

Back from the brink: an update on our endangered mammal populations



Boodies at Scotia

W. Lawler

Over 20 Australian mammals have become extinct since European settlement. More than 50 mammal species are now on the brink, listed by the Federal Government as nationally threatened with extinction. For more than a decade, AWC has delivered practical land management, based on good science, to help provide a more secure future for a suite of Australia's highly threatened mammals. Often working in collaboration with partners, including government agencies, our role in southern and central Australia has focused on creating large feral predator-free areas in which we could re-establish wild, self-sustaining populations of endangered mammals. Here is a snapshot of the results to date, highlighting the importance of AWC – and the critical role of feral predator-free areas – in preventing the extinction of several species.

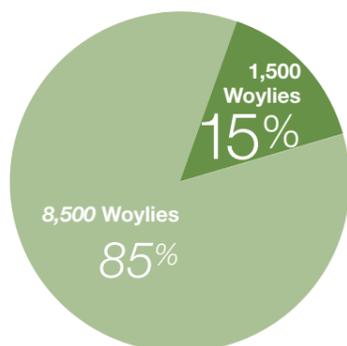
Woylie (Brush-tailed Bettong)

The Woylie was once very widespread with records in all mainland states and the Northern Territory. By 1970, it had experienced a dramatic decline, being confined to four subpopulations in south-western Australia. It staged a recovery in the late 1990s and was prematurely removed from the threatened species list. However, from 1999 the Woylie population has again been in freefall. It is estimated that the total population has declined by over 90% in the last decade, with cat predation a key factor driving the decline.

Population outside of AWC properties: The population has declined from around 250,000 individuals in 1999 to a current estimated population of less than 10,000.

AWC's contribution:

AWC protects three significant populations of the Woylie. Karakamia protects an estimated 550 Woylies, Scotia contains 700 Woylies and Yookamurra protects 250 animals. AWC therefore protects around 15% of an estimated world population of 10,000.



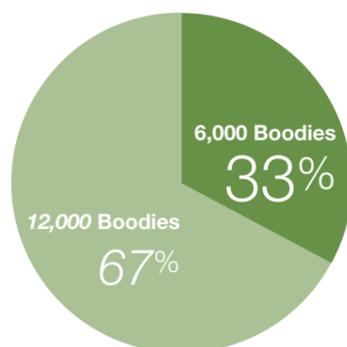
Boodie (Burrowing Bettong)

The Boodie was once one of the most abundant and widespread of all Australian mammals, occupying most of the southern half of the continent west of the Great Dividing Range. However, by 1960 it was extinct on the mainland and clinging to survival on offshore islands. The Boodie is the only member of the kangaroo family to construct and live in their own burrows. Burrows can be complex warrens with multiple entrances and interconnecting pathways, and up to 20 individuals living communally. AWC protects the Boodie at Faure Island in Shark Bay as well as at Scotia and Yookamurra.

Population outside of AWC properties: The Boodie population outside of AWC sanctuaries is around 12,000 animals; major populations are on Bernier and Dorre Islands in Shark Bay, Barrow Island and at the Arid Recovery project near Roxby Downs.

AWC's contribution:

AWC protects the largest Boodie population (more than 4,500 animals) at Faure Island. The Scotia population is around 1,300 animals while Yookamurra protects 250 Boodies. AWC therefore protects around 33% of the total Boodie population.



Greater Bilby

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Woylie

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Bridled Naitail Wallaby

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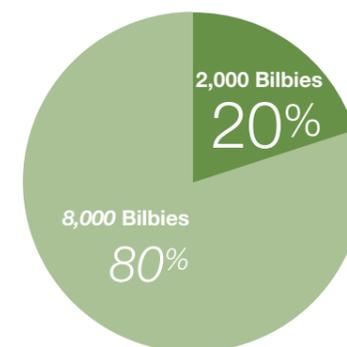
Greater Bilby

The Greater Bilby once occupied a large proportion of arid and semi-arid Australia. However, it is now restricted to populations in the Gibson, Great Sandy and Tanami Deserts, parts of the Pilbara and south-western Queensland. There are a small number of reintroduced populations, including at the Arid Recovery Project near Roxby Downs, as well as AWC populations at Scotia and Yookamurra. The primary causes of the widespread decline of the Greater Bilby are predation by foxes and feral cats plus competition from rabbits. Its closest relative, the Lesser Bilby, is now extinct.

Population outside of AWC properties: There is no rigorous population monitoring of the remnant populations in the deserts of the Northern Territory and Western Australia; however, it is estimated that the remaining population – not including AWC sanctuaries – is around 8,000 animals.

AWC's contribution:

The Scotia population of Bilbies is estimated at more than 2,000 animals, while Yookamurra protects around 40 animals. AWC therefore protects around 20% of the world population of the Greater Bilby.

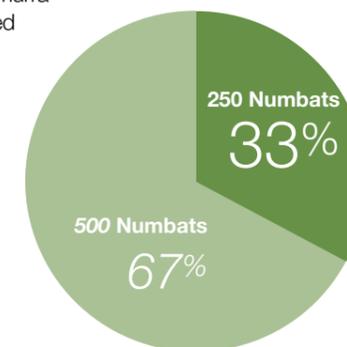


Numbat

The Numbat once ranged across much of southern Australia from western NSW and Victoria to Western Australia, extending as far north as the southern portion of the Northern Territory. By the 1980s it had disappeared from almost its entire range, surviving only in small fragmented populations in south-western Australia. The primary driver of its disappearance has been predation by foxes and cats. Numbats are unusual for Australian mammals in that they are diurnal, being active only during hot days and sheltering at night in tree hollows, fallen timber or burrows. The Numbat has been reintroduced at AWC's Scotia and Yookamurra sanctuaries.

Population outside of AWC properties: The Numbat population outside of AWC reserves is estimated at 500.

AWC's contribution: The Numbat population at Scotia is conservatively estimated at 225 (the largest population in Australia), while at Yookamurra the population is estimated at 25. AWC therefore protects approximately 33% of the entire Numbat population. After the Mt Gibson Endangered Wildlife Restoration Project is implemented, AWC will protect around half of the world population.

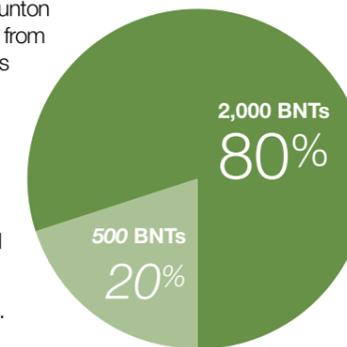


Bridled Naitail Wallaby

The Bridled Naitail Wallaby was presumed extinct until it was rediscovered in 1973 at what is now Taunton Scientific Reserve, near the town of Dingo in central Queensland. It was once widespread, extending from the Murray River region of western Victoria through central-western NSW and as far north as Charters Towers in Queensland. It is one of the more beautiful wallabies, with a distinctive white stripe running across its shoulders and back. The combined effect of habitat loss (land clearing) and feral predators pushed the Bridled Naitail Wallaby to the brink of extinction – it was not sighted between 1937 and 1973 – and it is now found only in four wild populations: three in Queensland and AWC's Scotia Wildlife Sanctuary.

Population outside of AWC properties: The three Queensland populations have declined to an estimated 300–500 animals.

AWC's contribution: Our most recent estimate for the wild Scotia population is over 2,000. AWC therefore protects over 80% of the world population.



Key ■ AWC population ■ Population outside of AWC properties