Foundation for Australia's Most Endangered Species Ltd.

Tammar Wallaby (*Macropus euginii*)

Conservation Status

There are three subspecies of the Tamar Wallaby. *M. e. eugenii* from mainland South Australia (SA) was considered extinct by the 1920s due to predation by foxes and extensive clearance of habitat. A population of *M. e. eugenii* was recently discovered in Kawau Island, New Zealand (where it had been introduced in the 1800s and is now considered a pest species). This population was used to re-establish a population of Tamar Wallaby in SA.

M. e. derbianus is found on the Western Australian mainland and some offshore islands. It survives only where foxes are controlled.

M. e. decres is found on Kangaroo Island, SA. This population is abundant due to a lack of foxes and plentiful ideal habitat (dense bushland adjacent to farm grassland).

Description

The Tammar Wallaby is the smallest of the species of the big Kangaroo genus (*Macropus*), weighing just five to seven kilograms. It has dark grizzled grey-brown fur above, becoming rufous on the sides of the body and pale grey-buff below. It has a distinct white cheek stripe and white patches behind the ears.

Habitat

Their habitat on Kangaroo Island ranges from coastal scrub to eucalypt forest and woodland. They rest in dense vegetation during the day and around dusk move quietly out into open grassy clearings to feed. They use regular paths, forming a series of tunnels through the undergrowth. They travel up to a kilometre or so from their daytime shelters. Several wallabies often feed in the same area but only the females and young form social groups. Each wallaby has a well-defined home range that overlaps with that of several others.

Diet

The Tammar Wallaby is a grazing animal. It prefers herbs and grasses, but will also browse on the leaves of some shrubs. It requires little water and when necessary can exist on seawater.

Breeding

The Tammar Wallaby has a very curious breeding cycle. The young are born in late January. Within a few hours of giving birth the female mates and the resulting embryo remains quiescent during lactation. This amazing biological process is called 'embryonic diapause'. Typically the quiescent embryos are re-activated within a few days of the summer solstice (depending on availability of water and nutrients) and the young are born about 25 days later (12 months after the mating at which they were conceived).

Tammar Wallabies have been observed to control their population size. If the mother decides that the colony is large enough then, just before the young is independent, the mother takes it off and deserts it, thus waiting till the last possible moment to make such an important decision.

Threats

Predation by foxes and cats and habitat clearance are the main threats to the Tammar Wallaby. On Kangaroo Island, where the species is abundant, they can cause severe damage to emergent crops and pastures. In these cases landholders are able to obtain a permit to destroy small numbers of wallabies on their properties.

Recovery Plan

In SA there is an ongoing project to return the *M. e. eugenii* subspecies to several suitable locations. In 2003, FAME assisted with the transfer of 85 Tamar Wallabies from New Zealand's Kawau Island to Australia. 10 Tammar Wallabies were released into Innes National Park on the Yorke Peninsula. Since then, three more groups have been released into the park. Monitoring of this population shows that they are surviving and breeding with the third generation of animls noe being born on site. It is thought that there are now over 100 Tamar Wallabies in Innes National Park. Monarto Zoo is involved in an ongoing captive breeding program for the *M. e. eugenii*.

References & More Information

Department for Environment and Heritage n.d. *Visitor Information Sheet: Tammar Wallaby*. Government of South Australia. www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks.

Strahan R (Ed) 1995. *Mammals of Australia.* The Australian Museum Trust. Reed New Holland, Australia.