidly during gestation to protect the young. Attachment to the nipples lasts for about 40 days, and weaning occurs at about 5 months. Some young die during lactation and early independence. Although weaned, the young share the maternal nest until the next breeding season. Males die soon after one mating season, whilst the female may survive to breed a second time.

Feeding

Mainly carnivorous, the wambenger eats spiders, centipedes, nectar, birds, house mice and other small vertebrates. Early settler's poultry provided some easy prey for the wambenger. Recently one was known to kill thirteen pigeons (from which blood was sucked but no flesh eaten) in one night.

Predation

Little is known of its predators. Domestic and feral cats often kill wambengers, but do not eat them. On many occasions, one has been brought home by a cat and in one instance, four in one week.

Further Information

The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) is responsible for the protection and management of native flora and fauna throughout W.A.

CALM wildlife officers or any of our offices are happy to answer any questions you may have. Write to:

Department of Conservation and Land Management
P.O. Box 104, Como. (09) 367 0333.



Department of
CONSERVATION & LAND MANAGEMENT
50 Hayman Road, Como, WA 6152
P.O. Box 104, Como, WA 6152
(09) 367 0333

1987





Description

The wambenger (*Phascogale tapoatafa*) (also known as the brush-tailed phascogale) is a small rat-sized nocturnal marsupial which looks like a squirrel. It is uniform dark-grey on its head, back and flanks, with a pale cream belly. The large ears appear hairless. The tail is long and the end half is covered with a silky brush of long black hairs, up to 40 mm long (hence "brush-tailed"). When the animal moves, its tail is held horizontal. An adult's head and body is approximately 200 mm long with a tail 190 mm long.

Behaviour

Being arboreal, the wambenger climbs with great agility either upwards or downwards with its body pressed flat against the trunk of the tree; it also runs quite freely, with short bursts of speed, along the open forest floor.

During the winter of 1983, one animal was radio-tracked at the Perup Forest Ecology Centre 50 km east of Manjimup. This study showed that for such a small mammal, the wambenger covers very long distances on its nightly foraging expeditions (4-5 km), spending most of its time searching the edges of gullies and swamps. Whilst feeding at night, the animal returned occasionally to a nest.

Nesting

During the day the wambenger sleeps in a nest made in a hollow of a tree, lined with leaves or shredded bark. Wambengers have sometimes used bird study nesting boxes positioned on the side of trees, six metres above the ground.