

Cameras detect 'extinct' wallabies near Broome

November 21 2014, by Geoff Vivian



A previous survey by the World Wildlife Fund in the Kimberley covered the rock wallaby (pictured), the black-flanked rock wallaby and the Nabarlek. Credit: Jess Koleck/WWF

Yawuru Country Managers have found a spectacled hare wallaby (*Lagorchestes conspicillatus*) population, a species which for the last decade was feared to be locally extinct at Roebuck Plains, adjacent to Broome.

World Wildlife Fund ecologist Alex Watson, who helped train the Yawuru group, says they captured images of two wallabies in the region

via strategically placed cameras, with the last sighting of the species being a single road kill 10 years ago.

"There was actually known to be a relatively healthy population before that," he says.

He says cat and fox predation has probably hastened the species' decline—foxes only reached Roebuck Plains in the last decade.

At night the marsupials graze on short, tender plants but in the heat of the day they conceal themselves in long grass, where it is up to 10 degrees cooler, leaving impressions known as seats.

As part of a training module, Yawuru Country Managers set eight cameras near wallaby seats and scats in likely habitat near the road kill site and left the cameras running for two months.

The managers also left out a bait of oatmeal and peanut butter which is known to attract the species.

"The [managers] showed me photos of probably two animals so we've got definite proof that there's spectacled hare wallabies there," Dr Watson says.

Dr Watson says the WWF concentrates on working to conserve threatened iconic species with Indigenous ranger groups by addressing the factors that threaten them.



This spectacled hare wallaby was captured by one of the cameras on Roebuck Plains. Credit: Yawuru PBC/WWF-Aus

He has trained Yawuru country managers to find *Lagorchestes* using sensor cameras, and now having found the wallabies the group has trained operators to continue remotely monitoring the marsupials.

"We'll not only be protecting that particular [species](#) but hopefully a whole community of animals that occur in that same ecosystem," he says.

However, changed fire regimes in the region are probably the biggest problem as *Lagorchestes* need both long- and short-grass habitats, which large hot fires tend to destroy by burning large areas at a time.

"They are in the process of working up their land management program and so this will help inform their fire management strategy," Dr Watson says.

"It will also help inform their other strategies so they may look at some sort of fox management, cat management program for the future."

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) website, the spectacled hare wallaby once occupied almost half of the continent but distribution is now "extremely patchy".

Provided by Science Network WA

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