



ENDANGERED



THEVENARD ISLAND MOUSE

The Thevenard Island mouse is found only on one Pilbara island near Onslow, where it shares its environment with a tourist resort and an oil processing and storage facility.

Hiding behind the name of *Leggadina forresti*, a native mouse sparsely scattered throughout the deserts of arid and semi-arid Australia, the Thevenard Island mouse remained incognito until 1987, when its larger body size led to its taxonomic status being questioned by Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) scientists. Subsequent genetic research showed that it is actually more closely related to another short-tailed mouse, *Leggadina lakedownensis*, a species originally described from Cape York, Queensland. At present, the Thevenard Island mouse is thought to be a new subspecies found only on one island!

Species of short-tailed mice, as their common name suggests, are easily distinguished from other native mice by having a tail that is shorter than the head and body. Little is

known about the biology or ecology of these seldom-seen mice. They are usually found on sandy soils vegetated with desert scrub and grasses. Like other arid-adapted rodents, the Thevenard Island mouse avoids the hot daytime temperatures by being nocturnal and by sheltering in burrows, where temperatures are significantly lower than above ground. Preliminary research on its water-conserving abilities suggests the mouse can extract sufficient moisture from its food and does not require free water.

Why is this native mouse threatened? Until recently, it lived on Thevenard Island without other mammalian competitors. When house mice were accidentally introduced in 1986, concern for the native mice became an issue, especially when the house mice began their characteristic plague

cycle following summer rainfall. The perceived biological similarities of both species, and the known success of house mice in colonising many types of habitat, suggest that a poison-baiting program would not be a feasible option for control. With the assistance of CALM, the Australian Nature Conservation Agency, West Australian Petroleum, and the University of Western Australia, a PhD study is now under way to examine the requirements of both the Thevenard Island mouse and the house mouse on Thevenard Island, and to develop a means of selectively controlling or eradicating the house mouse. Interim Wildlife Management Guidelines have been prepared by CALM to guide the native mouse's conservation. Actions to be carried out under the Guidelines include a translocation to another island to secure the subspecies against any catastrophic event.

The future of the Thevenard Island mouse now rests with selective control of house mice and a successful translocation.

By Dorian Moro
Photos by
Jiri Lochman & Dorian Moro

LANDSCOPE

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The threatened Wyalkatchem foxglove is being given a helping hand by scientists from CALM and Kings Park and Botanic Garden (see page 17).



This nesting pair of splendid fairy-wrens is one of the many 'Birds of the Stirling Range' (see page 36).



WA Goldfields timbers are fast becoming recognised as prime materials for producing world-class musical instruments. See 'Musical Timbers' on page 48.



A new CALM book, Dive & Snorkel Sites in Western Australia, will encourage novice divers and snorkellers to explore the rich and diverse coastline of WA. See 'Secrets of the Sea' on page 10.



The common rock-rat, photographed here in the Kimberley, has recently been recorded in the Kennedy Range National Park. See page 28 for a profile of this wonderful wilderness area.

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COVER


The brilliant purple flowers of the twining fringed lily (*Thysanotus patersonii*) entwined around the burnt stem of a slender banksia (*B. attenuata*). See 'After the Burn' on page 21.

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