

Black Wallaby: a new *Macropod* species of the Grampians, Victoria, in 1979

PR Bird

Five species of macropods have been listed by Wakefield (1974), Seebeck (1976) and Emison *et al.* (1978) for the Grampians ranges:

- *Macropus giganteus* (Eastern Grey Kangaroo)
- *M. fuliginosus* (Western Grey or Mallee Kangaroo)
- *M. rufogriseus* (Red-necked Wallaby)
- *Petrogale penicillata* (Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby)
- *Potorous tridactylus* (Long-nosed Potoroo).

The Western Grey Kangaroo is usually seen in open woodland or grassland flats, particularly in the Black Range and Victoria Valley area. The dark brown fur usually serves to differentiate it from the Eastern Grey Kangaroo, which may be seen with it in these locations. The Eastern Grey Kangaroo occurs more widely throughout the ranges and foothills, together with the Red-necked Wallaby.

The Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby colony in the Victoria Range was described by Wakefield (1971). The population of this wallaby is small and disturbance of its environment by visitors and an army cadet corps which used a nearby area for training may have endangered it.

The Potoroo too has a limited distribution – Pomonal area – and its status may also be uncertain since part of its known range is on free-hold land subject to alienation.

Sub-fossil evidence reveals that the following species were also once present in Western Victoria (Wakefield 1974; LCC (1978) report):

- *Bettongia gaimardi* (Southern Bettong)
- *Bettongia penicillata* (Woylie)
- *Bettongia lesueur* (Boodie)
- *Macropus greyi** (Toolache Wallaby)
- *Lagorchestes leporoides** (Brown Hare-wallaby)
- *Thylogale billardierii* (Red-bellied Wallaby)
- *Aepyprymnus rufescens* (Rufous Rat- kangaroo)
- *Onychogalea unguifera* (Northern Nail-tailed Wallaby)
- *O nychoalea fraenata* (Bridle Nail-tailed Wallaby)
- *Megaleia rufa* (Red Kangaroo)
- *Wallabia bicolor* (Black or Swamp Wallaby)

(* believed to be extinct).

The Southern Bettong once occurred in the Grampians (Wakefield 1974) whilst the sub-fossils of this species and the others variously occurred in the Lower Glenelg, Tower Hill, Byaduk Caves and Mt. Hamilton deposits, and at Koroit beach Aboriginal middens.

Wakefield (1974) accounts for the presence of these species by association with changes in the climate. Wet-forest species such as the Black Wallaby were prominent in Lower Glenelg deposits in Pleistocene sediments (c. 15,000 years BP) and again in the late Holocene epoch. Semi-desert forms, such as the Red Kangaroo, Boodie and Bridled Nail-tailed Wallaby, appear in the early Holocene epoch (c. 8,000 years BP) and more recently (2000-3000 years BP) in Koroit beach Aboriginal middens (LCC report). Did some or all of these species also occur in the Grampians?

The Black Wallaby was present in the Lower Glenelg area at least into the early 1900's, according to recollections of an early Portland farming family (AC Beauglehole, pers. comm.). The present most western occurrence given by Wakefield (1974) is the Otways, extending to the Port Campbell National Park. There is no evidence that it still occurs in the Lower Glenelg National Park (A Arnold, National Parks Service, pers. comm.).

The presence of the Black Wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*) in the Grampians was established in March 1979. Mr Don Macarthur, a farmer whose property at Mirranatwa adjoins forest in the Serra Range, captured a small wallaby amidst tussocks. The distinctive grey, black and reddish brown pelage signified to Mr Macarthur that this was not the common Red-necked Wallaby. He gave the animal to Mrs Susan McInnes of Victoria Valley but, despite treatment, it soon died. Subsequently the wallaby came into my possession and I photographed the animal (see photo below) and lodged the specimen with the National Museum of Victoria. Confirmation of identity was obtained from the curator of mammals, Miss Joan Dixon. Other individuals of the species have subsequently been seen in the Mirranatwa Gap area on both east and west slopes of the Serra Range. The extent of distribution of the species in the Grampians is unknown although there appear to be similar habitat areas (thickets of tea-tree, melaleuca and heath) elsewhere on lower slopes of the ranges.

Wakefield (1974) considered that, of the sub-fossil species, only the Bettong was present in Western Victoria at the time of European settlement. The Rufous Rat-kangaroo was regarded in the LCC report (1978) as having been present at that time.

Perhaps, in the light of the discovery of the Black Wallaby in the Grampians, one should not rule out the possibility of the survival of one of the smaller species listed above.

References

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