



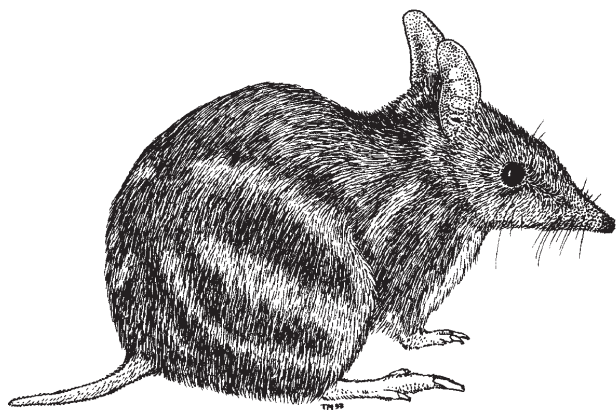
Eastern Barred Bandicoot

Perameles gunii

The eastern barred bandicoot is an insectivorous marsupial found only in Australia.

Is it threatened?

The eastern barred bandicoot is considered threatened because the species is potentially at risk of becoming extinct. This may seem surprising to many Tasmanians, as barred bandicoots are still common in parts of the state. However, the eastern barred bandicoot is now extinct in



South Australia and is 'critically endangered' in Victoria. In Tasmania it is listed as 'requiring monitoring' on the Tasmanian Threatened Species List 1995. Nationally, the eastern barred bandicoot is classified as vulnerable.

What does it look like?

The eastern barred bandicoot has a slender, elongated head tapering to a pink nose and well whiskered muzzle. It has large, prominent ears. Its soft fur is greyish brown, while across the hindquarters are the characteristic pale bars or stripes that give the species its name. The belly, feet and short, thin tail are creamy white.

Other bandicoots in Tasmania

In Tasmania there is only one other species of bandicoot, the southern brown bandicoot, *Isodon obesulus*. The southern brown bandicoot is easily distinguished from the eastern barred bandicoot as its fur is dark brown and rather coarse to touch. Its muzzle, ears and hindfeet are shorter than those of the eastern barred bandicoot, and its tail is dark brown.

Life history

Eastern barred bandicoots have a remarkable life history. They have one of the highest breeding rates of any animal of their size; indeed, their gestation period (the time from conception to birth) is one of the shortest recorded for any mammal — 12 days! In Tasmania, young are born between late May and December. During a single breeding season a female may produce 3-4 litters with a litter size of 1-4 young. Thus a female bandicoot can potentially give birth to as many as 16 young in one year!

Although the eastern barred bandicoot has a very high reproductive rate, mortality — particularly among juveniles — is extremely high. The causes of mortality are not well known, but predators and disease appear to be the main agents. The life-span of the eastern barred bandicoot is less than three years.

Lifestyle

Eastern barred bandicoots spend their day resting in nests. These are usually no more than a shallow depression in the ground with a dome of grass pulled over the top. Only one adult bandicoot occupies a nest, although young may share the nest with their mother for a week after they first leave the pouch. After dusk barred bandicoots emerge and immediately begin foraging for food. Bandicoots are solitary animals and only mix with others when breeding.

What do they eat?

Barred bandicoots mainly eat invertebrates from the soil. They locate their food using their well developed sense of smell. Then they use their strong claws and pointed nose to dig small conical holes from which they extract food. Their favourite food items include root-eating grubs such as cockchafer and corbies. They also feed on beetles, earthworms, berries and fungi.

Why is it threatened?

Loss of habitat is one of the greatest threats to barred bandicoot survival. It is important that we preserve areas of natural habitat and understorey plants. Introduced predators such as dogs and cats are another threat to bandicoots.

Clearing native habitat

Before Europeans arrived in Tasmania, the eastern barred bandicoot mainly lived in the native grasslands and grassy woodlands of the Midlands. These habitats were the first to be cleared for agriculture and grazing.

The eastern barred bandicoot has now largely disappeared from the Midlands region.

A similar process of large-scale clearing (as well as predation by introduced foxes) was also responsible for the drastic decline of this species on mainland Australia.

In the absence of foxes, selective clearing in Tasmania's southeast and north has provided suitable agricultural habitats for the barred bandicoot to colonise. These areas of improved pasture interspersed with patches of native bush are now the stronghold of the species in Tasmania. Barred bandicoots also use a variety of weeds, including European gorse and blackberries, as nesting sites and as a refuge from predators.

Loss of groundcover

While eastern barred bandicoots are still quite common in some parts of Tasmania, there is good reason for caution. Widespread clearing of remnant native bush, and also the removal of ground cover including some weeds, can convert prime barred bandicoot habitat into a wasteland in which the species cannot survive. This occurred over much of the midlands. We recommend that as much native bush be preserved as possible. The margins of such bushland with pasture provide excellent refuges for bandicoots.

Also, where weeds such as gorse and blackberries provide cover for bandicoots, we suggest these be retained where possible. However, if these weeds are a serious problem and have to be removed on a large scale, we suggest replanting of native species to preserve barred bandicoot habitat. This should be done prior to weed removal. The best native plants for providing cover for bandicoots are low-growing, shrubby species which form a dense shelter at ground level. Species of *Acacia*, *Grevillia*, *Hakea* and *Correa* are ideal.

Cats and dogs

Cats and dogs kill bandicoots, and may cause significant mortality in some populations. Cats carry the disease *Toxoplasmosis*, which can be transmitted to eastern barred bandicoots and is often fatal. We can reduce the impact of our pets on wildlife by keeping pets indoors at night. This stops them hunting when barred bandicoots are out feeding in the open. Preventing your dog from roaming means it has less opportunity to flush bandicoots from their nests during the day.

People

People have misconceptions about barred bandicoots. Many people confuse this animal with the rabbit, thinking that it eats grass and is therefore a problem on farms and in some gardens. Actually bandicoots are quite beneficial as they eat the grubs which eat the roots of grasses. Although bandicoots dig in garden lawns they are removing grass eating grubs. We suggest these diggings are a small price to pay for the pleasure of having a native marsupial living on your doorstep!

Foxes

Should the fox become established in Tasmania this species will be at great risk of extinction.

How can you help?

To preserve Tasmania's eastern barred bandicoot we need to preserve its habitat and keep the fox out of Tasmania. If you have barred bandicoots near your home or on the farm, be aware of what this little animal needs to survive. If you are planning to clear ground-cover, even if this is only weeds, be aware that barred bandicoots may be dependent on this cover for survival. And if it has to go, then think seriously about replacing it with native shrubs.

An eastern barred bandicoot recovery team, consisting of community representatives, guides recovery actions. Community cooperation is essential in implementing these actions.

Further information

Driessen, M. M. & Hocking, G. J. (1992). *The eastern barred bandicoot recovery plan for Tasmania: Research phase*. PWS, Tasmania.

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