

# Rock Wallaby Populations

Populations of Black-flanked Rock Wallabies (*Petrogale penicillata lateralis*) persist on nature reserves in the wheatbelt area south of Kellerberrin. The situation regarding the persistence of populations in these reserves seems grave however.



A rock Wallaby outside a cave at "the Granites" near Shackleton.

The Department's Wildlife Research Branch initiated a project in April 1978 for the purpose of obtaining sufficient information to formulate a management plan.

The study area consists of five large granite outcrops. Each outcrop has been surveyed and mapped for wallaby populations. To date wallabies have been recorded at 10 sites, but many of the sites carry, at most, only 2-3 animals. Moreover, there are numerous sites that seem to be suitable habitat for wallabies, but no sightings have been made nor have fresh scats been found.

Only one juvenile rock wallaby has been observed.

Information on Departmental files indicates that rock wallabies were once frequently observed, but repeated surveys have failed to sight an animal.

At this stage, it is too early to explain the causes of the population decline. Foxes and feral cats are abundant on the reserves and both are known to predate rock wallabies (particularly the juveniles at heel: W. Langdon, pers. comm.). Rock wallaby skeletal remains have been recovered from fox dens and material consisting of *Petrogale* hair and teeth have been found on the firebreak of one reserve. Such evidence is circumstantial and may represent carrion feeding, but the evidence seems sufficiently strong to warrant further investigation on the possible predatory role of foxes (and feral cats) and the need for control. With regard to this point, a baiting programme has been implemented by Vermin Control Officers of the Agriculture Protection Board.

Additional studies are under way to determine the dietary preferences of rock wallabies and their nutritional status. Rabbits are moderately abundant and their dietary habits are being examined to determine whether there is competition for food. Radio-telemetry equipment is on order.