

# Fact Sheet



[easterbilby.com.au](http://easterbilby.com.au)

## Appearance

The bilby is a marsupial mammal which belongs to the bandicoot family and is about the size of a rabbit.

They have large ears, a silky light grey and white coat, and a long, black and white crested tail. Bilbies have a long pointed snout and a well-developed sense of smell to help them find food.

The famous large ears of the bilby are hairless and help them listen for predators and their strong front paws help them dig their burrows and find food.



Female bilby at Charleville

Like all marsupials, the female bilbies have a pouch in which they carry their babies. Bilbies normally have one or two young at a time, although their pouches have eight nipples and is backward opening for an easy escape. Bilbies breed throughout the year as long as food is plentiful.

The best place to see a bilby for yourself is at the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service centre at Charleville, David Fleay Wildlife Park on the Gold Coast, Hervey Bay Nature World or try your local zoo.

## Habitat

Bilbies live in underground burrows that spiral to about three metres long and two metres deep and they come out under cover of darkness to find food. The burrow protects them from the scorching outback sun and predators.

The bilby's predators include goannas, cats, foxes, dingoes, snakes, large birds and large night birds of prey.

You will find bilbies in isolated arid and semi-arid areas in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. The Queensland bilby population is scattered across a 100,000km<sup>2</sup> area between Birdsville and Boulia.

Entrance to a bilby burrow



Semi-arid bilby habitat



## Food

After dark, the bilby leaves the protection of the burrow to eat plant seeds, fruits, honey ants, grubs, bulbs, termites, insects, fungi and spiders.

Like the Australian koala, bilbies get most of their water from the food they eat.

Because bilbies sift through dirt to find seeds, fruits and bulbs to eat, they digest a lot of soil. In fact, 20-90% of their waste is made up of dirt!

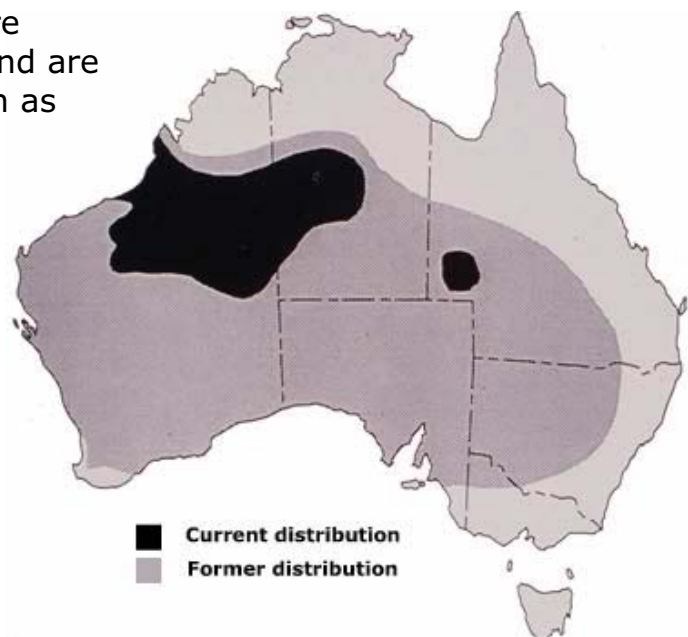
## Endangered

Because of competition for food and habitat degradation, bilby numbers have declined severely since the early 1900's because of competition for food with rabbits and livestock, predation from feral animals and changing habitat such as fires and grazing.



The bilby populations are now isolated and scattered which means they are susceptible to ecological changes and are vulnerable to natural disasters such as disease and fire.

The bilby was once found in 70% of mainland Australia, living in most areas west of the Great Dividing Range. Now bilbies are extinct in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. The bilbies in Queensland are now the most threatened and genetically distinct population in Australia, with only 600-700 specimens left in the wild. The bilby is considered 'vulnerable' nationally and 'endangered' in Queensland.



## Saving the Bilby

Of the six bandicoot species that once lived in the arid and semi-arid areas of Australia, only the bilby is left. Because of this, it is very important that we do all we can to make sure we don't lose the last of our Australian bilbies.

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) has invested a lot of time and money into saving the bilby. In particular, Ranger Frank 'the bilby man' Manthey and Ranger Peter McRae have been instrumental in the development of a wild breeding programme based in the Currawinya National Park in south-west Queensland.



Ranger Frank Manthey and Dawn Fraser

Captive programmes like those in Charleville help safeguard against disasters in the wild and provide an environment where bilbies can live without fear of feral animals or habitat damage from livestock. The site was chosen because of its reliable and diverse food supply and it is operated by permanent staff members.

Opened in Easter 2001, the Save the Bilby Fence was constructed by volunteers and funded by donations from ordinary Australians. In particular, the QPWS was helped by the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland and Darrell Lea, Australia's major chocolate manufacturer. The fencing project has so far cost more than \$400,000.



Darrell Lea chocolate bilbies

Luckily the Queensland State Government has also been working to save the bilby by purchasing habitat for reintroduction of the species.



Save the Bilby Fence preparations



A complete section of the fence