



## Meet your neighbour - Brush-tailed Phascogale

Funny name - lots of personality. The Brush-tailed Phascogale is Mount Alexander region's cutest resident. Next time you're in the bush at night, look to the trees. If you're lucky and very quiet, you might spot a Phascogale in the canopy searching for a juicy grub.

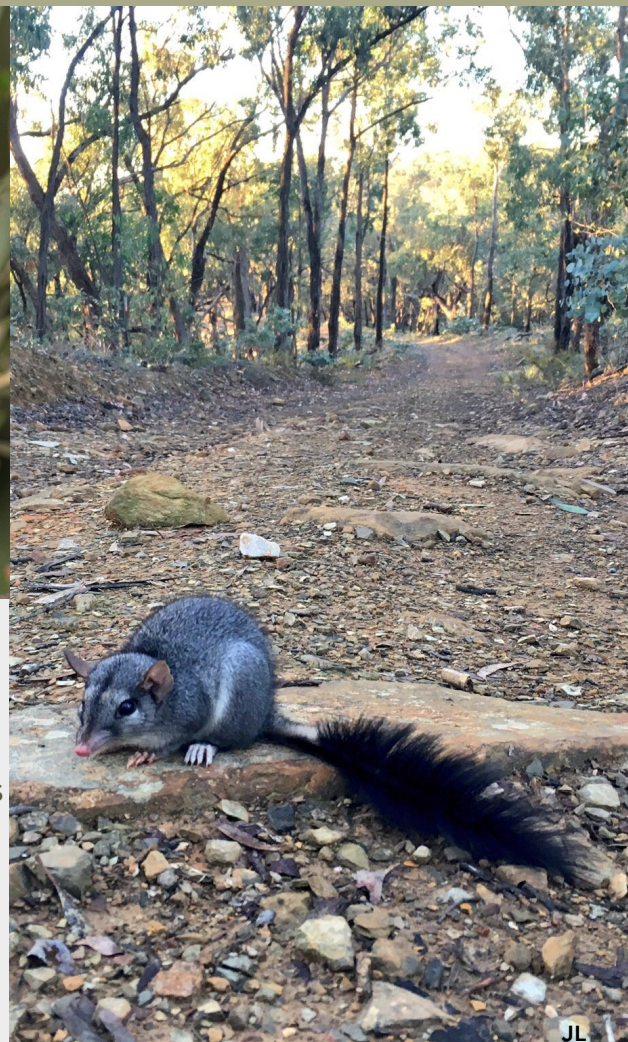
The Brush-tailed Phascogale's scientific name is *Phascogale tapoatafa*. They're sometimes called Tuans. Phascogales are a marsupial (meaning they have a pouch for their young) and are part of the carnivorous Dasyuridae family. In our region, their closest relative is the Yellow-Footed Antechinus.

### What do they look like?

Their large, black, bushy tails are their best-known and defining feature. The tail is almost as long as their body, which is small and uniform grey (only 16-26 cm). It is this bushy tail combined with small body small size that distinguishes the Phascogale from all other small mammals in the area. Although they look a little similar, they are much smaller than the Common Brushtail Possum. Phascogales are actually more closely related to Tasmanian Devils than possums!

### Party animals

Phascogales are nocturnal: they are awake all night and asleep all day. Their lives are short and sweet. Like many small Dasyurids, males won't see their first birthday. After a frenzied mating season in autumn, the males die from the stress. Most females only live one year, giving them time to raise babies.



Brush-tailed Phascogale – It's strange to see one in daylight. This is likely an exhausted male.

### Dinner time

Phascogales are ferocious little hunters, mostly eating invertebrates such as insects, spiders and centipedes. They find them on and under the bark of trees, on fallen logs and in the leaf litter. Sometimes they will eat small reptiles, birds and mammals, with an occasional sweet treat of flower nectar.





A Brush-tailed Phascogale exploring a nestbox added by a landholder.

## How can you help?

### A home in the trees

Brush-tailed Phascogales are found in dry open forests throughout central Victoria. Although small, Phascogales can really move. Males are quite intrepid and will travel widely during the mating season to find females. They spend most of their time in the trees, but also forage for food on the ground. When they come to the ground, foxes and cats often await.

Phascogales sleep in hollows formed by a tree as it ages. Tree hollows can take over 100 years to form. Inside their hollow, they make nests using feathers, fur and dry leaves to keep warm.

### Bushland habitat is vital

While large areas of forests are important, so too are small patches on farmlands, linear strips, and scattered trees, as these provide connectivity and contribute to the overall habitat mosaic. In our region, we know that logs and leaf litter are important predictors of their occurrence, as is habitat on slopes, likely because these areas have lots of rough-barked trees: which are perfect for encouraging a smorgasbord of insects.

### Under threat

Loss and fragmentations of habitat (especially large trees with hollows) and the introduction of predators, like cats and foxes, threatens their survival. The Victorian Government lists them as threatened under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*.

### How can I be a good neighbour?

- Keep cats inside at night to protect phascogales and other native wildlife.
- Undertake fox control on your property. Foxes will eat Phascogales too.
- Plant native trees and shrubs to encourage habitat for the Phascogale's food.
- Keep logs (especially hollow ones) and leaf litter on the ground to create Phascogale foraging habitat.
- Retain large old trees with hollows.
- Put up nest boxes.
- Join your local Landcare/Friends-of group, to contribute to broader landscape restoration.

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