

Native mouse believed to be extinct for 150 years found off Western Australia

Gould's mouse found on several small islands off coast of WA after population collapse on mainland



The 'extinct' Gould's mouse was indistinguishable from the Shark Bay mouse, which is found on several small islands off the coast of Western Australia. Photograph: Wayne Lawler/Wayne Lawler/Australian Wildlife Conservancy

Australian Associated Press

Tue 29 Jun 2021 05.08 BST

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/29/native-mouse-believed-to-be-extinct-for-150-years-found-off-western-australia>

Scientists have discovered that an extinct native mouse thought to have been wiped out more than 150 years ago is thriving on islands off **Western Australia**.

Researchers compared DNA samples from eight extinct native rodents and 42 of their living relatives to study the decline of native species since the arrival of Europeans in Australia.

The results showed the "extinct" Gould's mouse was indistinguishable from the Shark Bay mouse, which is found on several small islands off the coast of WA.

“The resurrection of this species brings good news in the face of the disproportionately high rate of native rodent extinction,” Australian National University evolutionary biologist Emily Roycroft said.

Roycroft said native mice accounted for 41% of all Australian mammals that had become extinct since European colonisation started in 1788.

“It is exciting that Gould’s mouse is still around, but its disappearance from the mainland highlights how quickly this species went from being distributed across most of Australia to only surviving on offshore islands in Western Australia,” she said.

“It’s a huge population collapse.”

Gould’s mouse (*Pseudomys gouldii*) was common and widespread before European settlement in eastern inland Australia, according to the NSW environment department.

It was named after English ornithologist John Gould’s wife, Elizabeth, and disappeared rapidly after the 1840s, potentially due to introduced cats.

The mouse was slightly smaller than a black rat, and quite social, living in small family groups that sheltered by day in a nest of soft, dry grass in a burrow.

It usually dug burrows at a depth of 15cm under bushes.

The study was published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America or PNAS.