

# Western Ringtail Possum Survey

## CPS 9696/1



## Lot 8

### Harris Road - Picton

September 2022

*Version 1*

***On behalf of:***

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## FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Plan 9696/1

FIGURE 2: Possum Observations - 27 September 2022

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report details the results of a western ringtail possum (WRP) (*Pseudocheirus occidentalis*) survey carried out over a section of Lot 8 Harris Road, Picton (the subject site).

The landowners (Aljim Pty Ltd/Daveben Pty Ltd) are seeking permission from the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) to clear up to 19 trees (0.3057 hectares(ha)) from within a 1.066 ha section of the subject site as depicted on Plan 9696/1 (Figure 1).

The western ringtail possum survey detailed here has been carried out to determine if the species is using the subject site and to what degree so as to assist regulators in assessing potential impacts of the proposed clearing.

It should be noted that the subject site and some adjoining areas were previously been surveyed for WRP in 2013 (Harewood 2013) with no evidence of the species being observed.

## **2. SCOPE OF WORKS**

The scope of works was to:

- Carry out a targeted one day and one night search for western ringtail possum habitat/site use (habitat, dreys, scats and individuals) of the subject site, this being all native vegetation within the area cross-hatched blue on attached Plan 9696/1.
- Assess the area for the presence/potential presence of other fauna species of conservation significance (and/or their habitat).
- Provide a report summarising methods and results.
- 

## **3. METHODS**

Field surveys (day and night) were carried out on the 27 September 2022 by Greg Harewood (Author).

### **3.1 WRP DIURNAL SURVEY**

A day time survey was carried out to locate and record dreys, obvious tree hollows, scats and individual WRPs along with documenting habitat characteristics. This involved a series of on foot transects across vegetated sections of the subject site.

### **3.2 WRP NOCTURNAL SURVEY**

A single night time survey was carried out with the aim of locating and recording individual WRPs primarily by way of eyeshine. This involved a series of on foot transects over vegetated sections of the subject site, at night using a LED head torch.

### **3.3 OTHER FAUNA SPECIES OF CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE**

Evidence of the presence or likely presence of other fauna species of conservation significance (or suitable habitat) was searched for and recorded concurrent with other site surveys. The aim was to obtain enough information to make a definitive comment on the likely significance of the survey area to other fauna species of conservation significance.

Methods involved searching microhabitats such as logs, rocks, leaf litter and observations with binoculars. Secondary evidence of a species presence such as tracks, scats, skeletal remains, foraging evidence or calls were also noted if observed/heard.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1 WRP DIURNAL SURVEY**

The only evidence of western ringtail possums found were two deteriorating dreys (nest like structures used for daytime refuge by WRP) (Figure 2). No other evidence of the species was detected i.e. no scats or individuals. These observations suggest that while WRPs appear to sometime utilise the subject site, they were not present within the subject site at the time of the survey. The lack of recent secondary evidence (i.e. fresh scats/recent drey construction/maintenance) also suggest they have not been present for some time (i.e. several months at least).

The subject site was found to be dominated by a low open forest of peppermint (*Agonis flexuosa*) over a dense grassland of introduced species. Two relatively small jarrah trees and a woody pear tree were the only other trees species recorded. Sections of the subject site have previously been cleared and contain bare ground or grassland (Figures 1 and 2).

Superficially most of the remnant vegetation present within the survey area represents potential WRP habitat given the dominance of favoured foraging species (peppermint). The fact that the WRPs appear to be absent (or at best present in very low numbers) does however suggest that the vegetation may have a generally low nutrient value.

Foliage nutrient levels are a major factor in explaining variation in abundance in WRPS and it is also a key factor influencing fecundity. Nitrogen and to a lesser extent phosphorus levels are the most important determinant of browse quality and habitat suitability for possums. (Jones *et al*, 1994, Wayne *et al*, 2005). It appears therefore that WRPs are largely avoiding the subject site, most likely because of the vegetation not having the required nutrient levels

to maintain a viable breeding population. Any individuals that are recorded are likely to be transient individuals moving into the area from better quality habitat in adjoining areas.

An example image of the main vegetation present is shown on the cover of this report.

#### **4.2 WRP NOCTURNAL SURVEY**

No western ringtail possums were detected during the nocturnal survey which is consistent with observations made during the day time survey.

#### **4.3 OTHER FAUNA SPECIES OF CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE**

Besides the two old WRP dreys no evidence of any other fauna species of conservation significance was recorded.

The nature of the habitats present (e.g. lack of hollow bearing trees and limited floral diversity) suggests that it is unlikely that any other fauna species of conservation significance would be present and/or rely on the site to a degree that clearing within the subject site, would result in significant impact on any species overall status.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

The assessment reported on here was undertaken to determine if western ringtail possums were present or likely to be present within the proposed clearing area.

No current evidence of western ringtail possums utilising the subject site was found during the course of the day and night time surveys. This is consistent with a previous survey carried out in 2013. The presence of two old and deteriorating dreys does however indicate that the species is occasionally present if only for limited periods. The low level of utilisation could be a consequence of poor foraging value of the peppermints present but this cannot be confirmed.

It is considered unlikely that the subject site represents habitat of importance to any other fauna species of conservation significance.

It is recommended that if clearing of the subject site is approved that a suitably qualified and experienced 'fauna spotter' be employed to inspect vegetation to be removed immediately prior to clearing to reduce the risk of WRP (and other fauna) being injured or killed.

This report should be forwarded to DWER for their consideration.

## 6. REFERENCES

Harewood, G (2013). Western Ringtail Possum Nocturnal Survey Report, 31 July 2013, Lots 7 & 8 Harris Road, Picton WA. Unpublished letter report for Ecoedge Environmental Services. 1 August 2013.

Jones B.A., How R.A., Kitchener D.J. (1994). A Field Study of *Pseudocheirus occidentalis*, I. Distribution and Habitat, *Wildlife Research*, 21, 175-87.

Wayne A.F., Rooney J.F., Ward C.G., Vellios C.V., Lindenmayer D.B. (2005). The life history of *Pseudocheirus occidentalis* in the jarrah forest of south-western Australia, *Australian Journal of Zoology*, 53, 325-337





# FIGURES

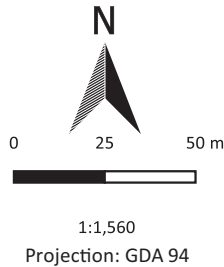


# CPS 9696/1 - Map



## Legend

-  CPS areas applied to clear
-  Land Tenure
-  Local Government Authorities
-  Local Rd - Sealed





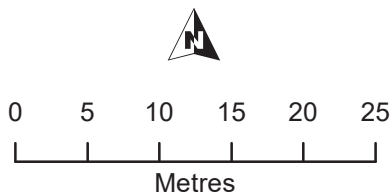

**GOVERNMENT OF  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA**





**Legend**

-  CPS 9696/1
-  WRP Drey (deteriorating)

WRP Survey

Drawn: G. Harewood

Date: Sept 2022

Scale: 1:525

CPS 9696/1  
Lot 8 Harris Road - Picton

**Possum  
Observations  
27 Sept 2022**



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The conclusions are based upon field data and the environmental monitoring and/or testing carried out over a limited period of time and are therefore merely indicative of the environmental condition of the site at the time of preparing the report. Also it should be recognised that site conditions, can change with time.

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