



Greater Bilby (Macrotis lagotis)

Description



The Greater Bilby is a nocturnal marsupial which has a silky light grey and white coat and a long black and white crested tail with a naked spur-like tip. Bilbies have a long snout and well-developed sense of smell to aid in finding food. Their large, hairless ears are extremely useful for listening for predators as well as prey.

Until recently, Australia had two species of Bilbies – the Greater Bilby and the Lesser Bilby. The Lesser Bilby is already believed to be extinct. The Greater Bilby is the largest member of the bandicoot family, measuring up to 55cm in body length with a tail of up to 29cm long. Adult males weigh 1-2.5kg and the females weigh between 800g- 1.1kg.

Diet

The Bilby is omnivorous and its diet includes bulbs, fruit, seeds, fungi, insects, worms, termites, small lizards and spiders. One of its favourite plant foods is the bush onion or yalka which grows in desert sand plains after fires. Bilbies don't need to drink water regularly because, like the koala, they get most of their moisture from their food. This makes the Bilby well adapted for survival in the semi- arid and arid areas of Australia.

Breeding

The Bilby is a fast breeder, with a 12 to 14-day pregnancy. When the baby joey is born, it looks like a baked bean with legs. It stays in its mother's pouch for between 75 and 80 days and is independent about two weeks later. Female Bilbies have a backward-opening pouch with eight nipples. At six months of age, the female Bilby can breed and usually has 1 or 2 young at a time. Although it is rare, she can have triplets. In a good season in the wild, bilbies can have up to four litters a year.

Habitat

Bilbies live in grasslands and mulga scrublands in the hot, dry, arid and semi-arid areas of Australia. Bilbies live in spiralling burrows which they dig up to 2 metres deep. This depth helps to keep them safe from predators and also to keep them at a constant temperature of 23 degrees, as bilbies can become heat stressed. Bilbies may have up to a dozen burrows, one for sleeping in and the others for escaping from predators.



Survival

Of the six bandicoot species that once lived in the arid and semi-arid areas of Australia, the bilby is the sole survivor. It is listed as "endangered" in Queensland and "vulnerable" nationally.

Their decline can be directly attributed to feral cats and the European Red Fox. The Bilby is a bandicoot and the only surviving representative of the sub-family Thylacomyinae. It is one of the few medium-sized native mammals remaining in arid Australia.

www.savethebilbyfund.org

Save The Bilby Fund is a non-profit organisation which relies on the support of volunteers and caring sponsors like you.

You can help Save The Bilby Fund by supporting National Bilby Day (the second Sunday in September annually), or School's Bilby Day (the Friday before National Bilby Day), and by celebrating Easter the Australian way with Bilbies (not bunnies), or by making a donation or buying Bilby merchandise today.

Bilby Fast Facts

1 Bilbies are also known as Rabbit-eared Bandicoots.

2 Their life span is 6-7 years in the wild and 11 years in captivity.

3 Bilbies have approximately 28 teeth.

4 Bilbies have long ears so that when they are digging, a portion of them remains above ground level so they can hear any predators approaching.

5 Bilbies have a long snout which is pink and hairless on the tip. They have an excellent sense of smell. They have a long, sticky tongue which they use to collect seeds and worms from the ground. Bilbies have very poor eyesight and are also sensitive to light.

6 They have strong forearms and hind legs which helps Bilbies to dig their homes and also to manipulate their food.

7 The Bilby is truly nocturnal. Bilbies don't emerge from their burrows until an hour after dusk and retreat at least an hour before dawn. A full moon, strong wind, and heavy rain can keep a Bilby in its burrow all night.

8 Bilbies once inhabited 70% of Australia and now they are only found in small areas in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South- West Queensland.



9 It is believed that the Bilby population has been reduced dramatically by a number of contributing factors including:

10 Predation by introduced species such as feral cats and foxes.

12 Farming animals such as sheep and cattle, which destroy the habitat of the Bilby and compact the soil.

13 The introduced European rabbit competes with Bilbies for burrows and food.