Southern Marsupial Mole

Notoryctes typhlops

Southern Marsupial Moles are secretive animals covered with dense, silky cream coloured fur that can be stained pinkish or golden brown by the red/orange pigments in the sand. They have many physical attributes that help them to live underground. These include a tubular body with a rear opening pouch (so they don’t get dirt in it when digging), vestigial eyes (they don’t need them when living underground in the dark), no external ear openings, a hard, protective shield on the nose and scooping claws for digging. Other features include short, powerful limbs and fused neck bones to make their bodies more rigid. They can be up to 16cm long and weigh between 40 and 70g with a tail length up to 2.6cm.

The only other recognised species of marsupial mole is the Northern Marsupial Mole which is slightly larger than the Southern species. Between 1900 and 1920, it is estimated that several thousand marsupial mole pelts were traded by Aboriginal people to Europeans and Afghan cameleers. Scientists are now working with local Aboriginal people to learn about tracking the mole which will help them find out more about their population sizes, movements, diet and life-cycle. Indigenous names for this species include Itjariitjari and Yitarritjarri.

Diet
They eat mainly invertebrate larvae and pupae, insects and geckoes. As they get enough moisture from their food they do not need to drink.

Breeding
Little is known about their breeding habits but they are thought to have one to two young that suckle in the pouch after birth. Deep, permanent burrows are built for the young after they leave the pouch.

Habitat
Southern Marsupial Moles are found in the sandy desert regions of Central Australia. Also known as ‘blind sand burrowers’, their habitat includes dunes, sandy plains and river flats. They need deep, loose sand as they mainly travel underground. While they usually move quite close to the surface, marsupial moles can burrow to depths of around 2.5m.

Threats
Previous hunting greatly reduced the numbers of Southern Marsupial Moles. They are now preyed upon by animals such as foxes, dingoes and cats. Changed fire regimes and grazing animals may have reduced the amount of food they have to eat. Soil compaction by stock movements and vehicles makes it more difficult for these moles to burrow.
Southern Marsupial Moles use their front feet to tunnel sand under their bodies as they move forward and their webbed rear feet to fill it in behind them!

Conservation
You can help the Southern Marsupial Mole by:

- being a responsible pet owner – desex your cats and dogs, keep them inside at night and don’t take them into national parks
- telling others about these amazing little creatures.

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