

# Kangaroo Island kangaroo

## *(Macropus fuliginosus ssp. fuliginosus)*



**Macros = large; pus = foot; fuliginosus = sooty**

**This is the only species of kangaroo found on Kangaroo Island.**

On an autumn day in 1802, English navigator Matthew Flinders wrote:

*'... a delightful regale they afforded, after four months privation from almost any fresh provisions ... in gratitude for so seasonable a supply, I named this southern land Kangaroo (sic) Island.'*

In 1803 Francois Peron, the naturalist aboard the French ship *Le Geographe*, took specimens of this kangaroo, collected near Penneshaw, to Paris. In 1897 these specimens were described and named *Macropus fuliginosus*. The Kangaroo Island kangaroo is thus the original *type specimen* for the Western Grey kangaroo, whose range extends from Western Australia east to the Great Dividing Range.

Much later, the Kangaroo Island kangaroo was recognised as a separate subspecies from the Western Grey kangaroo of the adjacent South Australian mainland and named *Macropus fuliginosus fuliginosus*.

The Kangaroo Island kangaroo is smaller and more robust than the mainland Western Grey kangaroo.

The tail, limbs and muzzle are shorter and its jaw broader. The fur is a darker brown colour and is longer and thicker than the mainland species. Females have a nose to tail tip length of 1 to 1.5 metres; males reach over 2 metres.

### Life in the scrub

The Kangaroo Island kangaroo is not strictly nocturnal, but spends much of the daylight hours sheltering in thick

scrub. From late afternoon to early morning the kangaroos move out to graze in open grassy areas, sometimes congregating in small groups.

If startled, the kangaroos bound along on their hind legs at high speed, but they more commonly use a slow gait, using their tails as well as all four feet.

### Kangaroos are grazing animals

The Kangaroo Island kangaroo has a preference for grasses and herbs, and also browses on the leaves of bushes. Processed human food severely disrupts the nutritional balance of their natural diet. Sugars in our foods can cause an increase in an undesirable fungus in kangaroos' stomachs, leading to diarrhoea and other digestive related problems. Food such as beans, peas and potato peel contain alkaloids that kill the natural bacteria living in their stomachs. Human foods can also cause dental decay and mouth infections. Feeding also affects the social behaviour of kangaroos, as large numbers of the animals are attracted to the 'free' foods. These problems can lead ultimately to malnutrition, poor health and even death.



***The feeding of kangaroos, and all other wildlife (including birds), is prohibited in all National Parks and Wildlife South Australia reserves including Kangaroo Island.***



Natural Resources  
Kangaroo Island



Government  
of South Australia

## Summer joeys

The young are born throughout the year but there is a pronounced peak in the summer months. When her joey is 7 to 9 months old, the female comes into oestrus again, and mates. If she mates successfully, a new joey is born a month later. The older joey begins to leave the pouch, but continues to suckle until it is about 18 months old. The young males and females are sexually mature from 20 months of age and continue this cycle of virtually continuous breeding.

## Conservation and management

In the early days of European settlement, this distinctive kangaroo was hunted for food and for the Adelaide skin trade. Its pelt was used to make furs or leather, depending on its quality. Today the 'tameness' of kangaroos has become an important part of the visitor experience on Kangaroo Island.

Wood Jones described it as '*... the most gentle and the quietest of all its kind.*'

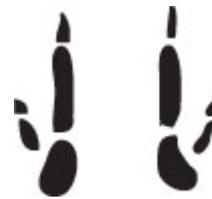
The kangaroo population on the island has increased considerably in some areas, since native vegetation has been cleared for pasture and cropping.

In 1925 Wood Jones wrote that the Kangaroo Island kangaroo '*... is an animal that South Australians should be proud of and do all in their power to protect and keep in perpetuity on its island sanctuary.*'

This sentiment was reinforced by Poole (1976), who pointed out that '*A continuing conservation programme with retention of sufficient suitable habitat is essential to ensure the survival of this distinct and historic kangaroo.*'

## References

- Poole, W.E. (1976). Breeding biology and the current status of the grey kangaroo *Macropus fuliginosus fuliginosus*, of Kangaroo Island, South Australia. *Aust. J. Zool.* **24**, pp.169-187.
- Robinson, A.C. & Armstrong, D.M. (eds.) (1999). *A Biological Survey of Kangaroo Island South Australia in November 1989 and 1990*. Heritage and Biodiversity Division, Department of Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs, SA.
- Strahan, R. (ed.) (1995). *The Mammals of Australia*. Reed Books, Sydney.
- Wood Jones, F. (1925). *The Mammals of South Australia*. Government Printer, Adelaide.



## For more information

**Kangaroo Island Natural Resources Centre**

37 Dauncey Street, Kingscote

P (08) 8553 4444

E [kinrc@sa.gov.au](mailto:kinrc@sa.gov.au)

[www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/kangarooisland/](http://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/kangarooisland/)



**Natural Resources**  
Kangaroo Island



Government  
of South Australia