

DIBBLERS AT ALBANY

A pair of Australia's rare marsupials, known as Dibblers has been found at Albany.

They were trapped at Cheynes Beach by Dr. Patricia Woolley a senior lecturer in Zoology at La Trobe University, Victoria.

The animals are the only ones found since Michael Morcombe re-discovered the species in 1967 after 83 years, of "extinction".

Dr. Woolley is a world expert on the group of marsupials of which the Dibbler (*Antechinus apicalis*) is one member.

In an earlier programme, Dr. Woolley had been allowed to search for and obtain two related species, one of which was the Little Red Antechinus. This animal was shown to be not as rare as had been thought and was well distributed in the Pilbara.

The license to take 3 pairs of Dibblers was issued subject to the conditions that not more than one pair was to be taken from any one locality and that the localities had to be at least 10 km apart. This was to ensure that colonies located were not unduly depleted. A further condition was that the Dibblers remain the property of the State and their ultimate disposal would be decided by the Minister for Fisheries and Wildlife.

Dr. Woolley was allowed to take the Dibblers to La Trobe University where her research is centred. She is working on a special project financed by the Department of Science on the recommendation of the Australian Research Grants Committee and aimed at improving our knowledge of the relationships of this group within the family *Dasyuridae*—the carnivorous marsupials of which the Tasmanian Tiger was perhaps the largest and best known. Hopefully, this will lead to a successful breeding of Dibblers in captivity with the possibility of re-populating suitable habitat.

The locality where this pair was captured is close to the site of a proposed caravan park at Cheynes Beach.

There are 3 specimens of the Dibbler in the Western Australian Museum which were collected in 1967 and some are held in other Australian Museums, particularly the National Museum, Victoria. About 5 are also held in the British Museum (Natural History) and others at Liverpool, England and Leydon, Holland. Most of these were collected north of Perth (Moore River and Victoria Plains) in the last century, but all the recent finds have been at Cheynes Beach on the south coast east of Albany, and at Jerdacuttup in the Shire of Ravensthorpe.



Dibbler (*Antechinus apicalis*).