



Photo courtesy of Mal Legg

WHERE DO BANDICOOTS LIVE?

Despite the current pressures on the Southern Brown Bandicoot, the species has managed to persist in and around the Kooweerup swamp area, probably using the network of drainage lines and vegetation corridors to forage in and move through the landscape. Without this habitat connectivity they wouldn't be able to disperse into new areas to breed so it's vital that these corridors are maintained now and in the future.

Bandicoots don't seem to be fussy about the kind of plants in their habitat. They can live in low to medium grass and shrub cover that is dense enough to provide protection from predators. They can even live in very weedy areas, although native vegetation provides the best food and shelter for them. In natural environments they build shallow nests in or on the ground among the grasses and shrubs out of grass and leaves, but in disturbed environments they have been known to live in weeds, wood heaps, under buildings and even in abandoned cars!

Although their numbers are quite low at present, bandicoots are highly adaptable and are fast breeders. If given a chance, the bandicoot population in the Kooweerup area could recover to a sustainable number.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?



Photo courtesy of Mal Legg

The SOUTHERN BROWN BANDICOOT in Kooweerup



GET INVOLVED

If you would like to be involved in bandicoot conservation activities in your area please contact the Biosphere to register your interest:

Western Port Biosphere Reserve

Ph. 03 5979 2167

e: admin@biosphere.org.au www.bandicootrecovery.org.au

This project is supported by the Western Port Biosphere Reserve through funding from the Australian Government's Caring for our Country.



WESTERN PORT BIOSPHERE



CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY

KOOWEERUP SWAMP

Since the conversion of swampland to farmland in the former Kooweerup swamp, native vegetation removal in the area has been significant. Today, only 1% of the remnant vegetation of the former Kooweerup swamp area remains, and many plants and animals have become extinct locally. Despite this, the area retains many natural values, including the nationally endangered Southern Brown Bandicoot, the Growling Grass Frog, and many endangered plants. "Endangered" can be defined as a species that could become extinct in 10 to 20 years, if nothing is done to protect it.



Kooweerup Swamp as it was in 1849. Image courtesy of Jeff Yugovic.

Kooweerup has been identified as supporting a key population of the endangered Southern Brown Bandicoot. For this reason, the Western Port Biosphere Reserve is investing project funding into enhancing Kooweerup's environment and we are calling on the Kooweerup community to work with us and make the most of this great opportunity.



Bandicoot nest. Photo courtesy of Dr. Terry Coates

WHAT IS A SOUTHERN BROWN BANDICOOT?

The Southern Brown Bandicoot is a small Australian marsupial that was once common across south-east Australia. It can be mistaken for a common rat but is identified by its larger size (a fully grown bandicoot is about the size of a small rabbit, although juveniles are much smaller), rounded back, long nose, shorter tail (which is always shorter than its body), small rounded ears and its distinctive feet. Like all other marsupials the female bandicoot has a pouch for her young.



Southern Brown Bandicoot searching for food. Photo courtesy of Jane Jobe

Bandicoots are not particularly social and usually tend to forage alone, but they are very inquisitive animals. They dig for grubs, beetles and fungi. You can tell where a bandicoot has been digging by the conical holes left in the soil. Foraging bandicoots improve soil health by aerating the soil, distributing fungi and recycling nutrients. The fungi and the bandicoot play a vital role in recycling nutrients in our soils.

Bandicoots breed from winter to summer, and can produce up to three litters in this time. Bandicoot babies - or joeys - are born after only a 12.5 day gestation period, which is the shortest gestation period of any mammal.

The joeys then climb into the mother's pouch to drink milk and grow until they are big enough to leave the pouch. At around two months old they are ready to leave their mother and live independently, although the world can be a dangerous place for a young bandicoot. Female bandicoots can have up to five young, but usually only one or two survive to independence.



A two-month old bandicoot. Photo courtesy of Sarah Maclagan

WHY ARE BANDICOOTS ENDANGERED?

Since European settlement, bandicoot numbers have declined significantly in Victoria due to urban expansion, habitat loss, predation by foxes, cats and dogs, and road kills.

With less vegetation to shelter and find food in, bandicoots are more exposed when moving and foraging and are at greater risk of predation. The high density of fox and feral cat numbers in the Western Port area has had a huge impact on bandicoot numbers. But domestic dogs and cats are also known to hunt and kill bandicoots, especially young bandicoots.

It is important to keep pets confined to your property at all times to help protect local wildlife. You can build a cat run, or install cat-proof fencing at your house, to keep your cat safe on your property. For advice on cat proofing your property, visit www.dpi.vic.gov.au. It's also important to always keep dogs on a leash when walking near wildlife habitat.

Feeding stray cats and leaving uneaten pet food out encourages foxes and cats into the area and boosts their numbers, putting even more pressure on local wildlife. Bandicoots like to eat pet food too, but this puts them at risk of being injured or killed by your dog or cat.