

# Potoroo rediscovered at Two Peoples Bay

A SMALL marsupial thought extinct for the past 125 years has been rediscovered at Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve east of Albany.

The animal, Gilbert's potoroo, - a small rat kangaroo - was last recorded between Albany and the Pallinup River in 1869.

The find was made by University of Western Australia Department of Zoology students Elizabeth Sinclair and Adrian Wayne.

CALM scientists positively identified the animals after Elizabeth and Adrian had trapped an adult female with a pouch young and a juvenile male. Two further adult males were trapped later.

"The rediscovery of a species that has eluded science for more than 120 years is remarkable in itself," Environment Minister Kevin Minson said.

"But it also clearly demonstrates that when fox numbers are brought under control, we can prevent small native mammal species from going extinct."

Elizabeth, a Ph D student, is studying genetic variation in quokkas and has been searching for populations along the State's south coast, including Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve.

There had been several "signs" of animals but despite intensive searches

and trapping, no quokkas were captured.

But two unusual animals found in the traps could not be identified as anything that had been recorded in the reserve.

Elizabeth and Adrian discussed the animals with CALM officers Alan Danks and Leigh Whisson and after measurements were taken, it became clear that the species was likely to be the long lost Gilbert's potoroo.

Tony Start, Andrew Burbidge and Norm McKenzie from CALM's Wildlife Research Centre at Woodvale went to the reserve armed with material from the WA Museum's collection. That material helped confirm the identification.

Gilbert's potoroo has been considered a subspecies of the long-nosed potoroo of south-eastern Australia and Tasmania. The rediscovery now allows genetic comparisons to be made to see if the WA animals should be recognised as a separate species.

The discovery of Gilbert's potoroo by Europeans was in 1840 at King George's Sound by John Gilbert who collected mammals and birds in WA for the prominent naturalist John Gould.

Gilbert later noted that he had not heard of the species being found in



*Gilbert's potoroo.* Photo by Jiri Lochman/CALM

any part of the "colony" other than King George's Sound.

Apart from Gilbert's specimens, the only other ones were collected for museums in 1866 and 1869. These had been collected in the Albany-Pallinup River area.

In 1975, the former Department of Fisheries and Wildlife began an extensive search for the animal and its relation, the broad-faced potoroo - also

thought extinct.

The search included Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve but no evidence of the species was found.

Tony Start, who was part of the search, said sub-fossil remains of the animal had been found in a number of coastal caves along the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Ridge, including Mammoth Cave. A bone fragment also had been found in a sand dune between Broke Inlet and

Windy Harbour.

CALM has controlled foxes inside the nature reserve since 1988 which has led to an increase in populations of other small mammals such as southern brown bandicoots.

It is now thought that Gilbert's potoroo may have survived in such small numbers that they previously were undetected but fox control has allowed them to increase

to levels where they now have turned up in traps set for other species such as quokkas.

Fox control in other parts of the south-west such as Dryandra, Batalling, Julimar and Perup, has resulted in an upsurge in native wildlife numbers.

CALM's Threatened Species and Communities Unit and the Science and Information Division now are working on plans to

find out how widespread the potoroos are and what conservation action was needed.

It is not the first time Two Peoples Bay has been the site of a rediscovered animal. The noisy scrub-bird was rediscovered there in 1961 after having been last recorded 72 years previously. It was this find that led to the nature reserve being established in 1967.

Mr Minson said it was remarkable that potoroos had been found in the same area as the noisy scrub-bird.

"Two Peoples Bay is an amazing haven for thought-to-be-extinct species," he said.

"CALM's management of the reserve to control fox numbers and protect large areas from wildfires, a strategy initiated for managing scrub-bird habitat, no doubt has had some more recent influence on the potoroos' survival," he said.

**Roo-note:** The rediscovery of the Gilbert's potoroo has its irony. Elizabeth Sinclair was searching for quokkas but found the potoroo instead. Twenty years earlier, Tony Start searched the south coast, including Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve, for potoroos but could only turn up quokkas.



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↑ PHOTO: JOHN WATSON

Minister for the Environment, Cheryl Edwards, meets  
Gilbert's potaroo, presumed extinct until rediscovered  
at Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve near Albany  
in December 1994.

Gilbert's potaroo is ..... etc.