

# Rakali at Yellagonga

## Our elusive native water rat

Have you ever seen a rakali at Yellagonga?

Rakali (*Hydromys chrysogaster*), also known as the Australian water rat or native water rat, are one of Australia's fascinating native mammals. These semi-aquatic rodents are specially adapted to life around our wetlands, lakes, rivers and waterways.

Rakali are excellent swimmers, with partially webbed hind feet, dense water-resistant fur and a distinctive thick tail with a white tip. They are mostly nocturnal and can be difficult to spot, even where they are present.

Yellagonga Regional Park is one of the important wetland systems in the Perth metropolitan area and provides habitat for rakali. The City of Joondalup currently lists rakali among the native animals found within the Yellagonga wetlands.

But how many rakali are actually living in Yellagonga today?



**We don't know.**

### What do we know about rakali at Yellagonga?

Rakali have been recorded at Yellagonga for many years. Historical records include sightings around Lake Goollelal, and a targeted survey in 2008 found evidence of a potentially significant population.

In 2008, researchers captured six rakali in three nights of trapping at Lake Goollelal.

Ten years later, in May 2018, the City of Joondalup and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) conducted another targeted survey to find out whether rakali were still persisting in the area.

Despite using more traps and surveying for an additional night, no rakali were captured.

However, this did not necessarily mean that rakali had disappeared.

Researchers found evidence of rakali feeding, including chewed crustaceans and midden piles near some of the traps.

The survey also identified several potential pressures around the lake, including reduced fringing vegetation, increased public use, increase dogs around the lake edge and the increase of predation by foxes and cats.

The researchers recommended continued reporting of possible rakali sightings by the community to help inform monitoring and conservation.

### **Why are rakali important?**

Rakali are a natural part of our wetland ecosystems.

They feed on aquatic invertebrates, crustaceans, fish, frogs and other prey, and are closely connected to the health of the waterways and vegetation around them.

Their presence can provide an indication that a wetland is supporting the habitat and food resources needed by native wildlife.

Rakali need more than just water. They rely on suitable habitat around the water's edge, including dense vegetation, stable banks, shelter and places to forage.

This is why protecting and restoring Yellagonga's fringing vegetation is so important.

### **Rakali need our help**

Rakali face a number of pressures across the Perth region.

These include:

- Loss and degradation of wetland and fringing vegetation
- Predation by foxes and cats
- Attacks from dogs
- Disturbance around wetland edges
- Declining water quality
- Changes to water levels
- Accidental capture in illegal fishing and crayfish traps

DBCA identifies rakali as a Priority 4 species in Western Australia, meaning the species is considered rare, near threatened or otherwise in need of monitoring.

There is also limited information about their current distribution and population trends in south-western Australia.

### **You can become a Rakali Citizen Scientist**

One of the easiest ways you can help is simply to keep your eyes open.

Rakali are most likely to be seen around water, particularly around dusk, during the evening or early morning. They may be swimming, feeding along the water's edge or moving between the water and surrounding vegetation.



**If you see a possible rakali:**

#### **1. Stop and observe**

Give the animal plenty of space. Don't approach, chase or try to attract it.

#### **2. Take a photograph or video**

If you can do so without disturbing the animal, a photo or short video can be extremely useful for identification.

### **3. Record where and when you saw it**

Make a note of:

- Location
- Date
- Approximate time
- What the animal was doing
- Whether it was swimming or on land
- Any other useful observations

### **4. Submit your observation**

Citizen science records can help researchers and land managers build a better picture of where rakali are still occurring and how their populations may be changing over time.

If you see a possible rakali, try to record:

- A photograph or video
- The exact location or nearest landmark
- Date and time of the sighting
- What the animal was doing
- Any other identifying features or observations

You can submit fauna records to the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) at [fauna.data@dbca.wa.gov.au](mailto:fauna.data@dbca.wa.gov.au). This is the email address used by DBCA for fauna data records.

For sightings within Yellagonga Regional Park, you can also contact the City of Joondalup, City of Wanneroo or DBCA to share your observation and ask whether there is any current monitoring, research or management information available for rakali.

Every well-documented sighting helps. By reporting what we see, the community can help build a more up-to-date picture of rakali at Yellagonga and encourage ongoing monitoring and research of this elusive native mammal.



### **What else can you do?**

You can help protect rakali and other wetland wildlife by:

#### **Keep dogs under control around wetlands.**

Dogs can disturb, chase or attack native wildlife. Keep dogs on a lead where required and give wildlife plenty of space.

**Keep cats contained.**

Cats are a major threat to native wildlife. Keeping cats indoors or securely contained, particularly at night, can help protect rakali and many other native animals.

**Protect wetland vegetation.**

Don't walk through or remove vegetation around the water's edge. Fringing vegetation provides important shelter and habitat.

**Don't feed wildlife.**

Wild animals need to find their natural food. Feeding wildlife can alter their behaviour and affect wetland health.

**Keep our wetlands clean.**

Take rubbish home and consider joining local wetland restoration and clean-up activities.

**Help restore habitat.**

Planting locally native vegetation and protecting existing vegetation helps create the shelter and habitat rakali need.

**Help us find out if rakali are still here**

The last dedicated rakali survey at Lake Goollelal was conducted in 2018.

That means there is a valuable opportunity for the community to help build a more up-to-date picture of rakali at Yellagonga.

Every reliable observation can add to our understanding.

A single photograph might seem insignificant, but when sightings are collected over time, they can help identify important areas of habitat, determine where rakali are still present and highlight areas where further monitoring may be needed.

**Seen a rakali at Yellagonga?****We'd love to hear about it.**

Please record your sighting and, where possible, include a photograph, date, time and location. Together, we can help build a better understanding of one of Yellagonga's most elusive native mammals.

Rakali belong at Yellagonga. Let's make sure they have a future here.