

Ampurta or Crest-tailed Mulgara

Dasyercus cristicauda

The Ampurta is a charismatic carnivorous marsupial found in arid sandy areas of northern South Australia and adjacent areas of the Northern Territory and Queensland. What it lacks in size, it makes up for with attitude as it has similar personality to its larger relatives (Dasyurid family) such as the Tasmanian Devil and Quoll (Native Cat).

IDENTIFICATION

Ampurtas are about the size of a small guinea pig, with a short fat tail. Their fur ranges from pale blonde fawn to a rufous brown, with dark black hair along their tail forming a crest-like 'mohawk' along the top.

DON'T CONFUSE ME WITH...

Some closely-related species may be confused with Ampurtas. The Brush-tailed Mulgara (*Dasyercus blythi*) is found mainly in the southern Northern Territory and Western Australia, but may overlap with Ampurtas in part of their range. Brush-tailed Mulgaras can be distinguished from Ampurtas by their lack of tail crest and number of teats (Ampurtas have eight, whereas Brush-tailed Mulgaras have six). The Kowari (*Dasyuroides byrnei*) lives on gibber plains and has a longer, lankier body, with grey fur and a larger bottlebrush-like tuft of hair on the end of the tail.



Silhouette; adult size Ampurta (right) compared with a House Mouse



Ampurta tracks (with a matchbox for scale). The Ampurta has run across from left to right. The two tracks together are the back feet and the two tracks apart are the front feet. Ampurta tracks are distinguishable from baby rabbit tracks by their small size and more distinct toe marks.

Natural Resources
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FACT SHEET | Threatened Fauna

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LEFT: Don't confuse Ampurta tracks with those of the Long-haired or Plague Rat (*Rattus villosissimus*) – these have four long toes on the front feet, creating a flower-like pattern, compared to Ampurta's five short, stout toes.

RIGHT: Size comparison between adult rabbit tracks (bottom of photo) and Ampurta (top of photo).

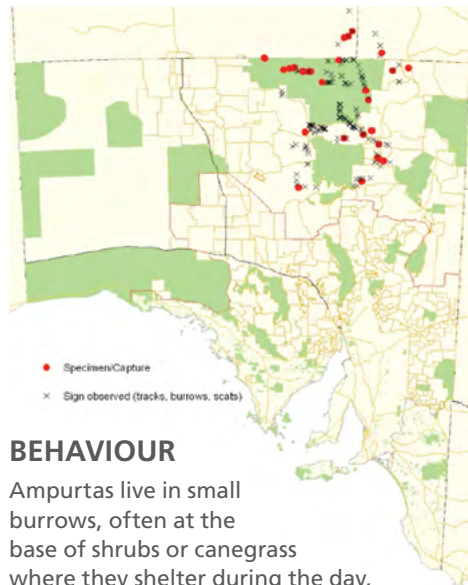
Ampurta tracks may be confused with other species at times. They closely resemble baby rabbit tracks in size but their feet are much less hairy than rabbits so their toe prints can be seen clearly in fresh tracks. Their hind foot tracks are also more rectangular compared with rabbits. Long-haired or Plague Rat (*Rattus villosissimus*) tracks may also be confused with Ampurta tracks, but their front feet have four long toes which are distinct from the five short stout toes of Ampurtas.

DISTRIBUTION

In South Australia, Ampurtas are known from the Simpson Desert, Tirari Desert and western margin of the Strzelecki Desert. In recent years they have also been found on the western side of Lake Eyre and as far south as the William Creek area and southern Birdsville Track. The species once had a wider distribution in South Australia, with historic records from as far west as Ooldea.

HABITAT

Ampurtas are found mainly in sandy habitats, including sandhills with Canegrass (*Zygochloa paradoxa*). They may also inhabit sand plain or sand mound areas (often with Nitrebush, *Nitraria billadierei*) or even sandy watercourses.



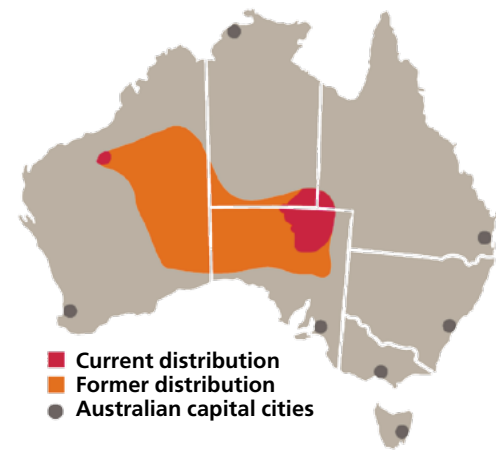
BEHAVIOUR

Ampurtas live in small burrows, often at the base of shrubs or canegrass where they shelter during the day, emerging at night to capture their prey. Unlike reptile burrows which have low, wide entrances, Ampurta burrow entrances have a similar height and width and often have elongated curved scats outside. On sunny winter days Ampurtas may sometimes be spotted basking outside their burrow entrances.

Ampurtas' voracious appetite includes a range of insects and arthropods including beetles, crickets, grasshoppers, centipedes, spiders and scorpions. They also prey on geckoes and skinks, small birds, even small rodents and marsupials – in fact, they are able to tackle most animals that are smaller than them. At times, they are also known to eat carcasses of larger dead animals such as rabbits.

POTENTIAL THREATS

Threats to Ampurtas are poorly understood. However, it is likely that their decline is linked to the introduction of predators such as foxes and cats. Rabbits are also thought to have had a major impact on this species by impacting vegetation which is important for the insects and other small reptiles and mammals that are part of Ampurta diet. In recent years it is thought that Ampurtas may have reoccupied parts of their former range following the introduction of Rabbit Calicivirus Disease which lowered rabbit numbers for over a decade.



HOW CAN YOU HELP?

If you think you have seen an Ampurta (or their tracks) within or beyond the locations shown on the distribution map please let us know. Note the location so that your written record can be used to find the same place again. A GPS fix or map reference would be very helpful, as would notes on the habitat or any other relevant information.

HOW CAN YOU CONTACT US?

To report your observation or for further information about Ampurtas contact the Community Fauna Officer, Natural Resources, SA Arid Lands.

RESOURCES

Ehmann, H. (2006). South Australian Rangelands and Aboriginal Lands Wildlife Management Manual: a resource handbook. Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, South Australia.



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