

DIRK HARTOG ISLAND FAUNA RECONSTRUCTION

by Keith Morris

Dirk Hartog Island National Park is WA's largest island and the focus of a program to restore it to its condition prior to European arrival, when a number of native animals roamed free. The first stage of the project has been focussed on removal of sheep and feral goats, and eradication of feral cats, which is essential before reintroduction of native animals. Removal of sheep and goats, and weed control, is also enabling recovery of the vegetation.

DBCA scientists and Midwest regional staff have assessed the suitability of the island habitat for the species to be reintroduced, and have determined the best populations from which to source these animals, based on genetic diversity, abundance, logistics and population sustainability criteria. They have also developed protocols and guidelines for reintroduction of animals to the island, which can be applied elsewhere.

Rufous hare-wallabies and banded hare wallabies are the first animals to be translocated to the island and monitoring of the animals is showing good results, with the presence of pouch young indicating they are breeding. Establishment of these new populations will improve the conservation status of these species, and provide an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the interactions of rare mammal species with each other and their habitat.

This project is being carried out with assistance from Dirk Hartog Island Eco-Lodge operators Kieran and Tory Wardle, the Shire of Shark Bay, the Malgana people, the local community and visitors, and researchers from Murdoch University, The University of Western Australia, and the National Environmental Science Program's Threatened Species Recovery Hub.