

Dramatic decline to mammal populations reach critical point

May 30 2014, by Pepita Smyth



The results of a research project examining the dramatic decline in native mammals in northern Australia was revealed at the Australian Veterinary Association's (AVA) Annual Conference.

Dr Andrea Reiss from Murdoch University, who is part of the project team, said that little is known of the role disease plays in the alarming decline of small to medium sized mammals in the Northern Territory.

"We're not certain if disease is a key threat to declining wildlife populations or whether the declines are due primarily to other factors such as changing fire regimes or the influence of introduced predators such as feral cats.

"What we do know is that if [species](#) continue to decline and mammal populations become more isolated, then the genetic diversity of species will diminish, making them more vulnerable to the negative impacts of disease.

"We need to understand the current role of disease in declining mammal populations to gain an understanding of its likely impact in the future," she said.

The disease investigation team is focusing its research efforts on four main sites within the Northern Territory's Top End. These study sites represent locations with stable mammal populations, those with populations currently undergoing a decline and those with populations anticipated to soon experience decline.

Four target species are being examined: the brush-tailed possum, northern brown bandicoot, northern quoll and brush-tailed rabbit-rat.

Provided by Murdoch University

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