

Tiny possum discovered in national park near Albany

December 10 2014



One of Australia's most endearing marsupials, the tiny western pygmy possum, has been discovered for the first time in Albany's Torndirrup National Park by a research team from The University of Western Australia examining the pollination of native plants by mammals.

The mouse-sized animal feeds on nectar, pollen, insects and other small animals, especially in woodlands of flowering eucalypts and banksias. It will also venture into oil mallee plantations, and even nest in suburban letterboxes adjacent to bush.

Professor Stephen Hopper, from UWA Albany's Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management (CENRM), is leading a project to study

the importance of mammals and birds as pollinators in Torndirrup.

CENRM scientific officer and PhD student David Tunbridge and Honours student Jessica Masson discovered the western pygmy possum with CENRM Assistant Professor Peter Speldewinde when they started trapping for honey possums in Torndirrup last month.

Professor Hopper said the pygmy possum turned up unexpectedly in bullich woodland between karri forest and peppermint woodland.

"A few banksia trees were in flower, and the researchers found some banksia pollen on the animal after it had been swabbed for pollen," he said.

"Jessica, David and Peter were delighted to make the discovery, and they quickly conveyed the news to Department of Parks and Wildlife staff. "

Sarah Comer, Parks and Wildlife's Regional Ecologist, confirmed the report was a new record for Torndirrup National Park.

"Despite the significant efforts of local naturalists like Vic Smith, the [pygmy possum](#) has eluded both early explorers and scientists who have recorded and studied the native fauna of the park for over 200 years," Ms Comer said.

"While the recent discovery is within the known range of the species it is exciting to know that young researchers can still make exiting contributions to the documentation of natural values in the public conservation reserve system."

Professor Hopper said the discovery opened up a new line of research for Torndirrup and how honey possums and western pygmy possums lived close to each other.

"Do they eat the same plant food? Do they interact aggressively or share resources when they meet," he said.

"Another honours student is likely to study that situation in 2015, so much more will be learnt about these cutest of bush creatures in the Great Southern."

Provided by University of Western Australia

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