

WAGIN - A PHASCOGALE FRIENDLY PLACE



"Oops! Get me outa here!" Jeff Short releases a phascogale. Photo: Sid Smithies

Early mornings have been exciting times around Wagin lately, with a record 11 red-tailed phascogales surveyed at one bushland site north of Wagin in February. The recordings are part of trapping surveys started late last year by Dr Jeff Short and some keen local volunteers, in attempt to understand more about the distribution and habitat needs of this endangered marsupial.

"Before this project started there were only 16 local sightings in the CALM database, which painted a fairly grim picture for these critters," Dr Short explained. "So far, we've trapped 17 phascogales since November and, considering that they are most mobile during autumn, we are hopefully in for some more exciting times ahead."

The project also involves collating community sightings to update the database. There have been

some great local stories about various phascogale sightings over the years, but until now they haven't been recorded. Of the 20-odd sightings reported so far, most have had to do with cats bringing in dead animals, but we've got reports of people finding them in old homesteads, on jam fence posts in paddocks, in backyards in town, and even one in the gutter in the main street!

While it is comforting to know that the red-tailed phascogale numbers are strong around Wagin at present, these small, tree-based carnivores are still very much under threat as a species. They are now only found in the western wheatbelt area, where fragmented bushland and predation by foxes and cats put their survival at risk. A focus of the project is to work with farmers to fence off and link up bush that provides valuable habitat for the red-tailed phascogale.

As you can see from the photo, phascogales like sheoak woodland, especially if wandoo (white gum) is associated with it. If anyone would like to know more about the project, especially any landholders in this general area who have suitable bushland, please contact me. I'd also like to know of any phascogale sightings, including historical records.

Sally Thomson

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