

Kangaroo research program confirms rare albino wallaroos on Mount Panorama

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Juvenile albino wallaroo. Credit: Tim Bergen

A UTS scoping survey for its Bathurst kangaroo research program has identified rare albino wallaroos in the Mount Panorama precinct – site of the internationally iconic car racing circuit.

Bathurst councillor Jess Jennings approached the Bathurst Kangaroo Project last week to identify an animal in a photo he had taken on his

phone while running in the public reserve. Clearer images were immediately sought, with local wildlife photographer Tim Bergen discovering at least two albino wallaroos, a female and her joey. These photographs were then forwarded to UTS's macropod scientist Dr Daniel Ramp for confirmation.

"I'd previously heard about the albino wallaroos, so when I was asked if I could get clear photos I was happy to oblige and learn more about these special animals," Mr Bergen said.

"The wallaroo shape is very distinctive and their yellow tails normally indicate female wallaroos. It was a thrill to find that the albino wallaroo mother seems to have an older albino daughter and a younger non-albino female joey.

"I've since learned that there are different types of albinism determined by which genes are affected, and the animals' yellow tails might also be a clue to the type of albinism they have," he said.

Dr Ramp, who is leading the UTS kangaroo research program in Bathurst, had spotted a white wallaroo on an initial visit to the mount earlier this year and was keen to get a clearer look.

"Albinism in wildlife is rare. Just a handful of wild albino macropods are mentioned in the scientific literature and public press, although zoos breed them as attractions," he said.



Albino wallaroo family. Credit: Tim Bergen

"Given the rarity of albinism genes and the odds against these recessive genes coming together to produce albino offspring, we knew there had to be an explanation about the origins of the albino wallaroo and her albino offspring.

"Knowing that the old Joseph Banks Nature Park at the back of the mount had released all its macropods when it was shut down about 20 years ago, we made inquiries about any albino wallaroos that might have been there.

"Sure enough, respected Bathurst naturalist and former ranger for the reserve, Ian McArtney, confirmed that a male albino wallaroo had been resident at the park.

"Without an available female carrying the rare recessive albinism gene that wallaroo's direct and many offspring were never albinos.

"Several isolated generations later there are now enough of the recessive genes in the Mount Panorama wallaroo population to come together to start producing albino wallaroos.

"The possibility of seeing more albino wallaroos in the precinct certainly raises the scientific value of the mount's macropod population.

"It is frequently thought that [albino](#) animals do not survive long in the wild as their vision can be impaired and they can be observed more easily by predators. Despite living near a racetrack these rare wallaroos appear to be doing well and are healthy.

"Some residents have known of the animals for some time, and want to see them protected. The most important thing is to leave them alone, drive carefully in the Mount Panorama precinct, and keep dogs leashed when in kangaroo habitat," Dr Ramp said.

The UTS-led kangaroo research program will use non-invasive scientific methods to determine [kangaroo](#) numbers and movement in the Mount Panorama precinct. The research is supported by Bathurst Regional Council and is a collaboration with the community-based Bathurst Kangaroo Project.

"Council is generously supporting the UTS research with the purchase of some tracking and monitoring technology, and we're looking forward to using a community-based approach to collaborate with council, local experts and Bathurst residents in running the Bathurst Kangaroo Project," Dr Ramp said.

"This innovative science collaboration will be launching soon with the

beginning of the fieldwork, and we will be putting out the call for participants and partnerships in the near future.

"These rare animals could well serve as an important flagship for the project."

Provided by University of Technology, Sydney

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