

GREATER BILBY

Endangered

Vulnerable

Critically Endangered

Extinct in the Wild

Extinct



Common name

Greater bilby

Scientific name

Macrotis lagotis

Habitat

Mitchell grass plains, sandstone ridges, gibber plains, rocky soils with little ground cover, hummock and tussock grasslands, and Acacia shrublands.

Habitat range/distribution

The greater bilby once inhabited most drier regions of mainland Australia. However, the range of their population reduced by over 80% due to loss and fragmentation of their habitat and the arrival of exotic predators.

Today they are found in several locations in western Queensland, with the largest remaining population in an area west of the Diamantina River, on Astrebla Downs National Park, and some pastoral properties.

Description

The greater bilby is one of Queensland's best-known marsupial species and holds deep cultural significance. Bilbies are the size of a rabbit, and have a long-pointed nose, silky pale blue-grey fur with a tan belly, long, pink ears and a crested black and white tail. They measure up to 55cm in body length, and their tails can be up to 29cm long. Males weigh 1–2.5kg, while females are lighter and weigh 800g–1.1kg.

Their strong sense of smell and large ears (that provide sharp hearing) guide them when looking for food as they can't see very well. Interestingly, when they run, they keep their nose down which contributes to their unusual gait.

Importance

The greater bilby is of spiritual importance to Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is a unique part of our Queensland fauna and serves an important role in the ongoing health of our ecosystems. Bilbies act as 'ecosystem engineers', with an individual bilby able to turn over up to 20 tonnes of topsoil in a year. Their digging helps water to infiltrate the soil profile, collect leaf litter and it helps collect seeds. Through these efforts, fertile pockets are created providing the perfect conditions for plants to germinate. The continual digging helps cycle organic material and nutrients back into the ground.

Key threats

- Habitat loss and fragmentation.
- Predators such as foxes and feral cats.

What is being done to help protect and conserve this species

The Astrebla Downs National Park provides important grassland habitat for the bilbies and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) rangers work to educate surrounding landowners and reduce pests such as feral dogs and cats.

In 2019, Queensland Government partnered with the Save The Bilby Fund. Captive-bred bilbies were re-introduced into Currawinya National Park in a predator-proof enclosure to reduce the threats posed by feral cats and foxes. The ongoing breeding program aims to create a viable population that can help repopulate other wild populations of bilbies.

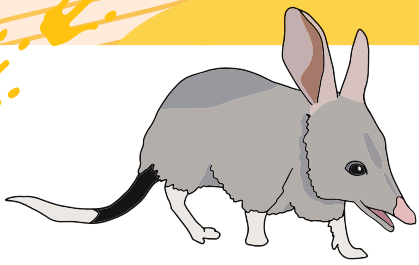
Ongoing research provides insights into understanding how greater bilby populations are changing over time. The bilbies are monitored by carrying out aerial surveys at Astrebla Downs National Park and surrounding areas, and on-ground surveys of their burrow activity at the national park. This monitoring program provides important information to help make decisions on how to best protect the species.

Become a bilby champion

- Protect bushland in your area to provide habitat for native animals.
- Keep dogs and cats secured at night.
- Join Bilby Tracks, a citizen science program run by Save the Bilby Fund.
- If you see a greater bilby in the wild, report the sighting to QPWS.
- Talk to your friends and family about threats to bilbies and what they can do.



The greater bilby burrows to a depth of three metres to avoid predators and to keep the burrow at a constant temperature of 23 degrees Celsius.



BILBY TRUE OR FALSE?

Circle your answer

Bilbies do not need water.

TRUE FALSE

Bilbies have excellent hearing.

TRUE FALSE

A bilby will typically burrow to a depth of 10 metres.

TRUE FALSE

Bilbies are found all over Queensland.

TRUE FALSE

The main threats to bilbies are habitat loss and fragmentation and predators including foxes and feral cats.

TRUE FALSE

BILBY WORD JUMBLE

ilyBb _____
 regedEnnad _____
 rageL sare _____
 giniggD _____
 trealbAs wosnD _____

Answers

True or false
 True, bilbies do not drink water. Instead, they obtain their required moisture from the food they eat!
 True, a bilby's large ears are not for decoration, as they provide sharp hearing!
 False, the greater bilby burrows to a depth of three metres. False, these days bilbies are found in several locations in western Queensland.
 True, foxes and feral cats as well as a loss of habitat have greatly impacted bilby numbers.

Bilbies do not drink water. Instead, they obtain their required moisture from the food they eat!

- Word jumble**
1. Bilby
 2. Endangered
 3. Large ears
 4. Digging
 5. Astrebla Downs

