

# MAMMALS OF THE WARBURTON REGION

Dr. Andrew Burbidge and Mr. Phillip Fuller of the Western Australian Wildlife Research Centre have recently published the results of research on the mammals of the Warburton Region in "Records of the Western Australian Museum".

The Warburton Region occupies an extensive area bordering the Northern Territory and South Australia from Lake MacDonalld at latitude 24° to the Blyth Range at latitude 27° and extending westward, at a maximum distance of 260 km, to the Warburton Range. It includes numerous rocky ranges surrounded by loamy flats and sand dunes.

In their paper, the authors present an annotated list of 28 indigenous and five exotic mammals recorded from the region. The list, which appears on page 23, was compiled from the records of the Western Australian Museum, scientific literature and the collections made by the authors in the course of their fieldwork in the area. Discussions with Aboriginal people of the region provided supplementary data on the past and present distribution of species and the Aboriginal names used in the various dialects of the Western Desert Language.

The status of the indigenous species has been categorised as common, moderately common, rare or extinct and it is noteworthy that the eight species listed as locally extinct are all of "intermediate" size, for example the Boodie and the Golden Bandicoot; larger mammals such as kangaroos and smaller mammals such as the Hopping Mouse are still plentiful. Other species of "intermediate" size, apart from the Echidna, were found to have declined in numbers.

Although the reason for the decline or disappearance of so many species of mammals is open to question, one obvious possibility is the establishment of exotic

mammals: both carnivores like the cat and fox and herbivores like the rabbit. Predation by cats was often cited by Aboriginals as the reason for the disappearance of native mammals in the region and Dr. Burbidge's earlier studies on Dirk Hartog Island and the Monte Bello Islands indicate that cats have been responsible for the extinction of similar sized species on those islands.

Another possible reason for the decline of some species is the changes in the timing, extent and frequency of fires in the interior following the concentration of the Aboriginal population in a few settlements. It was the practice of Aboriginals to use fire in hunting and in encouraging the regeneration of food plants. It is thought that this activity limited the accumulation of fuel, thereby preventing extensive summer fires. Consistent winter burning, resulting in a tight mosaic of vegetation in various stages of growth, has been found to be beneficial to certain species. Today, however, infrequent but very extensive summer fires are the rule rather than the exception.

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## The Mulgara (*Dasyercus cristicauda*)

A rat-sized carnivorous marsupial which lives in holes in the ground. It is found in arid regions and has the ability to live without drinking water as it has specially adapted kidneys. The Mulgara is also called Canning's Little Dog and the Crest-tailed Marsupial Mouse owing to the crest of shining black hair along the upper part of the tail.

Photo A. G. Wells





Hairy-footed Dunnart (*Sminthopsis hirtipes*)—below

A small marsupial about the size of a house mouse, in fact dunnarts are often called marsupial mice. They live mainly on insects. You can distinguish the Hairy-footed Dunnart, as its name suggests, by the fact that the pads of its feet are covered with bristles. It also has very large ears and a sharply pointed nose.



The Boodie (*Bettongia lesueur*)—left

This marsupial is also known as the Tungoo, Lesueur's Rat-kangaroo and the Burrowing Rat-kangaroo. It is now extinct from this region, in fact it appears to be extinct from all of mainland Australia. However, populations are still found on some islands around the coast, most notably Barrow Island, and Bernier and Dorre Islands. Boodies are about the size of a cat and usually live in burrows. They are entirely nocturnal.

The Dalgyte (*Macrotis lagotis*)—below

This animal is also known as the Bilby or the Rabbit-eared Bandicoot. The Dalgyte lives in a burrow which it digs using the powerful claws on the fore-feet. The burrow is deep and in this way the Dalgyte is able to escape the intense heat of the central desert. The Dalgyte is carnivorous and eats meat, insects and other invertebrates.

Photo A. G. Wells



SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME	ABORIGINAL NAME(S)	STATUS
<i>Macropus robustus</i>	Euro	Kanyarla, Nyatunya	Common
<i>Megaleia rufa</i>	Red Kangaroo	Marlu	Common
<i>Onychogalea lunata</i>	Crescent Nail-tailed Wallaby	Tjawalpa	Extinct
<i>Lagorchestes hirsutus</i>	Western Hare-wallaby	Mala	Extinct
<i>Petrogale ? lateralis</i>	Black-flanked Rock Wallaby	Warru	Rare
<i>Bettongia lesueur</i>	Boodie	Mitika, Tjungku	Extinct
<i>Trichosurus vulpecula</i>	Brush Possum	Wayurta	Rare
<i>Isoodon auratus</i>	Golden Bandicoot	Windtaru, Makurra, Nyulu	Extinct
<i>Perameles eremiana</i>	Desert Bandicoot	Walilya	Extinct
<i>Macrotis lagotis</i>	Rabbit-eared Bandicoot or Dalgyte	Nirnu, Marara	Rare
<i>Dasyurus geoffroii</i>	Western Native-cat	Parrtjarta	Extinct
<i>Dasyercus cristicauda</i>	Mulgara	Mingkiri	Moderately Common
<i>Antechinus macdonnellensis</i>	Red-eared Antechinus	Nyaluti, Murtja	Common
<i>Ningau sp.</i>	Ningau	—	Not known—probably common
<i>Sminthopsis crassicaudata</i>	Fat-tailed Dunnart	—	Common
<i>Sminthopsis hirtipes</i>	Hairy-footed Dunnart	—	Not known—probably common
<i>Sminthopsis ooldea</i>	—	—	Not known—probably common
<i>Antechinomys laniger</i>	Wuhl-Wuhl	Wuurl-wuurlpa, Pitji-pitji	Common
<i>Myrmecobius fasciatus</i>	Numbat	Walpurti	Extinct
<i>Notoryctes typhlops</i>	Marsupial-mole	Yirtarrutju, Yirtarri-yirtarri	Moderately common
<i>Leporillus spp.</i>	Stick-nest Rats	Tjuwalpi, Yininma	Extinct
<i>Notomys alexis</i>	Spinifex Hopping Mouse	Tarrkawarra	Common
<i>Pseudomys hermannsburgensis</i>	Sandy Mouse	—	Common
<i>Nyctophilus geoffroyi</i>	Lesser Long-eared Bat	} Patjupirri	} Common
<i>Eptesicus pumilis caurinus</i>	Little Bat		
<i>Chalinobulus gouldii</i>	Gould's Wattled Bat		
<i>Tachygllossus aculeatus</i>	Echidna	Tjilkamarta	Common
<i>Canis familiaris dingo</i>	Dingo	Papa, Ngupanu, Yinura	Common

EXOTIC MAMMALS RECORDED: House Mouse, Rabbit, Camel, Fox, Feral Cat—all common.