

Mammals



Mala, rufous hare-wallaby

Mammals are an important part of the park's cultural landscape.

An itjaritjari (marsupial mole) woman spent time at Uluru in the creation time, and marks she left on the rock are explained to visitors on signage along the Mala walk.

Mala (rufous hare-wallaby) people spent time at Uluru in the creation time, arriving from the north and subsequently fleeing to the south and southeast (towards South Australia) to escape from Kurpany, an evil dog like creature that had been specifically created and sent from Kikingkura (a site near the Western Australia border).

Human interactions with mammals today

Anangu today continue to hunt and gather animal species in remote areas of the park, including maḷu (red kangaroo, *Macropus rufus*).

Historically, 46 native mammal species are known to have been living in the region covered by the park. A number of these are now extinct, and some have become extinct in the wild in the Northern Territory.

Regular surveys have found that there are currently 21 native mammal species living in the park, three of which are listed as endangered or vulnerable under conservation legislation. Anangu support the re-introduction of several locally extinct native mammal species such as mala, mitika (burrowing bettong), wayuṭa (common brushtail possum), ninu (bilby) and waru (black-footed rock-wallaby).

Mala (rufous hare-wallaby, *Largochestes hirsutus*)

This small macropod was once abundant and widespread in the Northern Territory.

Today, it is extinct in the wild on Australian mainland, but roughly 200 to 250 live within Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, in a specially-fenced enclosure of 170 hectares.

Individual male mala generally weigh 800–1600 grams, and females 900–1250 grams. Patches of spinifex are primarily used for shelter, while also using adjacent areas for feeding on a highly variable herbivorous diet.

Mala prefer seeds and fruits when available, and leaf and stem material from grasses are a major food source.

When food is scarce they will eat spinifex, supplemented by insects. Mala need a mosaic of vegetation structure, and

small scale patchy fire is clearly important in creating this habitat.

Two factors are considered the main drivers of the collapse of the mainland Australian mala population – the impact of predation by foxes and cats, and the reduction of traditional Aboriginal burning practices across vast expanses of Australia as Aboriginal people were pushed into settlements.

In 1999, a cross-cultural workshop was held at Uluru to consider the possible re-introduction of native fauna back into the park. Anangu elders shared knowledge about the location of some species now extinct, and the importance of these species in the transfer of cultural knowledge.

Today, Muṭitjulu community members are involved in the day-to-day maintenance of the Mala Paddock, including controlled patch burn work.

Twenty threatened mammal species of the park are currently listed under the EPBC Act 1999



Spinifex hopping mouse



Rock wallaby



Itjaritjari (southern marsupial mole, *Notoryctes typhlops*)

Itjaritjari is small with a head and body length of 121–159 millimetres and long tail length of 21–26 millimetres, weighing 40–70 grams. Although this species is listed as vulnerable in the Northern Territory and it is rarely seen, itjaritjari is believed to be still widely distributed across the desert region of Australia. They are found in sand dunes, inter-dunal flats and in sandy soils along river flats.

Most of its time is spent underground and is more inclined to surface after periods of rain. The females have a backwards facing pouch, like the koala and wombat. Their diet consists of ant pupae, beetles, beetle larvae and cossid moth larvae.

Minyma Itjaritjari is an ancestral being that lived in a cave in the side of Uluru in the same valley as the mala people. She was friendly with mala women and would often come out of her cave to watch children play.

Murtja (brush-tailed mulgara, *Dasyercus blythi*)

Murtja is listed as vulnerable in the Northern Territory. A male brush-tailed mulgara weighs between 75–170 grams and females 60–95 grams. Including their tail lengths, murtja males record the longest lengths in total of 200–325 millimetres, and females slightly shorter 200–270 millimetres.

They live in burrows, which they dig on the flats of low sand dunes. Murtja burrows generally have one main entrance with two to three side tunnels and pop holes. The most striking feature of these small yet robust animals is the crest of black hairs on the tail. Murtja hunt at night mainly for insects and small invertebrates but are not strictly nocturnal. Management for this species includes patch burning to maintain habitat.

Tarkawara (spinifex hopping-mouse, *Notomys alexis*)

This common mouse lives throughout most of the arid zone of Australia, preferring spinifex covered sandflats and stabilised sand dunes. They are 226–262 millimetres long, including a 13–15 centimetres tail, and weigh 27–45 grams. Rainfall affects populations and individuals avoid the desert heat by sheltering in deep, humid burrows lined with small twigs, leaves, and other plant material. The mouse only comes out at night to find seeds, roots, shoots and invertebrates to eat.

Maļu (red kangaroo, *Macropus rufus*)

Maļu is found mainly in the better-watered plains country and low open woodlands, but subsists sparsely in the desert. The males are 1.6–2.4 metres tall, weighing 22–85 kilograms and females are 1.4–2 metres, weighing 17–35 kilograms.

In certain conditions, maļu mothers can nurture up to three young – one joey at foot, one in the pouch and one waiting to be born. This species is a popular source of food for Anangu, who utilise many parts of the animal including the meat, skin, and leg sinew.

Paṭupiri (gould's wattled bat, *Chalinobus gouldii*)

Paṭupiri, a common species widespread throughout Australia, inhabits open forest, mallee, dense forest, tall shrubland and urban areas.

They weigh only 10–18 grams, with a head and body 65–75 millimetres long, and a tail measuring 40–50 millimetres. The bats roost in trees, bird nests, ceilings and have been found in the exhaust of a tractor!

They emit different noises according to their activity – such as high pitched chirps when flying low and chittering when roosting.

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