

## FAUNA

# POTOROOS ON BALD ISLAND

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Bald Island from Mt Gardner.

Since the early 1900s Gilbert's Potoroo (*Potorous gilbertii*) was thought to be extinct, apparently just one more of the small marsupials that had disappeared since European settlement. There was great excitement in 1994 when it was rediscovered during a survey at Mt Gardner in Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve, near Albany. But still it is one of the most critically endangered mammals in Australia, as the total population of the species is only 40 animals.

As with several other rare fauna species still hanging on at Two Peoples Bay, it appears that long-unburnt vegetation provides important habitat, perhaps because a large part of the potoroo's diet consists of the underground truffle fungi that are associated with established native plants (see WW 2/2), so they are very vulnerable to wildfire.

To increase the security of the

species, the decision was made to try to found another colony on an island. Bald Island Nature Reserve was chosen because of its climate and suitable habitat – and also because it is free of foxes and cats.

Three Gilbert's potoroos, two males and one female, were released on the island in August 2005. They established home ranges quickly and by early October 2005, all had put on weight. Another female was transferred to the island in December and, days after her release, was found to have given birth to a young female, despite the disruption of being transported to the island. A recent monitoring visit recorded more success. Not only were all the animals from the first release alive and well, but the female had produced the first island born and bred young, a male almost ready to leave the pouch!

Gilbert's Potoroo's chances of long-term survival are now looking more hopeful.

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Mother and son.