

Possums reclassified as "endangered".

Environment Minister Albert Jacob recently announced that the Western ringtail possum's threatened species status has been upgraded from "vulnerable" to "endangered." The Action Plan for Australian Mammals 2012 recommended that this status should change to critically endangered, a status which would have more accurately reflected the dire circumstances that this species finds itself in due to anthropogenic changes to its environment: clearing for development, feral and domestic animal predation, logging, and large scale inappropriate controlled burning regimes

([https://books.google.com.au/books?id=qW27AwAAQBAJ&pg=PA272&lpg=PA272&dq=western+ringtail+possum+burbidge&source=bl&ots, p 271-75](https://books.google.com.au/books?id=qW27AwAAQBAJ&pg=PA272&lpg=PA272&dq=western+ringtail+possum+burbidge&source=bl&ots=p 271-75)).

Over the last ten years, the WRP population is estimated to have decreased by 80%. Over the next decade, as rainfall continues to decline, temperatures rise and leaf quality diminishes, urban development and logging continue to destroy habitat, and feral predation continues to decimate remnant populations, WRP numbers are expected to decline by a further 80%. They occupy just 500 km² of fragmented habitat, with many remnant subpopulations considered to be in decline. These shocking figures surely qualify the WRP for reclassification as critically endangered, a status which just might inject the WA government's formerly disorganised and seriously underfunded conservation efforts for

this species with some urgency, financial commitment and political will. It also might encourage the residents of areas that are lucky enough to now be called possum country, to value their rare and endangered nocturnal neighbours, to treat them with affection, respect and care. Maybe habitat trees in backyards and parks would be valued because they contain a critically endangered species, perhaps people would feel privileged instead of peeved when their roof is visited by a rare creature, perhaps they would drive more carefully, use safer rat poison, keep their dogs and cats in at night, bait for foxes and trap for cats in rural areas, and plant more native trees. Perhaps more people would write submissions and protest when developers, planners and politicians decide to bulldoze habitat to make way for hospitals, houses and foreshore recreation precincts, all of which could be situated to enhance habitat, not reduce it.

Maybe the reclassification of WRP as a critically endangered species just might make them special and rare enough for us all to make the effort that is needed to save this unique and beautiful creature—which surely has just as much right as we do to live in "possum country." For now, we have to hope that "endangered" alone is enough to get the message through: that we either begin to properly care for Western ringtail possums and their habitat—or they will end up as an "exhibition" species, one that you will only ever see in a zoo.

Western Ringtail Possum Recovery Plan

On the 12th November, the Department of the Environment released its draft Recovery Plan for the Western Ringtail Possum, and opened the period for public comment on the plan. All submissions need to be received by Friday, 13th February, 2015.

We believe that the more people who make comment on this Recovery Plan, the more seriously the Department for Environment will take the task of implementing it! In your submission, consider emphasizing one or all of these concerns: the importance of feral baiting, of appropriate fire

management regimes, the need for a moratorium on logging in known WRP habitat, the need for proper regulation of clearing for development in WRP habitat, the need for regulated control of domestic pets in urban possum hotspots, the need for genuine, meaningful support for the vets and carers who rehabilitate injured and orphaned possums, and the desperate need for managed sanctuaries to protect vulnerable populations.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/recovery-plans/comment>