

FIRE INFORMATION NOTE | WESTERN RINGTAIL POSSUM

Species and Conservation status

Western ringtail possum *Pseudocheirus occidentalis* – Critically endangered.

Description

Western ringtail possums are an arboreal (tree-dwelling) nocturnal species. They have dark chocolate brown fur with creamy white or grey bellies. Their prehensile tails have short fur with a distinctive white tip. Western ringtail possums can be distinguished from the only other large possum found in south-west Western Australia, the common brushtail possum, by their smaller size, shorter and usually darker fur, smaller rounder ears and much less bushy tail.



Where are western ringtail possums found?

Western ringtail possums are found in forested areas of south-west WA but are most common in coastal or near coastal areas and in the southern forests near Manjimup. The habitat preferences, diet and breeding patterns of western ringtail possums vary between these areas. Throughout their range western ringtail possums are found in peppermint, peppermint/tuart, jarrah, karri and sheoak forests and woodlands, and near-coastal heaths.

Ecology and biology

- Western ringtail possums only eat leaves. Preferred food sources are peppermint, jarrah, marri and sheoak where they occur but leaves of other species, including garden plants, are also eaten.
- In coastal areas, western ringtail possums breed throughout the year with peaks in April-June and October-December. In the southern forests they breed mainly in May and June.
- Western ringtail possums are nocturnal and rest during the day in dreys (nests of sticks and leaves) built in tree canopies, sedges or the skirts of balga (grass trees). They also shelter in tree hollows and log piles, particularly in the southern forests.
- It is important for western ringtail possums to have continuous tree canopy to move around their habitat and avoid being exposed to predators such as foxes, cats and dogs and to provide shelter from heat during summer periods.

What should I consider when undertaking fire mitigation activities?

- In coastal areas, plan for low intensity burns, in late autumn or early spring, when conditions are cool and moist to assist in protecting the canopy and when vegetation can resprout to provide food.
- In the southern forest area, plan to undertake your burn in early spring. This avoids removing food and habitat prior to harsh conditions in winter and ensures that resprouting of food plants after fire management activities is rapid and vigorous.
- Aim to keep at least half of the area occupied by western ringtail possums unburnt or protected from mechanical fuel reduction, especially if it is isolated from other areas occupied by western ringtail possums.
- Aim to wait until the area has recovered before undertaking further bushfire risk management actions in additional areas.
- You can protect hollows, dreys and other habitat by raking leaf litter and other fuel away, and wetting habitat elements down before burning.
- Aim to retain some balga unburnt. If igniting balga, do so by hand from the top to make it easier for western ringtail possums (and other animals) to escape.
- Consider conducting fox and feral cat control (e.g. 1080 baiting, trapping or shooting) immediately before and after your fire management activities.
- If safe to do so, conduct your burn at night when western ringtail possums are active and can more easily avoid the heat and flames.

More information

Threatened species management contact: DBCA's Species and Communities Program:
speciesandcommunities@dbca.wa.gov.au or your local DBCA Regional or District office:
www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/locations

Fuel management on your land: www.dfes.wa.gov.au/plannedburning/