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WOYLIE



BRUSH-TAILED BETTONG

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Bettongia penicillata ogilbyi*

IDENTIFICATION: The Woylie is a small nocturnal rat-like kangaroo, yellowish grey above, paler below with a black crest on the tail. When flushed from the nest, it bounds with head held low, back arched and tail almost straight. Woylies have strongly clawed forefeet, used for digging for food and nest making.

Head and body length 300–380 mm

Tail length 290–360 mm

Weight 1.1–1.6 kg

HABITAT: Open forest and woodland with a low understorey of tussock grasses or woody scrub. Formerly occurred in a wider range of habitats including spinifex hummock grasslands.

DIET: Consists largely of the fruiting bodies of underground fungi, supplemented by bulbs, tubers, seeds, insects and resin. The proportion of fungal material in the diet is greatest in summer and autumn. Fruiting bodies from underground fungi are considered to be the major food item throughout the year at Perup in Western Australia.

STATUS: Conservation Dependent. Evidence suggests that woylies were once widespread and abundant across Australia south of the tropics, including the central deserts in central Western Australia and into the southern region of the Northern Territory but numbers and geographic range have decreased dramatically during this century. Woylie populations have been re-established by translocation at numerous sites throughout Western Australia as well as in South Australia and New South Wales. Woylie numbers are recovering or being maintained in areas with fox control.

INTERESTING FACTS: Research indicates that the woylie does not eat any green plant material, nor does it drink but obtains its water from its food. Individuals may live for between four and six years. Their tail is prehensile (able to grasp things) and is used to carry nesting materials. In 1996, the woylie became the first mammal in Australia to be deleted from lists of threatened species as a result of conservation actions.

