

Bandicoots

- information about bandicoots

It is a sad fact that of the eleven species of bandicoot in Australia, seven species are classified as either rare or extinct. In New South Wales bandicoots are protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Fauna Protection Act and the most common species is the long-nosed bandicoot which weighs between 850 -1100 grams and is a drab greyish-brown with creamy white underbelly.

Bandicoots are rat-sized to rabbit-sized, they have elongated feet, strong forepaws (for digging) and lots of pointed teeth. They are marsupials and, like koalas and wombats, the female carries her young in a backward-opening pouch. Bandicoots have a very short gestation period (12.5 days) and females can breed from 4 months of age, males from 5 months. Females generally produce litters of 2 – 4 young.

The young are born hairless (about 13 mm long) and make their way to a teat and attach to it. Their umbilical cords remain attached until the young locate a teat in their mother's pouch – this is a unique feature among marsupials. The young bandicoot remains in its mother's pouch for approximately 50 days. Females live for up to 18 months while males generally live only about 12 months, worn out by the defence of their territory.

Bandicoots are strictly ground dwelling, territorial animals. They defend territories of up to 7 hectares and so cannot be relocated. If a bandicoot is released into the territory of another colony, the resident male will certainly harass it to death within days.



Eastern barred bandicoot

Bandicoots have often annoyed gardeners by leaving cone-shaped holes in their lawns, but in fact they are a gardener's best friend. They eat the pests that cause dieback in lawns, and keep the cockroach and spider populations down, as well as aerating the lawn. They have a keen sense of smell and hearing and this enables them to locate submerged insect larvae. They also eat insects, worms, seeds and berries. Their snout is used to find food and their forepaws are used for digging to retrieve it. A shrill, grunt-like squeak uttered while foraging often indicates the presence of the long-nosed bandicoot.

Although bandicoots usually have ticks, because they happen to live in the same environment as ticks, the ticks do not harm healthy animals. Bandicoots keep tick numbers down through grooming with their fused double-clawed back feet.

The greatest threat to bandicoot survival is from cats and foxes. Many are killed by motor vehicles and land clearing is also reducing their habitat and placing strain on the populations. The natural habitat of the bandicoot includes long grass or low shrubs. Being nocturnal, the long-nosed bandicoot spends the day in its nest – which is a shallow hole in the ground, lined with grasses and leaves.

If you do come across a dead bandicoot, always check (as with all marsupials) to see if it has a pouch. Injured females often eject their young so check around the female for any young that could be hiding under grass or nearby.



Southern brown bandicoot