

Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby

Petrogale xanthopus (Gray, 1855)

Other common name Ring-tailed Rock-wallaby

Conservation status

The Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby is listed as an **Endangered Species** on Schedule 1 of the New South Wales *Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995* (TSC Act).

The apparent decline in numbers may be attributed to hunting for the fur trade which has historically placed significant pressure on the survival of the species (Lim 1988).

Description (summarised from Sharman *et al.* 1995)

Whilst this threat no longer applies, it has had a considerable impact on the abundance and distribution of this species.

Head and Body Length

480-650 (600)mm

Tail Length

570-700 (690)mm

Weight

6-11kg

The Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby is fawn-grey with white fur below. Individuals have a distinct white cheek-stripe and hind-stripe, buff white side-stripe and a rich brown mid-dorsal stripe from crown of head to centre of back. The ears, forearms, hindlegs and feet range from rich orange to bright yellow.

The tail is usually orange-brown with irregular dark brown strips. However, the pattern and colours on the tail are variable, with the tail tip differing from dark brown to white.

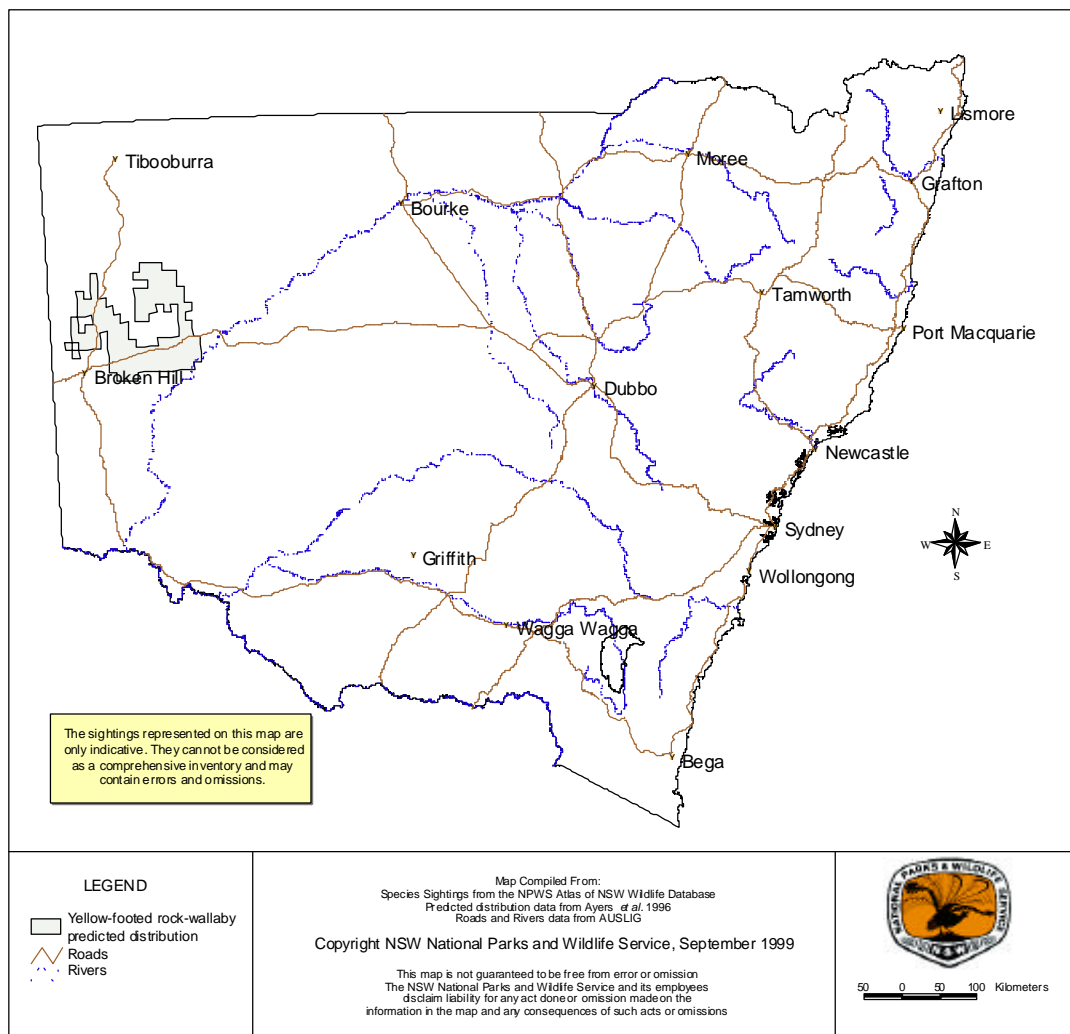
Distribution

The Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby historically, was widespread in arid and semi-arid inland Australia (Maxwell *et al.* 1996). Since European settlement the species has declined dramatically in distribution and abundance, with several populations becoming extinct earlier this century (Dickman *et al.* 1993). Today, the Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby is found only in low numbers on isolated rocky hills and outcrops in the semi-arid zone of South Australia, NSW and Queensland (Maxwell *et al.* 1996).



Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby

In NSW, the species is thought to have occurred over the entire north-western fold belt from Broken Hill to Tibooburra, including on the Barrier, Scopes, Byngano and southern Grey Ranges (Lim *et al.* 1980). However, populations of the species are currently only known from Mootwingee NP and Cotaurundee NR where less than 100 animals were counted in 1995 during annual surveys of the species (Ayers *et al.* 1996).



NPWS records of the Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby in NSW

The NSW population comprises two colonies about 10 km apart (Lim *et al.* 1992). This species is considered by Lim *et al.* (1992) to be in imminent danger of extinction.

Recorded occurrences in conservation reserves

Mootwingee NP, Cotaurundee NR (Ayers *et al.* 1999).

Habitat

Habitat consists of isolated rocky outcrops, cliffs and ridges in semi-arid country usually with mulga scrub as the dominant vegetation (Maxwell *et al.* 1996). Topography is generally low, with isolated rocky outcrops rising steeply from the surrounding

landscape (Lim *et al.* 1992). These rocky outcrops provide shelter sites that enable the wallabies to escape predators. Further, these areas contain permanent fresh water, although, the supply may be restricted to mere soaks at the edges of rock faces (Lim *et al.* 1992).

Preferred habitat also supports more diverse vegetation than the surrounding plains, which provides the wallabies with their diet.

Ecology

The Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby feeds on grasses and forbs and brows on shrubs and trees during drought, with chenopod species making up a small portion of their diet (Dawson & Ellis 1979).



Yellow-footed Rock-wallabies

There is no distinct breeding season for the species and it is thought that number of births is influenced by rainfall and hence food availability (Maxwell *et al.* 1996; Lim *et al.* 1987). Studies on captive animals indicate a gestation period of 31-32 days and juveniles have a pouch life of about 194 days (Sharman *et al.* 1995).

Threats

- Competition for food from introduced herbivores; goats, rabbits and sheep (Copley 1981; Lim *et al.* 1987)
- Competition from feral goats for caves used to shelter from the heat (Lim *et al.* 1980)
- Small population numbers with a fragmented distribution means that they are vulnerable to regional catastrophic events and may experience problems associated with the low variability within the gene pool (Dickman *et al.* 1993)
- Predation by foxes, cats and Wedge-tailed Eagles (Sheppard 1990; Lim *et al.* 1980; Lim *et al.* 1992)

- Hunting for the fur trade historically reduced population numbers (Maxwell *et al.* 1996)

Management

- Introduced animal control programs within known or potential habitat areas, specifically targeting herbivores (eg. goats and rabbits) and predators (eg. foxes and cats)
- Protection and maintenance of known or potential habitat
- Captivity breeding and re-introduction of animals into suitable habitat areas
- Alteration of prescribed burning and grazing regimes to ensure the enhancement and maintenance of known or potential habitats

Recovery plans

A recovery plan has not been prepared for this species.

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