

Westbury Backyard Bandicoots is a community group that aims to ensure the survival of bandicoots in the town by:

- \* Raising awareness of bandicoots in Westbury;
- \* Mapping the occurrence of bandicoots in the town;
- \* Distributing information booklets and fact sheets;
- \* Advising residents about creating gardens for bandicoots;
- \* Promoting the use of native vegetation;
- \* Recommending a gradual removal of gorse and blackberries;
- \* Encouraging the use of organic solutions to pest control;
- \* Encouraging responsible pet ownership.



Eastern Barred Bandicoot youngsters Photo: P. Doyle

# Westbury Backyard Bandicoots



Eastern Barred Bandicoot Photo: J.J. Harrison (CC BY-SA 3.0)

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Westbury Backyard Bandicoots

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## Westbury is fortunate enough to be home to the Eastern Barred Bandicoot and is thought to be the bandicoot capital of the world.

Tasmania has two species of bandicoot, the **Eastern Barred Bandicoot** (*Peremeles gunnii*) and **Southern Brown Bandicoot** (*Isodon obesulus*).

**Eastern Barred Bandicoots** were numerous and widespread in south eastern Australia at the time of white settlement. Their distribution coincided with rich agricultural land, so areas of suitable habitat were cleared for farmland. In Victoria, they were virtually wiped out, but in Tasmania they have fared better than their mainland kin, mainly because of the absence of that wily predator, the fox. Bandicoots 'freeze' when they sense danger, a strategy that works well for overhead raptors, but not for foxes – or cats. However, our bandicoots are not immune from the same dangers that sent Victorian animals to the brink; they are coping with loss of habitat, predation by cats and dogs, pesticides, toxoplasmosis and traffic.

Eastern Barred Bandicoots have a 'boom and bust' life cycle with one of the shortest gestation periods (12-13 days) of any mammal. Young bandicoots have the fastest growth rate of any marsupial and can easily disperse, which means they can respond quickly to favourable conditions by reproducing rapidly and colonising disturbed habitats such as areas regenerating after fires and home gardens in towns and country. Females can breed when they are just four months old and produce litters of up to five young which remain in the pouch for 55 days. A single female can produce up to five litters each year, so they have the capacity to rapidly increase their population. Conversely, in years with adverse conditions such as drought, populations can become locally extinct.



Eastern Barred Bandicoot Photo: P. Doyle

Unlike other marsupials, bandicoots have a complex placenta more like that of placental mammals, and their fast growth rate can be attributed to their milk that is richer than that of any other marsupial. By the end of lactation, bandicoots' milk has 55% solids, which is richer than any other placental mammals except seals.

**Southern Brown Bandicoots** are a plain grey brown colour and slightly larger than the Eastern Barred. They tend to favour forested areas, although they too are seen in country towns.



Southern Brown Bandicoot Photo: S. Lloyd

Both bandicoot species are solitary and mostly nocturnal. They are known as opportunistic omnivores, i.e. they eat just about anything of the right size. They dig in the topsoil for invertebrates (worms, spiders and insects), bulbs, roots and fungi, and they occasionally eat berries and other fruit. Their activities leave conical pits in lawns and other grassy areas which helps to mix the surface litter with the soil, and allows water to penetrate the soil. Their liking for the grubs that feed on the roots of grass helps to improve the health of lawns.

Bandicoots shelter in nests of vegetation beneath dense cover and are not fussy about whether the vegetation is native or introduced. However, planting native vegetation is preferable as it provides habitat for native insects and birds.

### How you can help

- Email us the location of any roadkill bandicoots you see. We will upload the information to the Department of Natural Resources and Environment's Tasmanian Roadkill Reporter app so we can identify roadkill hotspots;
- Consider making your garden bandicoot friendly. Tips on how to do this are provided in the brochure 'Urban Refuges' produced by NRM North. Free copies are available at Meander Valley Council Offices and the Westbury Library;
- Drive slowly and remain alert after dark;
- Use a torch to check out your own yard. About an hour after sunset is a good time to spot them. Be warned—bandicoot spotting can become an obsession;
- Encourage friends and neighbours to become bandicoot friendly.