Endangered Mammal Research And Fox Predation

Jack E. Kinnear, Department of Conservation and Land Management, W.A. Wildlife Research Centre, P.O. Box 51, Wanneroo, W.A. 6065

The impact of fox predation is profound: mammal species can only survive in refuges where cover or shelter affords sufficient protection and where food is nearby. However, even when these requirements are met, depredations by foxes reduce prey populations to levels well below the carrying of the habitat.

On an island that is still relatively pristine i.e. no disturbing factors, fox control resulted in a dramatic increase in rock-wallaby abundance–a response that signifies that fox predation alone can have a strong impact on a mammal population.

To date seven species of marsupials have been shown to be heavily depredated. In NSW, research has shown that the mallee fowl is also threatened. More research is necessary to define the range of species affected.

Fox predation is insidious and pervasive, with an enormous scope for interacting with other factors. If it is ignored or dismissed as a factor, it is unlikely that little progress will be made towards understanding the impact of other disturbances.