



MALA *Lagorchestes hirsutus* RECOVERY PLAN

DESCRIPTION

The Rufous Hare-wallaby or Mala, *Lagorchestes hirsutus* are small rabbit-sized wallabies standing approximately 30 mm high and weighing between 700g-2kg. Their fur colour, particularly on the hind quarters, chest and abdomen, is a rich sandy buff. The fur on the head and back has a greyish white tint and hair length increases towards the lower portion of the back, giving the animal a conspicuous 'shaggy' appearance (Troughton 1965). There is no apparent colour differentiation between the sexes, but females are on average larger than males of similar age. Like the other members of its group, the Mala is generally considered to be nocturnal and solitary.

DISTRIBUTION

The Mala was once one of the most abundant and widespread macropods of Central Australia. The accounts of early explorers bear testimony to this fact, and the extent of its former distribution is well reported by Aborigines (Burbidge *et al.* 1988). They recorded that *Lagorchestes. hirsutus* was once distributed throughout the great spinifex deserts and peripheral shrublands of Australia's central west.

Now the mainland form is extinct in the wild with translocated populations in several mainland "paddocks" – Uluru and Watarrka (NT), Scotia (NSW) and Dryandra (WA). Additionally there is a translocated population on Trimouille Island (WA). The Island subspecies is still extant on Bernier and Dorre Islands (WA).

STATUS

The current status of the Mala on mainland Australia is precarious and on Bernier and Dorre Islands it is vulnerable (Maxwell *et.al.* 1996). Legal protection and recognition of the species threatened status are afforded by way of its listing on International & Australian conventions:

Part 1, Schedule 1 Endangered Species Prot 1992 – **Endangered**

Appendix 1 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species – **Species threatened with extinction or effected by trade**

World Conservation Union (IUCN) 1996 *Red List of Threatened Animals*

Extinct *Lagorchestes hirsutus hirsutus*

Critically Endangered *Lagorchestes hirsutus*

ANZECC List of Threatened Fauna (1998)

Extinct *Lagorchestes hirsutus hirsutus*

Extinct in the Wild *Lagorchestes hirsutus*

PARK COMPONENT

Formerly the Desert Park managed the most important genetic group of Mala along studbook lines. This approach has been abandoned due to the success of the overall breeding in the larger "Paddocks". The Park now maintains a small group for display.

PROGRESS TO DATE

The Mala breeding program was very successful and has been downgraded in intensity. Breeding now occurs within the various "paddock" populations without intensive studbook management. The Park maintains a small breeding group of Mala for display purposes. These are genetically valuable animals and excess young are transferred to either the Watarrka or Uluru "paddocks".

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE(S)

1. Improve the status (currently Extinct in the Wild IUCN 1994) of the mainland subspecies to **vulnerable** based on criteria of population size, trends, extent of occurrence and probability of extinction within 10 years.
2. Maintain the status (currently Vulnerable – IUCN 1994) of the island subspecies.

