



Red-tailed Phascogale *Phascogale calura* (Gould, 1844)

Size

Head and body length

105-122 mm in males

93-105 mm in females

Tail length

134-145 mm in males

119-144 mm in females

Weight

39-68 g in males

38-48 g in females

Subspecies

None recognised.

Description

Small, strongly arboreal dasyurid, ash-grey above and cream to white below with a blackish patch in front of the eye and reddish coloured ears. It possesses a long tail with a brush of long black hair on the distal portion and distinctive reddish fur on the proximal portion.

Other Common Names

Red-tailed Wambenger, Indigenous (Noongar) name: Kenngoor

Distribution

This species was recorded across much of arid and semi-arid Australia, from western NSW, to central Australia (Tennant Creek), Great Sandy Desert, south-west Western Australia, and parts of southern South Australia.

Populations are currently known from several isolated nature reserves in the south-west of Western Australia, from the wheat belt to the south coast, such as Dryandra Woodland and Utanning, Boyagin, Dongolocking, and Parkeyerring Nature Reserves, as well



as remnant vegetation on private property. Red-tailed Phascogales have also been recorded on the south coast near Ravensthorpe and Fitzgerald River National Park. They have been reintroduced to Wadderin Wildlife Sanctuary near Narembeen.

For further information regarding the distribution of this species please refer to www.naturemap.dpaw.wa.gov.au

Habitat

The Red-tailed Phascogale inhabits Wandoo (*Eucalyptus wandoo*) and Sheoak (*Allocasuarina huegeliana*) woodland associations, with populations being most dense in the latter vegetation type. They show a preference for long unburnt habitat with a continuous canopy, as well as tree hollows. Wandoo trees provide excellent nesting sites in the form of hollow logs and limbs, which they line with grass and feathers. Nest sites occur in highly flammable areas, and may often be in dead sheoaks, skirts of live (or stumps of dead) grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea* spp.)

Behaviour

The Red-tailed Phascogale is arboreal, moving about the woodland canopy but often moving to the ground to feed. Generally nocturnal, it is known to be active during the day when seeking food sources. As with other small dasyurids, male Red-tailed Phascogales die shortly after the mating period in July. During this period, they have been observed to increase their home range (area of occupancy), and the choice of nest site to less secure refuges such as underground sites. While males roam over larger areas they are more vulnerable to predation. Home ranges vary from 1.5 ha to 8 ha, depending upon the season.

Diet

Red-tailed Phascogales are opportunistic feeders. Their diet includes invertebrates, small birds and small mammals.

Breeding

Mating occurs during a three week period in July. Males are highly mobile in the lead up to and during this period, and die shortly afterwards. Gestation is 28-30 days, and although up to 13 young are born, the maximum litter size that can be reared is eight (adult females have 8 nipples). Young remain dependent upon the mother

from August to October. After the young have been weaned, they disperse and set up their own home ranges by the end of summer. Although males live for approximately 11.5 months before they die, females can survive to breed a second or third time.

Threatening processes

Recent studies have shown that areas where foxes have been controlled have had the highest numbers of Red-tailed Phascogales. Predation by cats is also a probable threat to the species. Fragmentation and loss of habitat (in the Wheat belt) and frequent burning can remove mature-age vegetation which the species occupies.

Conservation status

Western Australian Wildlife Conservation Act 1950

Schedule 1 – Fauna that is rare or is likely to become extinct
(Threatened ranked as Endangered)

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Endangered

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species

Near Threatened (Version 3.1)

Management

- Exotic predator control.
- Appropriate fire management to ensure protection and regeneration of *Allocasuarina huegeliana* thickets or other vegetation type with a continuous canopy.

- Re-introduction to suitable large reserves.
- Education program for landholders with Red-tailed Phascogale on their properties - value of remnant bush, exclusion of stock, management of fire, cat control.
- Establish habitat links between remnant vegetation on private property and nature reserves in close proximity.

Other interesting facts

- The Red tailed Phascogale is able to make leaps of up to 2m while in the woodland canopy.
- The male Red tailed Phascogale invests so heavily in breeding that their immune systems fail, and just before they reach 12 months of age, they succumb to stress-related illnesses and die.

Selected references

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Maxwell S., Burbidge A.A, Morris K. (1996). *The 1996 Action Plan for Australian Marsupials and Monotremes*. Wildlife Australia, Canberra.

Last updated 8 February 2012, for further enquiries please contact fauna@dpaw.wa.gov.au

Further information

Contact your local office of the Department of Environment and Conservation.

See the department's website for the latest information: www.dec.wa.gov.au.



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