

Our Diminishing Heritage

The Potoroo is the smallest of the Kangaroo family being about the size of a rabbit and weighing up to 1.5 kg (approximately 3 pounds).

Potoroos are one of the 5 divisions or genera of rat-kangaroos. The three distinct kinds are the Musk Rat kangaroo of Queensland, the Bettongs and their relatives, and Potoroos.

Two species of Potoroos have been recorded from the south west of Western Australia. They are Gilbert's Potoroo (*Potorous tridactylus*), known from near Albany, and the Broad-faced Potoroo (*Potorous platyops*), known from near Goomalling and from between Albany and the Pallinup River. However, neither species has been seen this century. The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife has initiated a search for these animals so that if they do exist, necessary steps can be taken to ensure their survival. Finance has been provided by the Commonwealth Government.

Looking rather like a Bandicoot, the Potoroo is a creature of tussock and densely growing grasses associated with forest or woodlands, or other dense vegetation such as heaths in areas of high rainfall.

Studies in the Eastern States have shown that the animals require the dense natural vegetation of their habitat for protection against their many potential predators.

Potoroos are strictly nocturnal in their behaviour and unlike the Bandicoots and Wallabies, living in the same area, they stay entirely within their dense cover and do not come out of it to feed in adjacent open pastures. If the habitat is opened up by fire or clearing, Potoroos disappear until the vegetation has recovered. Such species are vulnerable to burning off in bush fire control.

Studies of female Potoroos in captivity have indicated joint or overlapping territories, where there was no fighting. Males on the other hand were always in severe conflict when they were together with a female on heat. Animals observed in wild populations had no wounds or scars, suggesting that in natural situations, they avoid coming into conflict.

In Tasmania it has been established that Potoroos for their small size are quite long-living in the wild and may live for 7 years. From birth it is at least 21 weeks before the young are weaned, and after leaving the pouch at about seventeen weeks, they are running free.

The Potoroo breeds throughout the year in Tasmania. Each female seems to commence breeding when it is about one year old and is also able to breed twice in each year, but the reproductive potential of the Potoroo is low because, like other members of the kangaroo family, it produces one young at a time. Mating may again follow about 4 days after the birth of the first young but the resulting embryo delays development for as long as four and a half months until either the first young is suckling intermittently during its weaning period or it is prematurely lost from the pouch.

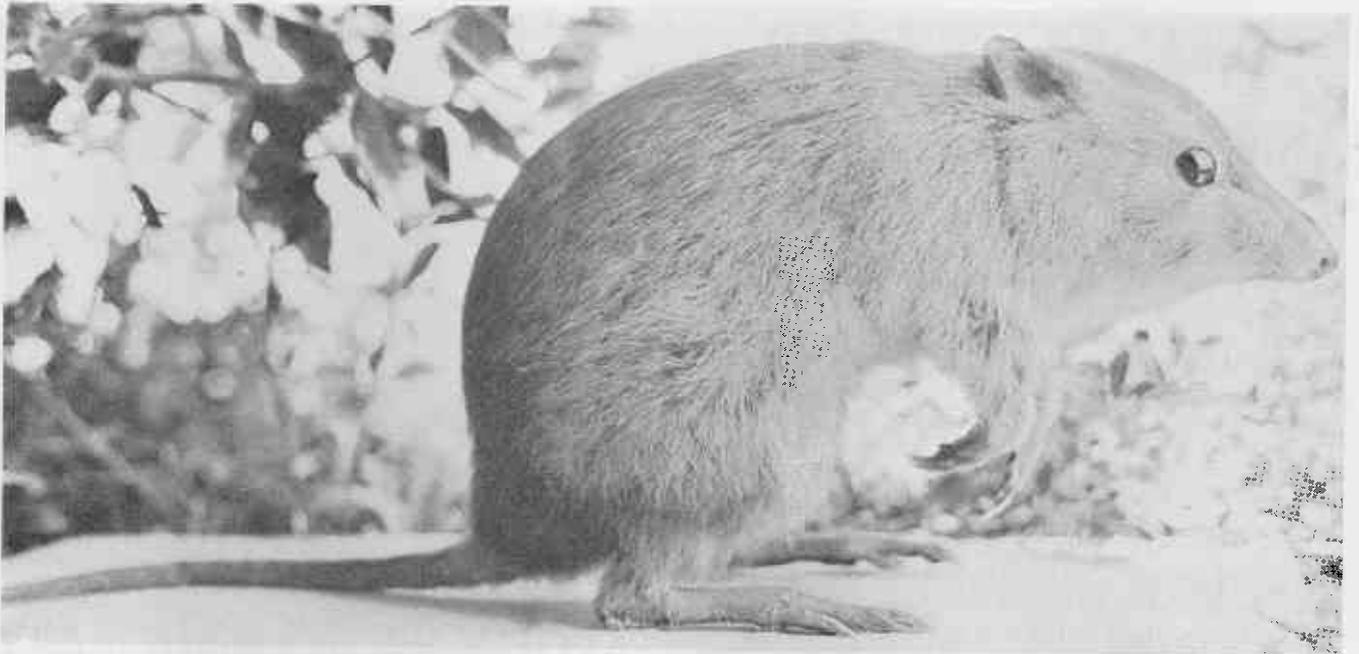
Potoroos could easily be confused with:

1. BANDICOOTS (see illustration) but . . .
 - A. ~~Potoroos are much smaller (up to 1.5 kg or 3 lbs.) than Quokkas which weigh up to 3 kg or 7 lbs.~~ *The fur of potoroos feels soft*
The fur of bandicoots feels ho
 - B. The tails of Potoroos are almost as long as their bodies.
The tails of Bandicoots are much smaller than their bodies.
 - C. The lower jaws of Potoroos contain only one pair of large incisors which are separated from the first cheek teeth by a wide gap.
The lower jaws of Bandicoots contain three pairs of small incisors and a canined tooth occupies the space between them and the first cheek teeth.
 - D. The first cheek teeth of Potoroos are very large and of a characteristic shape, quite unlike those of Bandicoots (see illustration).
2. QUOKKAS (see illustration) but . . .
 - A. Potoroos are much smaller (up to 1.5 kg or 3 lbs.) than Quokkas which weigh up to 3 kg or 7 lbs.
 - B. The feet of Potoroos are slender and covered in short fur.
The feet of quokkas are more robust and covered in longer fur.
 - C. Gilbert's Potoroo has a long, pointed face.
Quokkas have a short broad face.
 - D. The Broad-faced Potoroo is thought to be a pale sandy or grey colour.
Quokkas are usually dark brown.
3. WOYLIES (see illustration)

Woylies are of similar size and build to Potoroos and they have similar dental characters but they can at once be distinguished by their tails; the tails of Woylies have a distinctive brush or crest of black hair near the tip

As we have very little information about the distribution of Woylies we would also welcome any records you have.

They are known to live in the Tutanning Nature Reserve, East of Pingelly, in the Dryandra State Forest near Narrogin, and in the Tone/Perup River area, east of Manjimup.



POTOROOS

Potorous tridactylus and *Potorous platyops*



JAW OF POTOROO (OR WOYLIE) (Both are diagrammatic) JAW OF BANDICOOT

