

Rare Australian rodents under attack from all sides

25 January 2018



A watermouse on the Maroochy River Credit: University of Queensland

The continued survival of one of Australia's rarest rodents, the water mouse, could hinge on significantly increasing the size of development buffer zones around their habitats.

University of Queensland threatened species researcher Nina Kaluza, has spent six years mapping populations of water [mice](#) from Central Queensland to the Gold Coast, which she found to be crucially threatened by human and animal disturbances.

Ms Kaluzasaid water mice (*Xeromys myoides*), also known as false water rats or yirrkoo, are small nocturnal animals that build large mud nests like termite mounds, where they and their young can escape the highest tides.

"Not only are they beautiful creatures, they are very important for the environment as a key bio-indicator for humans to understand the health of coastal wetlands and the effects of climate

change," she said.

"These unique creatures rely on their [habitat](#) and a stable hydrology system for their existence, and have been listed as a vulnerable species by the State and Federal Governments."

They are currently under threat from cats, foxes and pigs; and habitat loss from urban, industrial and agricultural development, mining, pollution, and insecticides.

Bli Bli on Queensland's Sunshine Coast was a water mouse hot spot, but also an increasingly popular real estate area. Developmental changes on land adjacent to water mice habitat were crucial to their survival.



Two water mice maintaining a nest. Credit: University of Queensland

There were problems with feral invaders, with foxes filmed at seven out of 10 nests monitored along the Maroochy River, Sunshine Coast in 2015 and 2016. Subsequent pest abatement resulted in the

eradication of six foxes at this site.

Ms Kaluza, who monitors the footage of 50 cameras, including night vision, said it was important to map and monitor water mice nests to understand water mice behaviour, the impacts on them, and to identify those populations most at risk.

This research has contributed to the Commonwealth Government's referral guideline (2015) and she said the [water](#) mice were also found in unknown numbers in the Northern Territory and Papua New Guinea.



Fox investigating and disturbing water mice nests at the Maroochy River. Credit: University of Queensland

Provided by University of Queensland

APA citation: Rare Australian rodents under attack from all sides (2018, January 25) retrieved 17 September 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-01-rare-australian-rodents-sides.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.