

Greater Bilby

Macrotis lagotis



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

Map is not intended to indicate spatial distribution of the species, only the bioregions in which the species is found.

Greater Bilbies are culturally important marsupials about the size of small cats. They are the largest member of the bandicoot family – adult females weigh about 1 kg and males are twice that weight. They have long, highly sensitive ears that are important for keeping them cool and hearing predators. This, and their long, silky fur and white tipped tails, make it easy to tell them apart from other bandicoots. Greater Bilbies have strong front limbs like a kangaroo. They also have poor vision but good senses of hearing and smell. Greater Bilbies were presumed extinct in South Australia in the 1930s. Indigenous names for the Greater Bilby include *Ninu* (Pitjantjatjara), *Walpajirri* (Warlpiri), *Ahert* (Arrente) and *Mankarr* (Manjilyjarra).

Diet

Greater Bilbies forage at night, travelling up to five km to find food. They are omnivorous and feed on invertebrates (e.g. termites, witchetty grubs and spiders) fungi, seeds, bulbs and occasionally, small vertebrates they dig up.

Breeding

Most of the time, Greater Bilbies live alone, but they may live in family groups of two to four when they have young. Breeding is possible all year round but usually depends on rainfall and the availability of food. Female bilbies give birth to one to three young, which stay in the pouch for about 2.5 months (a Bilby's pouch contains eight teats).

Habitat

Greater Bilbies were once common across 70 per cent of the Australian mainland but now their distribution has been greatly reduced. They live in sandy deserts, inside burrows that spiral down to around two metres deep. Each burrow has only one entrance hidden by vegetation or a mound, and each animal can use up to 12 burrows within its extended home range.

Threats

The introduction of new predators (foxes and cats) as well as competitors for food and habitat (such as rabbits) by Europeans has greatly reduced the numbers of Greater Bilbies. Habitat clearance has been another threat along with accidental death from rabbit traps and poison baits and, past hunting practices. An increased number of fires and droughts has also led to a lack of food.



Greater Bilbies have long pointed snouts and long narrow tongues which they use for licking food up from the ground.

Conservation

Captive breeding programs have been established as a basis for restoring some populations of this species and several have been very successful. The trial release of bilbies on an offshore island in the Spencer Gulf was the beginning of attempts to reintroduce the animal to South Australia and they are now doing well there and, also at the Arid Recovery site near Roxby Downs.

You can help the Greater Bilby by:

- being a responsible pet owner – desex your cats and dogs, keep them inside at night and don't take them into national parks
- always observing fire warnings
- finding out more about recovery programs and supporting them
- finding out the names that other Aboriginal language groups had for bilbies.

For further information

Public enquiries

For more local information on any of the species in this resource please contact your nearest Natural Resource Centre office on:

Eastwood: (08) 8273 9100

Gawler: (08) 8523 7700

Lobethal: (08) 8389 5900

Willunga: (08) 8550 3400

Education enquiries

For teachers wanting more information about environmental education resources and opportunities please contact the relevant NRM Education sub regional team on:

Northern Adelaide: (08) 8406 8289

Barossa: (08) 8563 8436

Central Adelaide: (08) 8234 7255

Southern Adelaide: (08) 8384 0176

Southern Fleurieu: (08) 8551 0524

