



WOYLIE

Bettongia penicillata ogilbyi

Stick carrier

The brush-tailed bettong is a small marsupial from the potoroo, or rat-kangaroo, family. While their common name is 'brush-tailed bettong' they are more often referred to by their Noongar name of 'woylie' (pronounced 'woy-lee'), which means stick-carrier. If you look at the tufts of black hair on their tails, you can understand how they got that common name though!

A tail of difference

As a small hopping mammal, balance is crucial to a woylie. Much like the tails of its larger wallaby and kangaroo cousins, the woylie's tail assists with balance when hopping. But unlike these other mammals, the woylies' tail has a point of difference: it can curl and grip! This allows them to collect branches and softer materials like grasses for nest building.

What large feet you have

Woylies belong to a group of animals known as macropods, which literally means 'big foot'. Like their more obviously big-footed cousins, the kangaroo, they have large hind feet, which are perfect for bouncing through the bush.

Unlikely nest builders

When daylight strikes, woylies curl up to sleep. They do this in a hidden nest made of grass, bark and leaves. Using their prehensile (gripping) tail to carry small bundles of these nesting materials, they shape it into a dome under dense foliage – like under the protective fronds of a grass tree. Here, they have a place to rest during the day, before emerging at dusk to forage.

Busy breeders

Despite their low numbers in the wild, woylies are capable of breeding from just six months of age and can produce pouch young every 3-4 months. The joey spends around three months in the pouch growing. As solitary animals, mums may choose to toss a joey and run if threatened, as she can quickly become pregnant again.

Footlongs

The woodland woylies have wonderful mottled grey-brown fur on their backs and rump and a pale grey underside. They range in weight from 1.1 to 1.6 kilograms and stand between 30 to 38cm tall. With tail lengths that range from 29 to 36 centimetres, they are as tall as their tails are long!

Truffle hunters

Woylies are renowned for their love of fungi, with tell-tale diggings often giving these nocturnal connoisseurs away. Not only does this fill their bellies, but their diggings also help keep the soil and bush healthy along the way! In addition to fungi, woylies have a varied diet of seeds, nuts, insects, fruit and foliage, with their habitat determining their food choices.

Falling prey

Sadly, the woylie's population decline has been attributed to a few key threats. Loss of habitat from human land clearing, disease and the subsequent predation from introduced cats and foxes. But this also means that we can all help them not fall prey to more decline, by keeping our kitties from roaming beyond our homes!

A question of numbers

The woylie population has had its ups and downs. Conservation efforts after the first species decline in the 1970s were hailed a success and the woylie was removed from the endangered list in 1996. Another dramatic drop in woylie numbers followed shortly after though. Here in WA, they are listed as Critically Endangered, surviving in only two remaining wild populations and protected sanctuaries like ours.

mammals fact sheet

