

Conservation Matters

Another translocation milestone reached

June this year saw yet another milestone achieved by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attraction's (DBCA) *Return to 1616* project with the translocation of brush-tailed mulgara to Dirk Hartog Island, Wirruwana. This brings the total number of species that have now been returned to the island to eight!

The *Return to 1616* science team translocated 100 brush-tailed mulgara from Matua Kurrara Kurrara National Park, north east of Wiluna, with the help of Tarlka Matuwa Piarku Aboriginal Corporation's (TMPAC) Wiluna Martu Rangers. The mulgara's journey from their remote outback location began with a plane flight to Denham.



Right Wiluna Martu Rangers Vivian Stevens, Faye-Anne Jones, Jarrod Newbry ready to fly to Denham with their precious brush-tailed mulgara cargo safely on board for the first leg of their journey to Denham. *Photo – Tiana Jones.*

On arrival in Denham, the mulgara were given world-class service with a connecting flight to Dirk Hartog Island by helicopter. The entire journey of over 800km to their new home took only four and a half hours.



Above Careful loading of mulgara onto a helicopter for the last leg of their journey. Denham to Dirk Hartog Island National Park *Photo - Simon Welsh, GeoMedia*

Once on the island, the mulgara and the Wiluna Martu Rangers were met and welcomed by Malgana Elders and Traditional Owners.



Above (Left to Right) Neilisha Oakley (DBCA), Vickie Oakley (Malgana representative), Kathy Oakley (Malgana Elder), Margaret and Luticia Anderson (Wiluna Martu Rangers) Laetitia Wear-Jones (DBCA) and Fiona Oakley (Malgana representative). *Photo – Josh Woods (DBCA)*



LEFT After a few last minute health checks, the mulgara were released just after dark and wasted no time in exploring their new island home. *Photo - Simon Welsh, GeoMedia*

Our newest recruits are small native carnivores and have moved from a mainland national park of over 800,000 hectares in size to an island of just 63,000 hectares (albeit Western Australia's largest island). Although their new home is smaller than the one they left behind, there is one very big difference: there are no feral cats! Dirk Hartog Island National Park has been free of feral cats for more than five years now, and that's a huge advantage for the brush-tailed mulgara. This – together with a few years of good rainfall – means the population of small native animals on Dirk Hartog Island is slowly building up. So, in addition to moving to a safer place to live, there is also abundant food for our pint-sized predators to eat!

A small number of brush-tailed mulgara were given radio collars to enable the science team to track their progress. Obviously intrigued by their new home, the mulgara kept the science team well and truly 'on the hop' as they explored their new island home. All this hard work paid off however, as the mulgara that were recaptured a few weeks later (to have their radio collars removed) showed promising signs that they were settling in to the neighbourhood well. As an additional bonus, despite the mulgara's sharp teeth, all science team fingers were present and accounted for, although a few received painful nips.

Right Scan this QR code to see a brush-tailed mulgara being released.



Above Brush-tailed mulgara Photo – Mark Cowan.

The brush-tailed mulgara use those teeth to good effect, and not just on the science team members. When times are good and food is abundant, mulgara are able to 'bank' excess food in the form of fat stored in their tails. The more fat that is stored in their tails, the fatter and more sausage-like their tails appear, and the better their ability to survive leaner times. This is just the start of a safe, secure new life for the brush-tailed mulgara in the Bay. The science team have a big job ahead monitoring their progress along with the seven other species of native animals that have already been returned to the island as part of the Dirk Hartog Island National Park *Return to 1616* Ecological Restoration Project. *Return to 1616* is funded by the Gorgon Barrow Island Net Conservation Benefits Fund and the brush-tailed mulgara translocation has been made possible with input from the TPMAC Wiluna Martu Ranger Program.



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