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Species Fact Sheet: Brush-tailed rock wallaby



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Brush-tailed rock wallaby

Petrogale penicillata

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 wallabies' most notable feature, as their name implies, is the distinctively bushy tail. Found in New South Wales, Queensland and critically endangered in Victoria, the brush-tailed rock wallaby has disappeared from much of the southern and western part of its range.

Rock wallabies aren't found anywhere else on earth. There are currently 15 species and eight subspecies of rock wallaby and they form the largest group of macropods (marsupial with large hind limbs) in Australia. Rock wallabies are an internationally recognised group for the study of the development of species and chromosome evolution in kangaroos and wallabies.

Conservation status

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) Redlist of Threatened Species:
Vulnerable

Australian Government - *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*:
Vulnerable

Did you know?

- Brush-tailed rock-wallabies can climb tall trees with their sharp claws and strong legs. They can also climb almost vertical rocks.
- They are nocturnal but appear to enjoy the sunshine when the weather is cool.
- Rock wallabies were once hunted for fur but thankfully this no longer occurs.

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. They live on rocky escarpments, granite outcrops and cliffs, which have caves and ledges for shelter and face north for warmth.

They graze on native grasses found in surrounding habitat at dawn and dusk, and are known to also feed on the foliage and fruits of shrubs and trees as well as roots and bark.

Ecology and life cycle

Brush-tailed rock wallabies are highly territorial over their home range, which is about 15 hectares. They are social macropods and live in family groups consisting of two to five adults with juveniles and joeys.

They are medium-sized wallabies with the adults ranging from six to eight kilograms. They are very agile, moving confidently and swiftly around their rocky habitat using their long, thickly furred tail for balance and padded feet for grip.

Brush-tailed rock-wallabies have very distinctive facial markings with a white cheek stripe and a black stripe from the eye to the back of the head. Their bodies are brown with grey shoulders and darker feet. All of this camouflages them well in their habitat and they are often to spot.

Threats

Life is tough for brush-tail rock wallabies. They have been deprived of available habitat due to a combination of factors such as clearing of native vegetation, weed invasion and changed patterns of fire across the landscape. They must also cope with introduced predators and competition with livestock, feral goats and rabbits. This competition forces them to search for food outside their natural ranges.

Introduced predators

The introduction of foxes and cats has had a major impact on brush-tail rock wallabies. This is mainly because they evolved without the threat of introduced predators, therefore have limited ways to defend themselves against these species.

Foxes were introduced into Australia soon after European settlement and are now well established over most of the non-tropical mainland, including in rock wallaby habitat. They are believed to have contributed to the extinction of several small mammal species and pushed black-footed rock wallabies further toward extinction.

Habitat loss

Brush-tail rock wallabies live in areas that, with the settlement of Europeans, were cleared of native bush to accommodate agricultural and grazing land. This resulted in less habitat for the rock wallabies; often the only remaining habitat is fragmented, small patches of bush.

Conservation action

WWF-Australia is working with community groups to carry out surveys of some known rock wallaby populations. Community groups are being supported to get involved in habitat protection and to work on controlling predators to help protect the species along with continuing surveying and monitoring to further understand them.

Through the Threatened Species Network, a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia, WWF is supporting projects that focus on managing fire regimes and monitoring populations of brush-tailed rock wallabies at Currawinya, NSW, and controlling predators and engaging landholders in the Warrumbungles in central-western NSW.



How you can help

- One of the most important aspects of recovery of threatened species and communities is the protection of their habitat. Two thirds of Australia is privately managed rural land, and there is increasing recognition of the important role that private landholders can make to the conservation of biodiversity across Australia. If you manage, live on or own land that is habitat for rock wallabies, contact your state TSN coordinator to find out about how you can help.
- Leave your pets at home when you go into the bush, or if you choose to take your dog, keep it on a lead so that it does not chase wildlife.
- De-sex your pets and keep them inside at night so they do not hunt native wildlife.
- Report any rock wallaby sightings to park rangers, National Parks and Wildlife staff or TSN.
- Avoid trying to tame rock wallabies (or other wildlife) by feeding them. Tame wallabies are more susceptible to predators. Unnatural foods can also lead to serious health problems.