

BILBY



Macrotis lagotis

STATUS

- Vulnerable. (The Lesser bilby is now extinct).
- The main predators are feral cats, dingoes and foxes. When attacked Bilbies retreat into their burrows for protection. Competition with the rabbit, cattle and sheep and loss of habitat has also contributed to their demise.

ORIGIN


- Bilbies once occupied 70% of the Australian mainland and numbered in the millions. They became extinct in S.A. There are now several thousand living in protected areas due to breeding and reintroduction programs.
- There are only three small areas left in Australia where the Bilby is found in the wild: the Diamantina area of south west Queensland, Northern Territory and in Western Australia - generally where the fox has not become common. The population in the wild is now less than 10,000.

HABITAT

- Bilbies once lived in deserts, semi-arid, temperate grasslands and dry shrubby areas in Australia. They were common in Adelaide.
- Bilbies dig a series of long complex burrows to a depth of 2 metres and a length of 3 metres. There are many entrances and they use the burrow as a shelter during the heat of the day.
- The burrow is usually located next to a termite mound or shrub.

DESCRIPTION

- The Bilby is Australia's largest bandicoot and the only burrowing bandicoot species. Males can be twice as large as the female. Some can grow as large as a cat. (38cm long with a 20cm tail.)
- Generally Bilbies are rabbit sized marsupials with long, soft, silky grey fur on



the back, a lighter belly, a long black and white tail and a long pointed snout. The large ears have a rich blood supply, which helps the body to release heat. They weigh between 800g and 2.5kg.

- Bilbies have poor vision, but excellent senses of smell and hearing.
- They have strong clawed front feet for digging.
- Bilbies have one to three young who develop in a backwards facing pouch.
- After a 14-day gestation period the young are carried in the pouch for 75 days. They live up to seven years in captivity.
- The Bilby is an omnivore (eats plants and animals). It eats insects (like termites), seeds, fruit, fungi, mice and lizards.
- The Bilby is nocturnal, not venturing from its burrow to forage until it is dark.
- Bilbies do not need to drink. They obtain water from their food and “respiration water.”
- Bilbies sleep sitting back on their tails and tucking their heads down between their front paws with their ears folded along their face.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

- Bilbies are generally solitary. However, they sometimes live in groups of three or four.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Also known as ‘rabbit-eared bandicoot’ ‘walpajirri’, ‘ninu’. ‘dalgyte’ and ‘pinky’.

MONARTO’S CONTRIBUTION TO BILBY CONSERVATION

- Bilbies were released on an off shore island near Port Lincoln in 1997.
- There is also a recovery reserve which has been developed at Roxby Downs called “The Arid Recovery Project” where Bilbies from Monarto are released.
- Monarto has the largest captive breeding population in Australia.
- The management of the captive-breeding programme is a joint responsibility of Monarto Zoo, Department for Environment and Heritage and the Threatened Species Network of the Conservation Council. It is part of National Recovery Programme