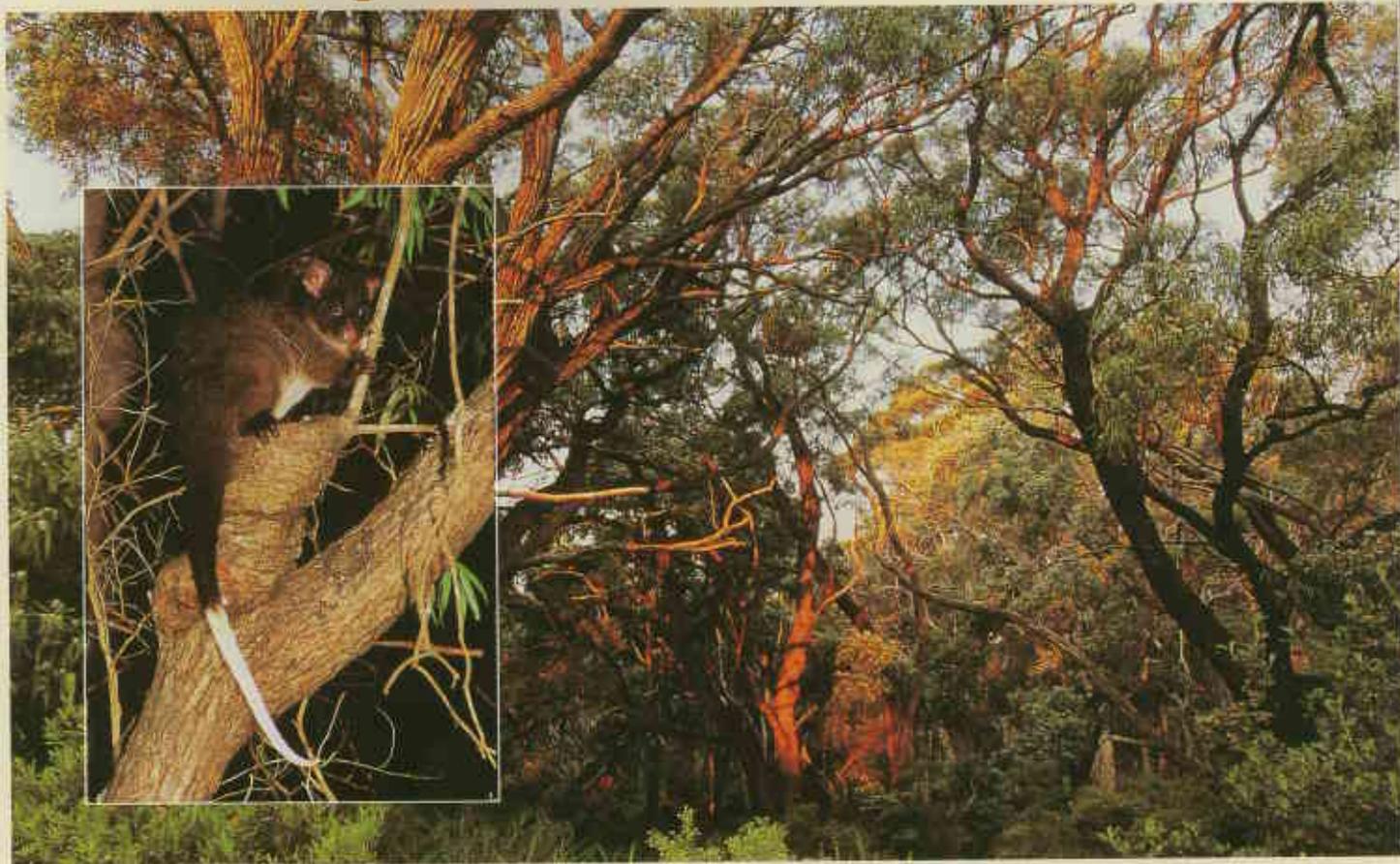


endangered

by Jeff Richardson



Western ringtail possum

The western ringtail possum (*Pseudocheirus occidentalis*) or ngwayir is only found in the south-west of Western Australia. Ngwayir is the Nyoongar name for this species. This smallish marsupial (about the size of a house cat) is usually dark brown above (but sometimes grey or black) with cream or light grey fur on its belly, chest and throat. The western ringtail spends almost all of its time in trees and shrubs and rarely comes to the ground. The characteristic bare skin on the underside of the prehensile (grasping) tail assists in this tree-dwelling lifestyle.

At the time of European settlement, the western ringtail had a patchy occurrence west of a line drawn between Perth and Pallinup River (west of Bremer Bay), with some additional

populations in the Wheatbelt (including Tutanning and Pingelly). Now it is only found in the far south-west, mainly on the coast and near coastal areas between Mandurah and Waychinicup National Park, but also in areas near Manjimup and adjacent forest blocks. The possums live in a range of habitats, but mainly inhabit peppermint (*Agonis flexuosa*) forests and jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*) and marri (*Corymbia calophylla*) woodland.

Due to the contraction of its range and the continued decline of the species, it is recognised both internationally and within Australia as vulnerable to extinction, and is listed in State legislation as 'rare or likely to become extinct'. To address this decline and improve the conservation status of the species, a new recovery plan is being prepared by the Department of Conservation and Land Management, with funding

assistance from the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Heritage.

The recovery plan identifies all the known threats and outlines actions for recovery of the species. Major threats include land clearing and incompatible land-use, as well as fox and cat predation. As many populations of the western ringtail are on land that is outside the State's conservation estate, recovery will be no easy task. For recovery actions to succeed, a range of land managers and landholders will need to work together to ensure that significant areas of habitat on land within and outside the conservation estate are managed for the western ringtail possum.

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