



Biosecurity alert: Northern palm squirrel

(*Funambulus pennantii*)

Photo: Cory Seeman

In Australia the northern palm squirrel (*Funambulus pennantii*) is listed as an extreme threat species nationally and in Western Australia it is a declared pest under the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* due to this listing.

The northern palm squirrel is a serious pest of orchard fruits such as pineapple, mango, pomegranate, apples, guava, blackberries and grapes. Extensive damage occurs in orchards, gardens and public parks as the squirrel forages for seeds, fruits, nuts, plant stems, young bark, buds, leaves, flowers, nectar, insects and grubs. Sugarcane and groundnut crops such as peanuts also suffer damage and the squirrel can also damage electrical wiring in houses creating a fire risk.

Introduced populations pose a risk to Australian native species susceptible to competition with the palm squirrel for breeding sites and food. Bird eggs and nestlings are at risk from direct predation, and this could result in a reduction of bird biodiversity in city parks and gardens

In Western Australia the species was released in the grounds of Perth Zoo in 1898 for reasons of enhancement and it successfully established a population there.

Currently there are no known populations of palm squirrels anywhere in Australia and the species is now considered eradicated in Western Australia. However, it has historically been detected in the illegal pet trade and illegal keeping poses the greatest risk of this species re-establishing in Australia.



LOOK for this pest

Once northern palm squirrel populations establish they are extremely costly and difficult to remove.

- The palm squirrel weighs 60-180g and has a bushy tail, slightly shorter in length than its body, interspersed with long white and black hairs.



- Five conspicuous white stripes run along its grizzled grey-brown coloured back. Three of these stripes run from head-to-tail while the outer two run from the forelegs to the hind legs.
- It has a creamy white belly and small triangular ears

Characteristics of the northern palm squirrel:

- semi-terrestrial living mainly in trees and above ground structures
- very gregarious, often found in small groups of up to 10 individuals
- most active in the morning and early evening having a rapid darting movement and great agility when climbing
- a scavenger, eating food waste and human-edible food like the lunches of school children
- The female builds a nest of sticks and plant material in tree cavities or on branches and cavities in house walls and windowsills. Baby palm squirrels mature at 6-9 months of age.



REPORT suspected sightings

The northern palm squirrel could be mistaken for WA native species including the Common brushtail possum; Brush-tailed phascogale and Numbat.

If you sight a northern palm squirrel, note the date, time and location of the pest. Take photographs, if possible.



Report your observations

MyPestGuide® Reporter
via app or online
mypestguide.agric.wa.gov.au

Pest and Disease Information Service
(08) 9368 3080
padis@dpird.wa.gov.au

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