

# JR FACT FILE



## BRUSH-TAILED ROCK-WALLABY

*Petrogale penicillata*



### AT A GLANCE

The Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby was once common throughout south-eastern Australia but is now listed as critically endangered in Victoria and vulnerable in New South Wales and Queensland.

#### Size:

Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies are one of the larger species of Rock-wallaby but are still small compared to most species of wallaby. Weigh from 6kg to 8kg. Length of combined head and body is 50cm to 60cm; tail is 50cm to 70cm.

#### Habitat:

Rocky cliffs with ledges and crevices for shelter. Victoria now has only two known colonies – one in the Snowy River National Park and a recently reintroduced population in the Grampians National Park.

#### Common Threats:

The Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby is considered one of Victoria's most endangered animals and is listed as critically endangered.

They were once hunted extensively for their meat and fur. In 1908 a fur trader recorded sales of 92,000 skins of the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby!

Today they are threatened mostly by foxes but also by feral cats, wild dogs, decreases in natural habitat from land clearing as well as competition from other animals.

#### What is a Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby?

Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies are highly agile, with flexible hind feet and well-padded soles that allow them to grip on steep boulders and cliffs. They have a distinctive dark stripe extending along their cheek between the ears to the back of the head.

As the name suggests, the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby has a bushy tip on its tail, which provides balance for landing on uneven ground.

The Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby is the only species of rock-wallaby occurring in Victoria and was once thought to be extinct here due to the extensive hunting for its meat and fur throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

It was rediscovered in 1937 and is now considered one of Victoria's most endangered mammals.

#### Saving the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby:

Parks Victoria is a part of a recovery team set up to help save the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby from extinction. Recovery projects include a captive breeding program. Because the breeding cycle of the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby is so slow, the captive breeding program fosters joeys out to other wallabies in captivity. This enables the mother to become pregnant again immediately so that numbers are more likely to increase.

As a part of the captive breeding program, in 2008 the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby was re-introduced into the Grampians National Park. These new populations are being closely monitored and predator numbers are being kept under control to ensure a suitable habitat is maintained.

This means controlling fox populations through baiting and trapping programs as well as conducting controlled burns to ensure appropriate plants and habitats are created.

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## FASCINATING FACT:

THE BRUSH-TAILED ROCK-WALLABY HAS BEEN NICKNAMED 'THE SHADOW' BECAUSE THEY ARE SO SHY AND SO FEW PEOPLE EVER SEE ONE IN THE WILD.

## **Where do Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies live?**

Being so agile, the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby is happy climbing up steep slopes and rock stacks which make hunting difficult for predators. It uses ledges, crevices and caves in cliffs for shelter, and forest or grassland nearby for foraging and feeding.

Today the only known populations remaining in Victoria are in the Grampians and Snowy River National Parks.

## **The Diet of a Brush-Tailed Rock-Wallaby:**

The Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby is a herbivore feeding during dawn and dusk on a variety of different grasses and shrubs.

In the dryer summer months it forages for the juicy bark and roots of a variety of trees which enables it to survive without drinking water for long periods.

## **A Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies Family Life:**

Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies live between five and ten years. They live in family groups of two to five adults with their juveniles and joeys. Males will mate with more than one partner, while females mate with a single partner until he dies or moves away. They are opportunistic breeders which means they breed when conditions (such as rainfall) are right, rather than breeding seasonally.

Like other wallabies, the female Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby has a forward opening pouch and four milk-producing teats (called mammae). After a gestation period of 30 days, she gives birth to one joey. With undeveloped eyes, hind limbs and tail, the joey climbs through its mother's fur and into the pouch where it attaches to a teat. It remains there for six months before venturing outside the pouch for the first time. Nine months after birth, the joey is fully weaned and is ready to fend for itself.

## **Want to Know More?**

[www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au)

[www.vicrockwallaby.com](http://www.vicrockwallaby.com)