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# AGILE WALLABY



Adult female

(continued over)

# AGILE WALLABY *(continued)*

**T**HE AGILE or Sandy wallaby (*Macropus agilis*) is found in the Kimberley region of W.A., parts of the Northern Territory and the Cape York peninsular of Queensland.

It mainly lives close to rivers with grassy plains and scattered woodland. Agile wallabies are more closely related to the large kangaroos such as the Euro, Red kangaroo and Western grey than to other W.A. wallabies, except the Western bush wallaby and Tammar.

The population of Agile wallabies in the Kimberleys fluctuates widely and may increase to plague proportions. When this happens they compete with stock and damage pastures by selective grazing which may eventually contribute to soil erosion.

Wallaby numbers have increased in some parts of the Kimberley as a result of the changes effected by European settlement, in particular, an increase in the number of permanent water points and the control of predators, mainly dingoes.

Agile wallabies are protected animals in W.A., because of their pest potential they are also declared animals.

A management programme has been drawn up for Agile wallabies jointly by the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife and the Agriculture Protection Board. This may be revised at intervals in

the light of current population estimates. The aim of the programme is to manage the wallaby population so that it is not endangered as a species while at the same time preventing unacceptable damage to the rangelands.

## **Description:**

Agile wallabies are golden to sandy brown in colour, paler underneath with a distinct white stripe on the cheeks and down the side of the hips.

## **Reproduction:**

Wallabies are marsupials, therefore they do not develop a placenta. The young of Agile wallabies are born after a short gestation period of 29 days while still at a very early stage of their development. At birth they climb from the birth canal to the mother's pouch and attach themselves to a teat. After about 6 to 6½ months, they begin to leave the pouch for increasing periods of time, until they are no longer dependent on it at about 7 to 7½ months. They continue to suckle from outside the pouch for up to three months or more.

Agile wallaby females may hold an embryo dormant for over six months. Development is recommenced when a joey is lost or the previous joey is nearly ready to leave the pouch. The female comes on heat and mates again soon after the previous joey has been born. Under good conditions, a female may have a joey still suckling at foot, another

in the pouch and a dormant embryo. This complex reproduction system is an adaption to periodic droughts. Under dry conditions dormant embryos recommence development to take the place of joeys which die. Adverse conditions may cause the reproductive cycle to cease altogether, only to resume shortly afterwards.

## **Environment:**

Agile wallabies survive high temperatures by the use of shade and by avoiding activity during the day. They regulate their body temperature largely by panting and by licking their forelegs.

## **Food:**

Wallabies have only a single stomach but, as in ruminants, bacterial fermentation within the stomach is important to digestion of fibre. They use protein and energy efficiently and are well adapted to survival on low protein feed.

## **Ecology:**

Apart from man, the only important predator of kangaroos and wallabies is the dingo. Controlling the dingo population appears to permit numbers to build up more rapidly when seasons are favourable.

*For up-to-date information on kangaroo and wallaby management programmes contact the Agriculture Protection Board, Jarrah Road, South Perth, 6151. Telephone (09) 367 0111 or any country office of the APB or Department of Fisheries and Wildlife.*