



Credit: Fredy Mercay / ANTPhoto.com



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# Leadbeater's Possum

our faunal emblem

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The Leadbeater's Possum is Victoria's fauna emblem. It is regarded as endangered and is restricted primarily to very high rainfall Ash forests in central Victoria which are the also State's highest quality timber resource.

The possum belongs to the arboreal group of marsupials that nest in tree hollows and so is potentially very vulnerable to timber harvesting that removes old, large trees.

As well as large old nest trees, the Possum requires an understorey of wattles on which it feeds, and a dense forest structure that allows it to move about freely. These requirements are naturally met by regrowth developing after stand-replacement wildfires. Natural regrowth stands contain a scattering of old dead or damaged stags for nesting, and a dense understorey mix of eucalypts and wattles for feeding and accessibility.

As regrowth ages, nest trees decline. Therefore, the ideal forest structure changes. Mature forests eventually become unsuitable for the possum. In the absence of fire to recreate ideal habitat, Leadbeater's Possum populations decline and largely disappear.

Considerable research and thought have been invested in how to conserve Leadbeater's Possum. Around two thirds of Victoria's Ash forests have been put into reserves, including the Yarra Ranges National Park, where about a third of known nest sites are located.

It has been recognised that timber harvesting is an important management tool that can recreate the ideal habitat structure provided greater efforts are made to retain and protect old nest trees among the resultant regrowth. In the absence of severe fire, future populations of the Leadbeater's Possum are likely to be concentrated in timber production zones as older forests become unsuitable habitat.

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