

Australian marsupial the woylie at risk again

October 6 2014



Credit: Sabrina Trocini

A small Australian marsupial called the woylie or brush-tailed bettong is once again critically endangered as a result of predators, principally cats, according to a Murdoch Professor.

Murdoch's Adjunct Associate Professor, Dr Adrian Wayne, will discuss the history of conservation of the woylie and the possible causes of the marsupial's decline at a public lecture at Murdoch University on Wednesday October 8 at 7pm.

Dr Wayne said it was not the first time the woylie was facing serious decline.

"Originally the woylie was found across much of southern Australia but

by the 1960s they were restricted to three small areas in south-west Australia," Dr Wayne said.

"Conservation efforts were a success though and by the 1990s woylie numbers increased from hundreds of animals to more than 200,000.

"The increase in their population was due principally to broad-scale fox control and more than 50 translocations across Australia as part of the Department of Parks and Wildlife's conservation projects.

"By late 1990s they became the first Australian animal to be removed from state and commonwealth conservation lists."

Despite this amazing recovery of the species they are once again facing danger with a 90 per cent reduction in their numbers from 1999 to 2006.

The recent rapid declines of the woylie have caught researchers by surprise and a [conservation](#) research project began in 2006 to identify the unknown causes of the decline.

"As well as learning more about the woylie and the nature of the dramatic population changes to provide clues as to the causes, the project has investigated the possible roles of food resources, predators and disease in driving the decline," Dr Wayne said.

"Current evidence indicates that the most likely causes of the declines have been predation, principally by cats, of individuals that may have become more vulnerable by some other factor, possibly disease.

Provided by Murdoch University

Citation: Australian marsupial the woylie at risk again (2014, October 6) retrieved 10 April 2024

from <https://phys.org/news/2014-10-australian-marsupial-woylie.html>

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