

Threats and reintroductions of Arid Australia



History

European settlers travelling to Australia brought with them cats, foxes, and rabbits to make this new continent feel like home, they cleared land to build farms, displacing indigenous people and disrupting the traditional forms of land-management they maintained. Wopilkara numbers began to quickly decline after colonisation, becoming extinct on the mainland around 1930. Two surviving populations were located on the Franklin Islands South of the town of Ceduna.



Stick nest built by re-introduced Wopilkara at the Arid Recovery reserve.

Re-introduction

The earliest mainland re-introduction site was Shark Bay Nature Reserve, and since then, many attempts have been made to re-introduce the species to other islands or areas of the mainland. However, some challenges remain, where success of these releases vary. This is due to most rescue areas lacking the material for nests, and the threat of predators nearby.

An example of a successful reintroduction is at Arid Recovery near Roxby Downs, starting with a successful trial release of eight Wopilkara in a predator-free reserve in 1998. Later, 100 individuals sourced from Reevesby Island were released and thrived within their reserve. However, heatwaves in the last few years have decreased succulent vegetation and the climate is too dry for the Wopilkara above-ground nests, leaving Arid Recovery to cease introducing Wopilkara to their reserves. Re-introduction sites in cooler, wetter areas are continuing to be a success.

<i>Re-introduction sites</i>	<i>Year established</i>
Reevesby Island	1990
Salutation Island, Shark Bay Nature Reserve	1990
St. Peters Island	1993
Venus Bay Conservation Park	1995
Arid Recovery	1998
Scotia Wildlife Sanctuary	1998
Mount Gibson Wildlife Sanctuary	2017

Wopilkara susceptibility

Their small size and similarity to European rodents made them easy prey for the cats and foxes which rapidly spread across Australia in the years following colonisation.

This introduction means there has been no historical relationship where Wopilkara and predators co-exist, therefore Wopilkara are poorly equipped to deal with predation.

Rabbits are thought to also have been instrumental in the decline of the Wopilkara on the mainland, as uncontrolled breeding led to population booms which devastated the native succulents Wopilkara rely on as a major part of their diet.



Wopilkara (*Leporillus conditor*) at Arid Recovery before the droughts.

**COMMON
NAME:**

WOPILKARA



**SCIENTIFIC
NAME:**

**WHEN DID WOPILKARA GO EXTINCT ON THE
MAINLAND? WHAT WERE SOME OF THE CAUSES?**

**WHEN AND WHERE DID REINTRODUCTIONS
FIRST OCCUR?**

**HOW MANY WOPILKARA WERE RELEASED IN THE FIRST
REINTRODUCTION AT ARID RECOVERY?**

**HOW MANY WOPILKARA NOW LIVE IN FENCED RESERVES
ACROSS AUSTRALIA?**

**NAME THREE RESERVES THAT HAVE REINTRODUCED
WOPILKARA**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



The Greater Stick-Nest Rat (Wopilkara) Population Development



1930

Wopilkara population became extinct on the mainland of Australia, where only 1,000 Wopilkara remain on Franklin Island. Wopilkara were classified as a threatened species.

1990, 1991

Small populations of Wopilkara were re-located from Franklin Island to Salutation Island, located at Shark Bay Nature Reserve, WA.

Soon after, 101 Wopilkara bred from Monarto zoo, SA, were successfully released onto Reevesby Island. By 1991, over 200 Wopilkara were living on Reevesby Island.

1993

The South Australian Government re-located a small population of Wopilkara from Franklin Island to St. Peter Island as an 'insurance population.'

1995

Venus Bay Conservation Park re-located a small Wopilkara population from Franklin Island. Success of this re-introduction was due to their predator-free areas in the park.

1998

Arid Recovery, located near Roxby Downs, re-located 8 Wopilkara from Franklin Island, and introduced them into their predator-free reserve. Scotia Sanctuary also did this.

1999

Arid Recovery had successful breeding of the 8 Wopilkara, thus, 100 Wopilkara were sourced from Reevesby Island and were re-located to Arid Recovery Reserve.

2017 - Current

The Australian Wildlife Conservancy's Mount Gibson Wildlife Sanctuary re-located 13 Wopilkara (7 males and 6 females) from St. Peter Island to Mount Gibson Sanctuary. Since 2021, Wopilkara are now classified as a vulnerable species, with an estimated population of 1710 individuals within fenced reserves.