

IMPORTANT RESERVE IN LAKE GRACE AREA

The Dragon Rocks Reserve is located in the Shires of Kulin and Lake Grace. It is near the town of Hyden. Historical records show that the rocks were called Dragon Rocks in 1893 by Mr. Holland in his exploration plan 113. They were probably named after the dragon lizards that are found there.

In 1966, Mr. Richard J. Lane, Secretary of the Lake Grace Farmers Union sent a letter to the Chief Warden of Fauna of this Department suggesting an area of land, which adjoined his property, should be gazetted as a Fauna and Flora Reserve. The land included the Dragon Rocks. This proposal received a great deal of support from a number of people and organisations including the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife. However, a soil survey had to be carried out by the Department of Lands and Surveys before any decision could be made. This was completed in August of 1972.

The area around Dragon Rocks was the last large area of vacant Crown Land remaining in that part of the State. Although this Department had not surveyed the area in detail by 1966, preliminary surveys had shown that it was potentially of great scientific value. The local people had seen several rare species, such as the Numbat, bandicoots and marsupial mice

in the area. There were a number of small Nature Reserves in that region already but none of these were large enough to support populations of animals such as Numbats or small wallabies. The two nearest reasonably large Reserves are the Lake Barker Nature Reserve (96.6 km north east) and the Lake Magenta Nature Reserve (80.5 km south). Surveys by the Western Australian Museum and this Department did not find the same variety of animals in these Reserves as was thought to be in the Dragon Rocks area.

It was not until August 1972, that the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife undertook the first detailed wildlife survey of the area and they were not disappointed in the numbers and variety of animals and plants they found. In 1973 "Results of a Biological Survey of a Proposed Wildlife Sanctuary* at Dragon Rocks, near Hyden, Western Australia" (Report No. 12) was published. (A more detailed article giving an outline of this survey appeared in S.W.A.N.S. Vol. 3, No. 3. Winter 1972).

* Since December 1975 the words 'Nature Reserve' have been used instead of 'Wildlife Sanctuary' for an area of Crown land set aside for the protection of flora and fauna.

The report listed the following animals which were either seen or captured within the proposed Nature Reserve: Western Grey Kangaroo, Western Brush Wallaby, Brush-tailed Possum, Honey Possum, Red-tailed Wambenger, Common Dunnart, Fat-tailed Dunnart, Wuhl-wuhl, Mitchell's Hopping Mouse, Western Mouse, Lesser Long-eared Bat, Little Bat, Gould's Wattleed Bat, Echidna, House Mouse, Fox, Cat, Rabbit, Short-nosed Bandicoot, Western Native Cat, Numbat.

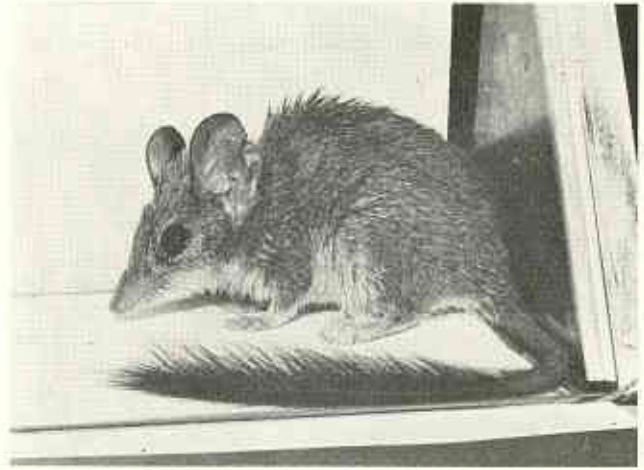
Of the birds, fifty-nine species were recorded. This number alone reflects the diversity and size of the Dragon Rocks area. Some reptiles were also collected, these included: geckoes, legless lizards, dragon lizards, skinks, snakes and blind snakes.

The 1973 survey therefore confirmed what Mr. Lane and others already knew—the Dragon Rocks area with its diverse range of marsupials, birds and reptiles, combined with the rich vegetation formations was of considerable biological value.

In order to retain the full diversity of fauna, all vegetation types found in the area had to be adequately represented in any proposed Reserve. The greatest problem in the Dragon Rocks case was to keep sufficient Salmon Gum woodland. There is little of this type of vegetation left in the area as most has been included in the adjoining farming properties.

It must be emphasised that the size of the Dragon Rocks area was of great importance to the survival of many of the animals found there, especially the larger ones. The larger the area the more animals it can support—there is a certain amount of truth in the saying “safety in numbers”.

As early as 1965 Mr. Lane recognized the importance of making the area a Reserve. Over a period of seventeen years our Departmental files show letters of advice, knowledge and queries from Mr. Lane; informing the Department of changes taking place in and around the proposed Reserve, for example, shifting bird populations; re-appearance of animals not seen in the area for a period of time. However, it was not until August 1979 that 32 097 ha of the Dragon Rocks area was proclaimed a Nature Reserve, vested in the Western Australian Wildlife Authority, for the purpose of the conservation of flora and fauna.



Red-tailed Wambenger (*Phascogale calura*) in captivity. The Red-tailed Wambenger is closely related to the Common Wambenger which is also called the Tuan or Brush-tailed Phascogale. Wambengers live in trees and usually make their nests in hollows. They live on nectar as well as insects and flesh. The Red-tailed Wambenger is smaller than the Common Wambenger and is reddish brown in colour. The part of the tail between the body and the brush is bright rufus.



Common Dunnart (*Sminthopsis murina*)

A soft-furred and delicately built little marsupial, about the size of a domestic mouse. The Common Dunnart can easily be distinguished from a mouse by its pointed nose and large number of incisor teeth. When a dunnart is cornered it will adopt a threatening posture with widely opened mouth, often accompanied by noisy exhalations.

Photo A. G. Wells



Short-nosed Bandicoot (*Isoodon obesulus*)—left

This bandicoot is also called the Quenda. It is thought to occur in the Dragon Rocks area. Short-nosed Bandicoots have harsh, almost spiny, fur. The spiny fur consists of specialised outer guard hairs beneath which is a soft under-fur. Bandicoots feed mostly on invertebrates which they are able to dig out of the ground.