

Woylie

Bettongia penicillata



WHITEMAN PARK
CONSERVATION • RECREATION • EDUCATION

By any other name

The brush-tailed bettong is a small marsupial from the kangaroo family. While their common name is 'bettong' they are more often referred to by their Noongar name of 'woylie', pronounced 'woy-lee'.

A tail of difference

As a small hopping mammal, the tail of a woylie is an important appendage to assist in balance when hopping, much like the tails of its larger cousins, wallabies and kangaroos. Unlike these other mammals, the woylies' tail has a point of difference, as it is able to curl and grip. This allows them to collect branches and softer materials like grasses for nest building.

Busy breeders

Despite their low numbers in the wild, woylies are rapid breeders, with females capable of breeding at six months of age. Gestation lasts just 21 days before the joey is born, spending around three months in the pouch growing. The females are able to produce pouch young every 3-4 months. They are solitary animals, with the exception of females with young at foot.

Nocturnal landscapers

Busy nest builders, woylies use their prehensile (gripping) tail to carry small bundles of nesting material which is shaped into a dome under dense foliage. The hidden nest is made of grass, bark and leaves, and provides an area for the animals to rest during the day, emerging at dusk to forage.

Gourmet diet

Woylies are renowned for their truffle hunting skills and their love of fungi, with tell-tale diggings often giving these nocturnal connoisseurs away. In addition to fungi, woylies have a varied diet of seeds, nuts, insects, fruit and foliage, with their habitat determining their food choices. In captivity, woylies are fed a mix of fruits, vegetables, nuts, muesli and the occasional meal worm. Within the soft-release enclosure of Woodland Reserve, they are partial to Asian greens like bok choy, and their all-time favourite of peanuts!



Critically endangered

The woylie was once widespread throughout Western Australia, from Shark Bay through to mid-South Australia, although in the 1970's their numbers had fallen dramatically. Conservation efforts brought their numbers up and by 2001 they were removed from the endangered list. Another decline shortly after has the species now currently listed as critically endangered on the IUCN red list. Predation by feral animals, primarily cats and foxes, habitat loss and potentially disease are thought to have led to the population crash.



Photos courtesy of Houndstooth Studio