



Meet your Neighbour – Brush-tailed Phascogale

Funny name – lots of personality. The Brush-tailed Phascogale is one of Nillumbik’s cutest residents. Next time you’re in the bush at night look to the trees. If you’re very lucky and very quiet, you might spot one dancing though the canopy on the lookout for a juicy grub.

The Brush-tailed Phascogale’s scientific name is *Phascogale tapoatafa*. They’re also called Tuans.

Phascogales are a marsupial (meaning they have a pouch for their young) and are part of the carnivorous (meat-eating) Dasyuridae family. In Nillumbik their closest relatives are Slender-tailed Dunnarts and Agile Antechinus.

What makes them so cute?

Their large black bushy tail is their best known feature, helping them to balance as they play in the trees. It’s almost as long as their small grey body, which is only 16-26cm (not including the tail). They have large eyes to help them see in the dark – and make them super cute. They might look a little like a possum, but they are more closely related to a Tasmanian Devil! See over the page for a picture.

Party animals

Phascogales are nocturnal: they are awake all night and then sleep all day.

Live fast – die young

Life is short but sweet for a Phascogale. Like many small mammals in the Dasyuridae family, the male phascogales won’t see their first birthday. After a frenzied mating season in autumn, the worn-out males die from the stress. The females live only one more year, giving them time to raise their babies.

Dinner time

You wouldn’t want a Phascogale to ask you over for dinner. They eat large invertebrates, such as insects, spiders and centipedes. Yuck. They find them on and under the bark of trees, on fallen logs and in the leaf litter. Sometimes these meat-eaters will also eat small reptiles, birds and mammals, with an occasional sweet treat of flower nectar.



Caught on camera. A Phascogale visiting a camera trap at night. The smell of oats, peanut butter and golden syrup was too much.

A home in the trees

Brush-tailed phascogales are found in the dry open forests north-east of Melbourne and through central Victoria.

Although small, Phascogales can really move. The more intrepid males will travel about 1km within their home range.

They spend most of their time in the trees. When they come to the ground for food or travel they have to be very careful they aren't eaten by a fox or cat.

Phascogales sleep in hollows formed by a tree as it ages. Tree hollows can take over 100 years to form. These very young and short-lived animals live in very old homes!

Inside their hollow homes they make nests using feathers, fur and dry leaves to keep warm. One Phascogale will have many homes. Some females have been recorded using over 30 sites in one year.

Fire and the Phascogale

Fire is as tough for this little creature as it is for us. The 2009 fires in Kinglake National Park destroyed many of their homes. Ten years later, they are only just starting to move back in. The unburnt areas of Nillumbik provided an important refuge for them during this time.

This shows how important large areas of unbroken forest can be. It allows them to move and interbreed, while providing places for their population to survive catastrophic events.

Under threat

Loss of trees (particularly large ones with hollows) and the introduction of predators, like cats and foxes, threatens the survival of the Brush-tailed Phascogale.

The Victorian Government lists them as threatened under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*.

How can I be a good neighbor?

- Keep your cats in at night so they can't catch a defenseless Phascogale for dinner.
- Remove harbor for foxes around your property – foxes will also eat a phascogale if they can.
- Plant native trees and shrubs – with large home ranges phascogales are at risk without places to hide as they move about.
- Retain large old trees which have hollows for Phascogales. You can also put up nest boxes or create artificial hollows – they will thank you for their new homes.



Brush-tailed phascogale – It's very strange to see one in the day. It's way past this little fella's bed time. Yawn!

If you would like to help the Brush-tailed Phascogale email environment@nillumbik.vic.gov.au, visit nillumbik.vic.gov.au or call 9433 3111 to find out more.