



Species Fact Sheet Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby



Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby

These unique and beautiful 'acrobats' of the marsupial world leap and bound their way around rocky outcrops and cliff ledges in rugged and steep country near the east coast of Australia. Of the 15 species of rock wallaby in Australia, most are now considered threatened, and have disappeared from much of their original range.

The Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby is a small reddish brown rock-wallaby weighing 5 to 8 kg with a distinctive long bushy tail and white cheek blazes. Rock-wallabies are extremely agile, moving swiftly and confidently through rugged terrain. They appear to be almost flying.

They move with a hopping action using both feet together with their tail used for support and balance and their short, well padded, rough textured feet giving them remarkable grip. Their tiny forearms are used for holding food, tending young and balancing.

Distribution and habitat

The brush-tailed rock wallaby can be found in fragmented populations roughly following the Great Dividing Range from south-east Queensland to Western Victoria's Grampians. Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies live in steep rocky outcrops, cliffs and boulder piles which provide plenty of caves, crevices and overhangs for shelter from heat and predators. They feed on a wide variety of native grasses, herbs and shrubs as well as roots and bark in the evening and early mornings and return to their rocky shelters by day.

Rock-wallabies live in colonies made up of several small family groups living together. Colonies may be so close together as to be virtually continuous or may be hundreds of kilometres apart.

Breeding

Female rock-wallabies give birth to a single pouch young at a time, about the size of a jelly bean. Pouch young are born with no fur and remain in the pouch for 6 months. Like other macropods rock-wallabies can have several young 'on the go' at once at different stages of development e.g. one embryo, one in the pouch and one at foot. Life expectancy in the wild is 5-10 years on average.

Threats in the wild

The dramatic decline of rock-wallaby numbers began in the late 1890's when they were hunted for sport and their furs sold for bounty.

Today, the major threat to Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies in the wild is predation by foxes, dogs, cats and wedge-tailed eagles. This is mainly because they evolved without the threat of introduced predators and therefore have limited ways to defend themselves against these species. Particularly vulnerable are sole younger wallabies searching for new homes.

Competition for food in rock-wallaby habitat is a severe threat to their survival, often forcing colonies to leave the protection of the rocky outcrops for more exposed grassy areas. Livestock such as cattle & sheep, feral goats, horses and rabbits all compete for the same food.

Many colonies are being pushed towards extinction due to loss of habitat or habitat modification such as clearing of native vegetation and weed invasion. Other threats include drought, wildfire and inbreeding due to isolation and decline of colonies and resulting diseases.

Recovery Actions

To address the critical decline in Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby populations, the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) Threatened Species Unit have commenced a Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby Recovery Program. Fox control and managed captive breeding programs are two of the high priority recovery actions in place to help increase the numbers of wild populations.

Waterfall Springs Wildlife Sanctuary and Foundation conducts an important managed breeding program for the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby that aims to generate sufficient new animal numbers for eventual reintroduction into the wild.

Saving Australia's threatened species requires the support and commitment from the whole of the community. Wild habitat preservation and regeneration is the primary means for ensuring the long-term survival of Australia's vitally important native species.