

Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park Notes

Mammals

Mammals play an important role in *Anangu Tjukurpa*. One of the main ancestors, the *Mala* (rufous hare-wallaby) people, travelled to Uluru from the north and subsequently fled to the south and southeast (towards South Australia) to escape from *kurpany*, an evil dog like creature that had been specifically created and sent from *Kikingkura* (near the Western Australia border).

In the context of *Tjukurpa* the actions of ancestral beings such as the *mala* and *itjaritjari* (marsupial mole) have important roles in evolution of the form and features of Uluru. *Anangu* continue to hunt and gather animal species in remote areas of the park and the main mammal hunted is *malu* (red kangaroo, *Macropus rufus*).

Historically, 46 native mammal species are known to have been living in the region covered by the park. A number of these are now extinct, and some have become extinct in the wild in the Northern Territory.

Regular surveys have found that there are currently 21 native mammal species living in the park, a number of which are listed as endangered or vulnerable under the *Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*.

Anangu support the re-introduction of several locally extinct native mammal species such as *mala*, *mitika* (burrowing bettong), *wayuṯa* (common brushtail possum), *ninu* (bilby) and *waru* (black-footed rock wallaby).

Mala (Largochestes hirsutus)

This small wallaby was once one of the most abundant and widespread macropods in the Northern Territory. Individuals generally weigh 800-1600 grams (males), and 900-1250 grams (females) and live mainly in patches of spinifex, which is used primarily for shelter. *Mala* use adjacent areas for feeding and have a highly variable diet but are predominantly herbivorous. They prefer seeds and fruits when available and leaf and stem material from grasses are a major food source. When food is scarce they will eat spinifex, supplemented by insects. *Mala* need a mosaic of vegetation structure and diversity and small scale patchy fire is clearly important in creating this habitat. Two factors are considered to have contributed to the major collapse of this species, the impact from predation by foxes and cats and the reduction of traditional Aboriginal burning practices when Aboriginal people were moved to settlements.

In 1999, a cross cultural workshop was held to consider the possible re-introduction of native fauna back into the park. *Anangu* elders shared knowledge about the location of some species now extinct, and the importance of these species in the transfer of cultural knowledge. The *mala* reintroduction program was supported by the construction of an enclosure (170 hectares) within the park and 24 individuals, nine female and 15 male, were released into this area in 2005. In the last survey completed a total number of 51 (22 female and 29 male) were recorded with 13 of the 22 females having pouch young.



Left to right - *Mala* is an important ancestral animal in *Tjukurpa* and construction of the *mala* paddock in 2005 was to support a breeding program for the re-introduction of this species to the park



Itjaritjari (Notoryctes typhlops)

Itjaritjari (marsupial mole) is small with a head and body length of 121–159 millimetres and tail length of 21–26 millimetres and weighs 40-70 grams. This species is listed as rare and is widely distributed across the desert region of Australia. It is generally found in sand dunes, inter-dunal flats and in sandy soils along river flats and spends most of its time underground.

These animals are rarely seen and are more inclined to surface after periods of rain. The females have a backwards facing pouch, like the koala and wombat. Their diet consists of ant pupae, beetles, beetle larvae and cossid moth larvae.

Minyma ltjaritjari is an ancestral being that lived in a cave in the side of Uluru in the same valley as the *Mala* people. She was friendly with the *Mala* women and would often come out of her cave to watch the children play.

Murtja (*Dasyercus blythi*)

Murtja (mulgara) or is listed as vulnerable Australia wide. Head and body length is 125-220 milimetres (males) and 125-170 milimetres (females) and tail length is 75-125 milimetres (males) and 75-100 milimetres (females). The *murtja* is small weighing between 75-170 grams (males) and 60-95 grams (females) and inhabits the arid sandy dune regions of Australia. They live in burrows, which they dig on the flats of low sand dunes and the burrow generally has one main entrance with two to three side tunnels and pop holes. The most striking feature of these small yet robust animals is the crest of black hairs on the tail, which is short and fattened at the base. They hunt at night, mainly for insects, arthropods and small invertebrates but are not strictly nocturnal. The park currently has a management program for this species, which involves an annual survey using targeted trapping and a patch burning program to create ideal habitat.



Left to right - *murtja*, *ltjaritjari*, *patupiri* and *tarkawara*

Tarkawara (*Notomys alexis*)

Tarkawara (spinifex hopping mouse) are common and live throughout most of the arid zone of Australia preferring spinifex covered sandflats and stabilised sand dunes. They have a head and body length of 95–112 milimetres and tail length of 131–150 milimetres and weigh between 27–45 grams. Populations vary greatly according to levels of rainfall and population explosions were recorded in 1974-75 and 1988-89 after heavy rains. Individuals avoid the desert heat by sheltering in deep, humid burrows lined with small twigs, leaves and other plant material. Like many animals in the desert they only come out at night and their diet consists of a variety of seeds, roots, shoots and invertebrates.

Maļu (*Macropus rufus*)

Maļu (red kangaroo) is found mainly in the better-watered plains country and low open woodlands, but subsists sparsely in the desert. The males are 1645–2400 milimetres in size and females are 1390–2000 milimetres and weigh between 22-85 kilograms (males) and 17-35 kilograms (females). When conditions are favourable *maļu* females can nurture three young at one time, one joey at foot, one in the pouch and one waiting to be born. This species is a popular source of food for *Anangu* and they utilise many parts of the animal including the meat, skin and leg sinew.

Paṭupiri (*Chalinolobus gouldii*)

Paṭupiri (Gould's wattled bat) are a common species widespread throughout Australia and inhabit open forest, mallee, dense forest, tall shrubland and urban areas. The head and body length is between 65-75 milimetres and tail length is 40-50 milimetres and they weigh between 10-18 grams. These bats roost in tree spouts, bird nests, ceilings and have even been found in the exhaust of a tractor! They emit different noises according to their activity such as high pitched chirps when flying low and chattering noises when roosting. Owls, feral cats and birds like the butcherbird, prey on them.

Threatened Species

There are 20 mammal species of the park currently listed under the EPBC Act 1999 including the mulgara (*Dasyercus cristicauda*), greater bilby (*Macrotis lagotis*), marsupial mole (*Notoryctes typhlops*), golden bandicoot (*Isoodon auratus*), rufous hare-wallaby (*Largochestes hirsutus*) and black-footed rock-wallaby (*Petrogale lateralis*). For a complete list of species refer to the UKTNP Draft Plan of Management 2009 – 2019 available at the Cultural Centre.

