

## Members' Page

# THE MURDERING ANIMAL - OR, A CASE OF BITING OFF MORE THAN YOU CAN CHEW

*Avril Baxter*

The red-tail phascogale, which was once found throughout southern and central regions of WA, has now retreated to an area largely bordered by Boddington, Kondinin, Kojonup and Jerramungup. It has become an icon for groups such as the Wagin/Woodanilling Landcare Zone (WWLZ), in which individuals can take action to preserve an endangered species.

The red-tail phascogale lives happily alongside human beings as testified by the WWLZ's call for sightings, which pictures an animal crawling up the security door of a house. And cute and cuddly as they appear to be, *LFW* members Rob and Anne Battley whose home is 30 metres from the edge of Dryandra woodland, have another story to tell.

These animals are blood-thirsty!

Rob and Anne love all animals and have an aviary in which over the years they had gradually bred up a population of 42 Gouldian finches and canaries. One morning they went out to the aviary and wondered why they didn't see any birds flying around. On further investigation they found all the birds were dead, many had their bellies eaten out, others' heads were chewed. What had happened? They were used to an occasional carpet python getting into the aviary, but the destruction

was never like this, it looked like "a fox had gone mad in a hen house".

They kept looking in the nests to see if anything was alive, only to find a very fat little red-tail phascogale curled up and sound asleep. They realised that it had been two days since they had visited the aviary and during that time a single red-tail phascogale had killed their precious breeding stock.



It is a testament to their concern for the native animals they live alongside that the Battleys relocated the partied-out red-tail phascogale to the nearest balga.

*Illustration: Louise Burch*