Conservation Science W. Aust. 6 (1) : 159–176 (2007)

BiblioRingtailPossum: the western ringtail possum, *Pseudocheirus occidentalis* (Thomas, 1888), a subject-specific bibliography

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ABSTRACT

This bibliography contains 403 items concerning the ringtail possums, *Pseudocheirus occidentalis* and *P. peregrinus*. Most of these have been published and reviewed outside the Department of Environment and Conservation (formerly the Department of Conservation and Land Management). They have been arranged into the broad subject areas of Behaviour, Conservation Status, Description, Diet, Diseases, Distribution, Ecology, Evolution, General, Genetics, Management, Physiology, Reproduction and Threatening Processes. The majority of these titles can be viewed in the Wildlife Science Library, Woodvale.

INTRODUCTION

This is a bibliography of information about the ringtail possums, *Pseudocheirus occidentalis* and *P. peregrinus*. Both species are included for two reasons. Firstly, these species were once taxonomically synonymous and many Western Ringtail Possum specific papers where published under the former taxonomy. Secondly, the species share some aspects of biology and ecology.

Most references are from the scientific literature, but general articles have also been included. The bibliography is updated as new materials become available. Updates can be obtained from the Wildlife Science Library on request. Notification of relevant materials for inclusion can also be sent to the Library.

The bibliography was started with titles extracted from CONSLIB, the Departmental Library Catalogue. The references contained within these titles were checked and added. This process continued until all relevant references had been included. Internet searches were also performed, and the site specific information printed out. The URLs have been included, but because of the temporary nature of URLs they should not be relied upon. More references from these and other World Wide Web sources were added.

Every effort has been made to obtain a copy of each reference and lodge them in the Library. However in some cases this has not been possible, especially with the older material.

For ease of use the references are listed alphabetically and have been allocated an item number. This item number can be found under one or more of the 14 broad subject categories.

DESCRIPTION

The ngwayir (pronounced 'n-waar-ear') (western ringtail possum, *Pseudocheirus occidentalis*, Thomas 1888) is a folivorous marsupial endemic to south-western Australia. It is small (0.8 to 1.3 kg), usually dark brown to black (though sometimes dark grey) above, with cream or grey fur on the belly, chest and throat. It is easily distinguished from the sympatric koomal (common brushtail possum, *Trichosurus vulpecula hypoleucus*) by its smaller size, smaller round ears and absence of a brush tail.

Figure 1. Western Ringtail Possum (Pseudocheirus occidentalis) *(Photograph courtesy of Adrian Wayne, DEC)*

Near-coastal populations of the ngwayir can breed throughout the year but breeding peaks occur April–June and October–December (Jones et al. 1994). Further inland, breeding seasonality in the jarrah forest is more acute than in coastal areas, for example, in Perup 77% of births occurred in May–June and 23% in October–November (Wayne et al. 2005). Females can breed at less than 12 months of age and can breed continuously, occasionally breeding twice in the same year (Ellis and Jones 1992). The gestation period for the species is around 2–4 weeks. Litter size is usually one, with twins uncommon (Jones et al. 1994; Wayne et al. 2005) and a litter size of three rare (de Tores, unpublished data). The young stay in the pouch around 100 days, they are weaned between 6 to 8 months and disperse between 8 to 12 months of age (Ellis and Jones 1992; Jones et al. 1994; How 1978; Wayne et al. 2005).

Diurnal resting sites include dreys, platforms, tree hollows, hollow logs, within vegetation such as balga (grasstree, *Xanthorrhoea preissii*) skirts, on the ground under sedges, forest debris and disused rabbit warrens (Jones et al. 1994, Wayne et al. 2000; Wayne 2005). In suburban situations the species uses roof spaces and other dark cavities.

Five Noongar names have been suggested by Abbott (2001). Ngwayir and nguara (both pronounced 'n-waar-ear') are the most commonly used (Wayne et al. 2001 and Jones 1995 respectively).

DISTRIBUTION AND CONSERVATION STATUS

The ngwayir was first described from a specimen collected at King George Sound, Western Australia. At the time of European settlement the species had a range extending from just north of Perth to Waychinicup National Park (east of Albany) including scattered populations through the wheatbelt (Jones, 1995). The subsequent range contraction was noted as early as 1907 (Shortridge 1909). Currently, the species is found mainly in and near coastal areas from Bunbury to east of Albany as well as around Manjimup (Jones, 1995).

Contemporary range contractions are due to a range of influences including inappropriate land management, clearing for urban and agricultural development and introduced predators (foxes and cats) (Wayne et al. 2006; de Tores, 2005).

The ngwayir is listed as Vulnerable under the 2000 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species; Vulnerable under the Commonwealth government's Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999; and Specially Protected Fauna that is listed as rare or likely to become extinct under the West Australian Wildlife Conservation Act 1950.

A recovery team has been established and a recovery plan is presently being written for the species.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The compilers wish to thank Humera Rhind, Leanne Randall and Jasmine Howell (students) who have assisted at various times. Also thanks to Adrian Wayne and Paul de Tores for reviewing the draft.

BEHAVIOUR:

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