

THREATENED SPECIES OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

LESSER BILBY *Macrotis leucura*



Conservation status

Australia: Extinct.

Northern Territory: Extinct.

Description

The lesser bilby was a medium-sized marsupial (body mass of 300-435 g) that was both smaller and less colourful than the greater bilby. The lesser bilby was grey-brown above and paler below with a white tail that was about 70% of its head-body length.

Distribution

The species occupied spinifex and canegrass on dunes and sandy plains in two regions of arid Australia; the first in northeast South Australia and adjoining southeast Northern Territory, the other in the Gibson and Great Sandy Deserts of Western Australia and adjoining regions of the Northern Territory. The western distribution was discovered only after discussions with elderly Aboriginal people (Burbidge *et al.* 1988; Johnson and Southgate 1990).

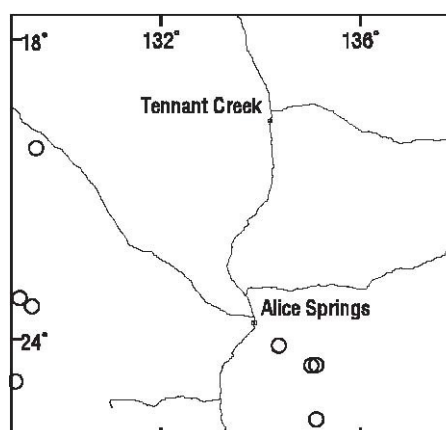
Conservation reserves where reported:

None (although it may have formerly occurred in areas that are now included within Uluru Kata-Tjuta National Park and West MacDonnell National Park.)

Ecology

The biology of the lesser bilby is poorly known. The species was nocturnal and sheltered during the day in a deep burrow dug amongst sand dunes. Its diet consisted of termites, ants and roots. It occurred in dunes and sandplains with spinifex, sometimes

with mulga and/or tussock grass (Burbidge *et al.* 1988).



Known locations of the lesser bilby.
o = pre 1970; • = post 1970

Conservation assessment

The lesser bilby is presumed to have become extinct in the NT in the 1960s, following a broad-scale decline extending over at least the previous 50 years (Burbidge *et al.* 1988). It was probably extinct in the southeast of the NT by the first half of the twentieth century (Finlayson 1961).

Threatening processes

The decline and extinction of the lesser bilby is attributed to a range of factors including predation by cats and foxes, and habitat alteration due to the impacts of exotic herbivores and to changed fire regimes.

Conservation objectives and management

The species is presumed extinct. No conservation management plan can offer further help.



Threatened Species Information Sheet

Compiled by

Chris Pavey
[May 2006]

References

- Burbidge, A.A., Johnson, K.A., Fuller, P.F., and Southgate, R.I. (1988). Aboriginal knowledge of animals of the central deserts of Australia. *Australian Wildlife Research* **15**, 9-39.
- Finlayson, H.H. (1961). On central Australian mammals, Part IV. The distribution and status of central Australian species. *Records of the South Australian Museum* **41**, 141-191.
- Johnson, K.A., and Southgate, R.I. (1990). Present and former status of bandicoots in the Northern Territory. In *Bandicoots and bilbies* (eds J.H. Seebeck, P.R. Brown, R.L. Wallis and C.M. Kemper.) pp. 85-92. (Surrey Beatty & Sons, Sydney.)
- Parker, S.A. (1973). An annotated checklist of the native land mammals of the Northern Territory. *Records of the South Australian Museum* **16**, 1-57.

