

THE dalgyte or bilby *Macrotis lagotis* until recent times occurred over much of the Australian continent, including south-west WA. I collated distributional information from museum catalogues and specimen labels, scientific literature, regional histories, and interviews with 'oldtimers' (born before 1930). This last source provided most information. Because it is such a distinctive animal, it is unlikely that it could be confused with any other species present in the south-west.

The dalgyte (an approximation of the Noongar term for the bilby) was found to have occurred south-west to a line joining (approximately) Guilderton, Gingin, Upper Swan, Wooroloo, Chidlow, Bannister, Boddington, Bridgetown and Margaret River, and then south almost to the southern coast in places. I also used vegetation mapping produced during the Regional Forest Agreement to model the original (1929) geographical range of the dalgyte in south-west WA.

The last specimens were collected in the 1930s, but the species was last observed in the south-west as late as the 1980s. I assessed this chronology of (?apparent) extinction against the 15 factors usually invoked in explaining declines of native mammals in south-west WA.:

FAUNA

THE DEMISE OF THE DALGYTE

Ian Abbott

drought, changed fire regimes, Noongar hunting, pastoralism, dingo predation, cat predation, trapping for fur trade, disease, clearing of vegetation for agriculture, competition from rabbits and introduced rodents, unintended mortality from rabbit trapping and poisoning, fox predation, logging and mining.

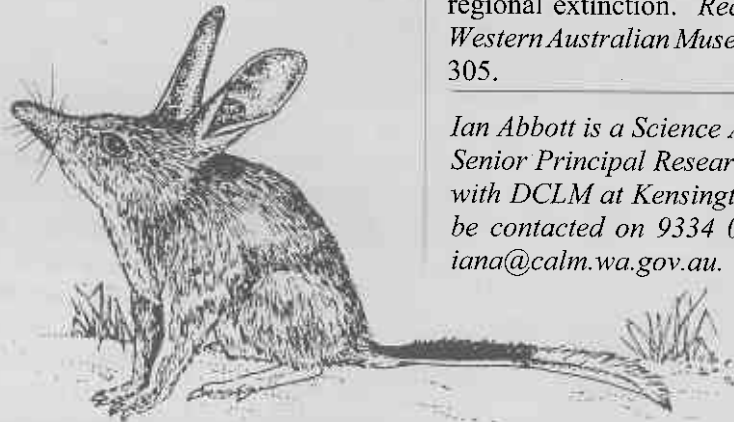
Careful consideration of the evidence available led me to determine that the fox is the single

essential factor associated with regional decline of the dalgyte. I then formulated an additional hypothesis, that if the fox had not established in south-west WA, the dalgyte would have persisted in national parks, nature reserves, the eastern portion of State forest, and patches of remnant vegetation on farmland. This is a testable hypothesis, as DCLM is now re-introducing dalgytes to various national parks from which foxes have been removed by ongoing poisoning.

Generalizing from my analysis, extinction can be a drawn-out process to which many factors can contribute. The primary factor may also differ from species to species.

Reference: Abbott, I. (2001). The Bilby *Macrotis lagotis* (Marsupialia: Peramelidae) in south-western Australia: Original range limits, subsequent decline, and presumed regional extinction. *Records of the Western Australian Museum* 20: 271-305.

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THE WAY WE WERE

INTRODUCTION OF CATS TO THE BUSH

IN 1990, Thomas Dimer, then 87, recorded the things that had happened during his long life. Born in 1903 on a station in the Esperance hinterland, he was the archtypical bushman, drover, miner, dogger ... he has this to say about feral predators:

"You've got to be born and bred in the bush to see how the birds live, and I think the biggest pest in the world today, that's cats, dogs and foxes. They've killed all the little wallabies out, killed all

the little lizards and that sort of things out, and the cats climb up the tree and get the eggs and all the ground years ago when there was plovers and any birds there, turkey and that sort of thing that lay eggs on the ground, the foxes destroyed them. That's the biggest pest that ever came to Australia. Cats too. In the turn of the century, the Government asked Dad would he take out 200 cats from Israelite Bay to distribute to get rid of the rabbits. So he distributed 200 cats around

from Israelite Bay to Nanambinia Station, and them cats, the domestic cats came out from England you see, and they were paid for."

There are many fascinating snippets about living in the WA bush in this document "Interview with Thomas Dimer", by Helen Crompton, March 1990, ref no OH 2339, Battye Library Oral History Unit. A transcript is held in the Esperance Library.