

Rare bettongs return to mainland

November 3 2011



Eastern bettong. Credit: Adrian Manning

The rare eastern bettong (*Bettongia gaimardi*) has returned to the Australian mainland, after an absence of over 80 years.

In an effort to re-establish the population on the eastern seaboard, where it was once abundant, scientists and land managers last week translocated 19 of the [small mammals](#) from [Tasmania](#) to breeding facilities at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve in the ACT.

The move is part of a larger grassy woodlands restoration research project, the Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo Woodland Experiment, led by Dr. Adrian Manning from The Australian National University in collaboration with the ACT Government and the CSIRO.

Dr. Manning said the once plentiful miniature member of the [kangaroo](#)

family, also known as the Tasmanian bettong, hadn't been seen in the area since the late 1800s.

"The decline in bettong numbers was swift in the Canberra district as a result of fox and cat predation, and land clearing to make way for agriculture," he said.

"Eastern bettongs are what we might refer to as 'ecosystem engineers' because they dig soil looking for truffles, and in doing so move fungal spores, improve soil conditions and encourage excellent water infiltration, which are all essential to good ecosystem health.

"As ecologists, what we're trying to do is understand the impact of these reintroduced animals on the woodland ecosystem and to see if such effects can be used as an ecological restoration tool that can be harnessed by [land managers](#) to repair critically endangered box gum grassy woodlands.

"The location where we will reintroduce the bettongs at Mulligans Flat is an 'outdoor laboratory' for learning about restoration of temperate woodlands, and we hope that the project will be a catalyst for changing thinking about how we rebuild our lost ecosystems.

"The findings emerging from this experiment will have application throughout similar woodlands in south eastern Australia."

Animals from this founder population will then be reintroduced to Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary near Canberra next autumn.

Provided by Australian National University

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