
TREE KANGAROOS 98 Fact Sheet (7/1/98)

Tree Kangaroos (*Dendrolagus* ssp.)

Description: Tree kangaroos are arboreal marsupials, and are the only members of the kangaroo family which live in the trees. Of the eight recognized species of tree kangaroo, four are included in the SSP: Doria's (*Dendrolagus dorianus*), Goodfellow's (*D. goodfellowi*), Matschie's (*D. matschiei*) and the grizzled tree kangaroo (*D. inustus*). Tree kangaroos range in size from 15 to 40 pounds. Despite their life in the trees, these animals lack the opposable thumb or prehensile tail of opossums. They differ from terrestrial kangaroos in having shorter, wider hind feet and a long, narrow tail that is used for balance. All four feet have heavy, curved claws that aid in climbing.

Range: Tree kangaroos are found only on the island of New Guinea and in northeastern Australia. All of the SSP species are found in New Guinea.

Habitat: Dense tropical forests from sea level to nearly 10,000 feet in altitude are home to the tree kangaroo.

Diet: Tree kangaroos feed primarily on tree leaves, but also eat flowers, grass and fruit, which are digested in their sacculated stomachs by fermenting bacteria.

Social Organization: Most species of tree kangaroo appear to be solitary. It appears that females keep a territory of a few acres, while males have larger territories which overlap those of several females. The female has a single joey which, like those of other marsupials, is born small and quite undeveloped. It climbs unassisted into the pouch where it grows for the next ten to twelve months before permanently leaving the pouch. Joeys continue to nurse at foot for several months after permanently leaving the pouch.

Conservation Status: *D. inustus* and *D. ursinus* are listed under CITES Appendix II. *D. bennettianus*, and *D. lumholtzi*, previously listed as CITES II, were voted to be delisted at the CITES meetings in June of 1997. Neither *D. goodfellowi* nor *D. matschiei* are listed by CITES. 1996 IUCN lists *D. goodfellowi*, *D. matschiei*, *D. mbaiso*, *D. dorianus* and *D. scottae* as "threatened," *D. benettianus* and *D. lumholtzi* as "near threatened," and *D. inustus*, *D. ursinus*, and *D. spadix* as "data deficient." There are no accurate estimates of the number of each species which survives in the wild, and the TK-SSP is funding ongoing research in the field to procure

this information. The first phase of field work to determine the conservation status of *D. matschiei* on the Huon Peninsula in Papua New Guinea was completed in early 1997. Dr. Lisa Dabek, TK-SSP Research Advisor, sent out a preliminary summary of her findings to all TK-SSP Institutional Representatives. Funding has been secured for the second phase of the work, beginning in July, 1998. Fund raising also was secured to allow preliminary methodology trials in the field for Australian tree kangaroo conservation efforts, beginning in August, 1998 (V. Thompson, L. Dabek).

Threats to Survival: Tree kangaroos are primarily threatened by hunting for meat and habitat destruction from logging, mining, oil exploration and agriculture.

Zoo Programs -- SSP: As of May, 1998, the 35 North American Institutions that participate in the SSP manage 3 Grizzled, 20 Goodfellow's, and 110 Matschie's tree kangaroos. The overall purpose of the tree kangaroo SSP is to enhance the conservation of tree kangaroos is as follows:

1. Develop a management program based on improving the rate of reproduction and expanding the current captive populations of Matschie's and Goodfellow's tree kangaroos.
2. Maintain a viable population of Matschie's (*D. matschiei*) tree kangaroos in captivity.
3. Continue to research behavioral and physiological parameters of tree kangaroo reproduction.
4. Resolve the current health problem of Mycobacterium infection in tree kangaroos.
5. Conduct comparative studies of Matschie's with the other species of captive tree kangaroos, especially Goodfellow's (*D. goodfellowi*).
6. Establish the tree kangaroo as a zoo-based conservation ambassador for New Guinea.

7. Coordinate and interact with other regional captive breeding programs.
8. Determine the actual conservation status of known species of tree kangaroos throughout the island of New Guinea.
9. Initiate international relationships with the government of Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea.
10. Conduct field research on tree kangaroo behavioral ecology and reproduction to gain a better understanding of tree kangaroo biology in the wild for comparison with the study of captive tree kangaroos.

Research: Funding was secured for a research proposal to study estrous behavior, reproductive cycles, and joey development of captive *D. goodfellowi*, *D. dorianus*, and *D. matschiei*, in Papua New Guinea and at the San Diego Zoo (V. Thompson, L. Dabek, M. Franke). Research on the onset of estrous in prepartum and postpartum Matschie's tree kangaroos is ongoing at the Woodland Park Zoo (J. Steenberg, J. Scott).

SSP Coordinator: Valerie Thompson

San Diego Zoo

PO Box 551

San Diego, CA 92112

(619) 685-3226

Fax: (619) 232-4117

Email: vthompson@sandiegozoo.org

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