

PROPOSED RESERVE AT DRAGON ROCKS

In early August, 1972, officers from the Fauna Research Branch and the W.A. Herbarium began a detailed fauna and flora survey of land in the Hyden district of Western Australia. An area of approximately 80,000 acres was being considered as a potential reserve for the conservation of flora and fauna.

In brief, the purpose of the survey was:—

- (1) To assess the land in terms of the quality and diversity of its flora and fauna.
- (2) To determine suitable boundaries for the proposed reserve by discovering, as far as possible, the distribution and hence the habitat requirements of the indigenous animals.



Granite outcrop. Adult she-oak stand in background.

The country consists of high-level, undulating, scrub-covered sandplains with laterite breakaways and ridges giving way to long, gradual slopes supporting mallee associations. The shallow drainage lines contain Salmon Gum stands. One of the many exposures of granite rock, typically surrounded by "Tammar Scrub", has been given the name "Dragon Rocks". This picturesque name, highlighting the presence of the Dragon Lizard (*Amphibolurus ornatus*) on the exfoliating flaking granite tors and bosses, will be recommended as a suitable name for the reserve when it is acquired.



Barking gecko (*Phyllauis milii*).

It was already known that the region supported some interesting animals. The Wuhl-Wuhl (*Antechinomys spenceri*) and the Fat-tailed Marsupial Mouse (*Sminthopsis crassicaudata*) had been captured in 1967. By the end of August, 1972, an extensive list of native animals had been confirmed and specimens lodged with the Western Australian Museum.

MAMMALIA

Marsupialia

MACROPODIDAE	Common Name
<i>Macropus fuliginosus</i>	(Western Grey Kangaroo)
<i>Macropus irma</i>	(Western Brush Wallaby)
PHALANGERIDAE	
<i>Trichosurus vulpecula</i>	(Brush-tailed Possum)
BURRAMYIDAE	
<i>Cercatetus concinnus</i>	(South-Western Pigmy Possum)
TARSIPEDIDAE	
<i>Tarsipes spencerae</i>	(Honey Possum)
DASYURIDAE	
<i>Phascogale calura</i>	(Red-tailed Wambenger)
<i>Sminthopsis murina</i>	(Common Marsupial Mouse)
<i>Sminthopsis crassicaudata</i>	(Fat-tailed Marsupial Mouse)
<i>Antechinomys spenceri</i>	(Wuhl-Wuhl)

Rodentia

MURIDAE

<i>Notomys mitchellii</i>	(Mitchell's Hopping-Mouse)
<i>Pseudomys occidentalis</i>	(Western Mouse)
<i>Mus musculus</i>	(House Mouse—non-native)

Chiroptera

VESPERTILIONIDAE

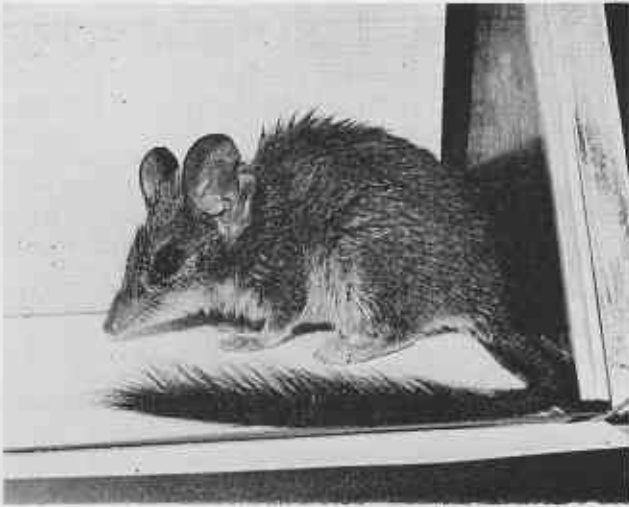
<i>Nyctophilis sp.</i>	(Long-eared Bat)
<i>Eptesicus pumilis</i>	(Little Bat)
<i>Chalinolobus gouldii</i>	(Gould's Wattled Bat)

Monotremata

TACHYGLOSSIDAE

<i>Tachyglossus aculeatus</i>	(Echidna)
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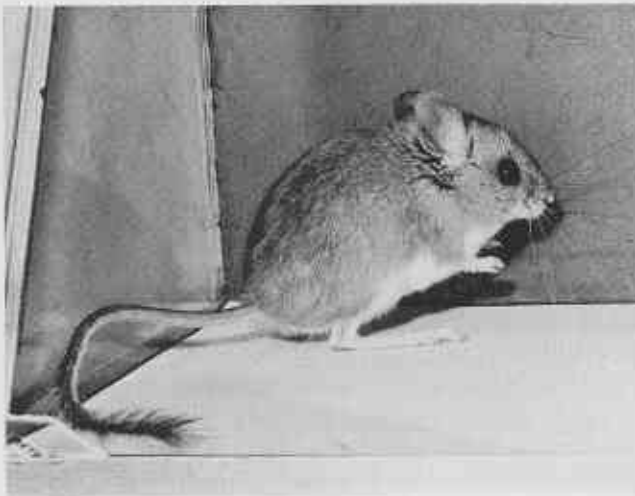
Many of the mammals in the above list are of particular interest. Very little is known about *Antechinomys spenceri*; and *Pseudomys occidentalis* is listed as one of "The Rare Ones" by W. D. L. Ride in his book, "A Guide to the Native Mammals of Australia". The specimen of *Sminthopsis murina* was extraordinarily large and had a noticeably shorter tail than is characteristic for the species. A similarly large and apparently anomalous specimen was recently captured by Museum staff at Tarin Rock, a nearby flora and fauna reserve.



Red-tailed Wambenger (*Phascogale calura*). This female had eight young in her pouch.

The Pigmy Possum and the Fat-tailed Marsupial Mouse are interesting because they can lower their body temperature well below that needed for normal activity (become torpid). By so doing these animals are able to enter a state of energy-saving inaction. It has been shown that this state may be prompted by a situation in which food supplies are unreliable, as they may often be in arid areas.

The Honey Possum (*Tarsipes spencerae*) has been described as a zoological enigma. According to Ride (1971) "it has no obvious close relatives, and much work yet remains to be done before we understand it or its ancestry."



Mitchell's Hopping Mouse (*Notomys mitchellii*). Female.

AVES

Many birds were identified including both diurnal and nocturnal birds of prey. Several species were of special interest, such as the presence of the Purple-gaped Honeyeater and Square-tailed Kite.

REPTILIA

The reptiles collected are at present being identified by the W.A. Museum. Of interest was the large number of Little Whip Snakes (*Denisonia gouldii*) captured. A species of Blind Snake (*Rhamphotyphlops sp.*) from a meat-ant nest, and Fraser's Scale-footed Lizard (*Delma fraseri*) was found in rotting Salmon Gum logs. Aside from these species, a wide variety of skinks, geckos and dragons were captured.

AMPHIBIA

A number of different frogs were caught. The most notable was the specimen of *Myobatrachus gouldii* caught in a pit trap. A. R. Main, in his "Key to the Frogs of South-Western Australia", describes it as follows: ". . . having a very small head and extremely short limbs. Looks like a turtle and lives always beneath soil surface." This specimen was obviously wandering around on the surface when it fell into the trap. There had been very heavy rain during the night.

A species of tree-frog was also captured, but this is still to be identified.

The fauna listed above reflect more than 3,000 trap nights and some hundreds of man-hours of effort.

The quality and variety of the fauna captured on this block of land indicates that it is potentially one of the most valuable reserves in the State.

It is believed that small mammals in arid areas have habitat requirements which vary widely from season to season and from species to species. If most of the species indigenous to such an area are to be permanently conserved, large areas of all the native habitat types should be included in the reserve.



Myobatrachus gouldii An unusual frog which is turtle-like in appearance.