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Agriculture Protection Board
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WESTERN GREY KANGAROO



Adult female

(continued over)

WESTERN GREY KANGAROO

THE WESTERN grey kangaroo (*Macropus fuliginosus*) is commonly found in woodland, heath, open forest, coastal scrub and mallee country in the south of the continent from the south west of Western Australia to the south western corner of New South Wales.

The Western grey kangaroo was an extremely abundant animal in many parts of south western Western Australia at the time of first European settlement. It is still abundant wherever its natural habitat has not been disturbed. However, where land has been cleared for agriculture the remaining areas of bush are frequently inadequate to maintain the previous kangaroo population which consequently grazes on surrounding crops and pastures. Damage to crops and pastures is most prevalent where areas of bush are surrounded by farm land. However, in some areas Western grey kangaroos appear to be living entirely on agriculture land.

Kangaroos are protected animals in W.A. Because of their pest potential Western grey kangaroos are also declared animals in Western Australia, under the Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act. Kangaroo management programmes have been drawn up jointly by the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife and the Agriculture Protection Board.

The management plan is revised at intervals in the light of current population estimates and reports of damage to agriculture. The aim is to ensure that the Western grey kangaroo is not endangered as a species, while at the same time allowing farmers to protect their livelihood.

Description:

The Western grey kangaroo is light grey-brown to chocolate in colour. The sexes are similar except that males are larger. They travel with head held high, the forequarters low and the tail curved upwards.

Reproduction:

Kangaroos are marsupials, therefore they do not develop a placenta. The young of Western grey kangaroos are born after a gestation period of about 30 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 eight and a half months they begin to leave the pouch for increasing periods of time, until they are no longer dependent on it at around 10½ months of age. They continue to suckle from outside the pouch for up to six months. The Western grey kangaroo female comes on heat and mates again only after the previous joey has left the pouch.

Environment:

Western grey kangaroos 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:

Kangaroos have only a single stomach but as in ruminants, bacterial fermentation within the stomach is important to digestion of fibre. Kangaroos use protein and energy efficiently and are well adapted to existence on low protein feed. They are grazers eating native grasses and grass-like plants as well as browsing on some native shrubs including poison plants. They have developed a considerable tolerance of sodium fluoroacetate; the poison found naturally in many native plants.

Ecology:

Before European settlement dingoes and man were the major predators of Western grey kangaroos. This century man has become the major predator while introduced foxes account for some joeys. In recent years the curtailment of control activities may have led to a build up of kangaroo numbers in some areas and seasons.

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