



ENDANGERED!



THE WOYLIE

While once widespread and abundant across much of southern Australia west of the Great Dividing Range, the woylie, or brush-tailed bettong, (*Bettongia penicillata*) now survives naturally in only a handful of isolated reserves in the south-west of Western Australia. Clearing of habitat for agriculture, the impact of grazing stock and predation by foxes have all contributed to the species' decline.

The last remaining natural populations of woylies in WA are in the Perup and Dryandra Forests and the Tutanning Nature Reserve. A group reintroduced into Batalling Forest in 1983 has become established and appears to be expanding into neighbouring areas. Another group introduced into Boyagin Nature Reserve in 1992 is increasing in numbers. Woylies have also been reintroduced into parts of their former range in South Australia.

The preferred habitat of surviving woylie populations is open forest or

woodland, with a clumped, low understorey of tussock grass or woody scrub. This is probably more a reflection of predator avoidance strategies than an indication of ideal habitat, as woylies once occurred abundantly in quite open spinifex grasslands through southern and central Australia. Their continued presence in reserves such as Perup, Dryandra and Tutanning could be partly due to the presence of thickets of poison bush (*Gastrolobium* spp.). These plants provide shelter and reduce the impact of foxes, possibly through secondary poisoning. Nevertheless, numbers were declining and woylies almost vanished from their last strongholds in the South West, only recovering where fox control programs have been implemented.

A recovery program, supported by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) and the Australian Nature Conservation

Agency (ANCA), is under way. Fixed trapping transects have been established to monitor any changes in these known populations, and trapping surveys have been conducted to determine the extent of the species range outside these known areas. Preliminary evidence suggests that woylies are expanding out of the Perup Forest both west towards Kingston Forest and south to Lake Muir, and may also be expanding west from where they were first reintroduced into Batalling.

The commencement of widespread fox control in South West forests provides an opportunity to increase the woylie's range markedly during the next few years. While still considered endangered, the outlook for this lively little macropod is cautiously optimistic.

by Jackie Courtenay

Main photo - Tony Friend
Inset - Jiri Lochman

LANDSCOPE

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Yellow-billed spoonbills have visited Star Swamp for the last three years. They sift small crustaceans from the shallow water. The story of this suburban wetland is told on page 45.



A marine park is proposed to adjoin the Prince Regent Nature Reserve. The Complex Coast (page 49) discusses the need for integrated management of land and sea around our coast.



Found all over Australia, short-beaked echidnas are one of two Australian egg-laying mammals. They still occur around Perth. See page 18.



About a quarter of Stirling Range National Park has been closed to protect its unique flora from dieback disease. Turn to page 10 to discover these plants on the edge.



The orange-bellied frog is part of the South West's fine-scale richness and variety. Find out more about these fascinating creatures on page 35.

C O V E R

The coral gardens in the sheltered lagoons of the Rowley Shoals contain dozens of different varieties of staghorn coral and are inhabited by a huge range of colourful reef fish. See 'Coral for Keeps' on page 28.

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