

Western Ringtail Possum (*Pseudocheirus occidentalis*)

EPBC Status - Critically Endangered



National Environmental Science Programme



Western Ringtail possums. Photos: Adrian Wayne (Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions)

The Western Ringtail Possum (WRP) had been listed as Vulnerable on the EPBC Act since 2000 until it was up-listed to Critically Endangered in 2018, bringing it in line with the Western Australian state-level conservation status. WRP were always at higher risk of becoming threatened than their eastern counterparts, given the fact their range is so much smaller than the Common Ringtail Possum in the eastern states. The reduction in their habitat for urban development and the drying effects of climate change in the South West's forests appear to be among the main drivers pushing the species towards extinction. The WRP's preference for foraging on Peppermint trees (*Agonis flexuosa*) is one saving grace for these unique marsupials as these trees are one of the few species that tend to be spared in the course of urban development. As a result, WRPs can be encountered with relative frequency in urban settings, making the species more likely to benefit from urban citizen science activities. Two towns in particular have attracted substantial

support from local citizen scientists, in Busselton and Margaret River.

One of the most successful citizen science programs for WRP is the Annual Ringtail Tally, run by The Geopraphe Catchment Council (aka GeoCatch) in Busselton. Now in its third year, this program asks residents to record possums in their backyard, school or local park over a one-month period. Participants can record as often as they like during the one-month time slot. These events are based on a set area search methodology, incorporating some standardised scientific approach to the survey. These data are also shared with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (Western Australia) enhancing their ability to manage the species in the Swan Coastal Plain Management area. Further south, Nature Conservation Margaret River have taken their active conservation volunteers to the next level by initiating a seasonal standardised citizen science survey on 1km transects along the Wadandi Trail.

These surveys are being conducted in collaboration with the Friends of Reserve Groups in the Margaret River region and are sure to yield some important information about WRPs and how they are using the forests around Margaret River under varying seasonal conditions.

The WRP is a very charismatic species and worthy of an increased public profile when it comes to opportunities to contribute information about its conservation status across the South West. The South West is under increasing pressure from urban development, but this can also represent an opportunity to garner support from these growing communities for conservation action in the form of citizen science.

Further information

www.natureconservation.org.au/our-work/threatened-species-protection/
www.geocatch.asn.au/our-work/biodiversity/western-ringtail-possum/helpingwesternringtailpossums/