

It is not uncommon to find our native mammals living inside buildings. In winter when it is cold outside and there is little food around, ski lodges offer both warmth and food. Most buildings may seem secure and solid to us, but offer plenty of gaps, holes and cracks that allow access to these tiny, agile animals. Remember these are protected native animals that have lived harmoniously in this area for thousands of years, long before development commenced on the mountain. We are all obliged to protect them.



Dusky Antechinus *Antechinus swainsonii*

### What should I do if I discover small mammals in my building?

#### ENSURE AREAS WHERE FOOD IS KEPT OR CONSUMED ARE CLEAN.

Check behind fridges, in cupboards and beneath dishwashers for food scraps or crumbs that may attract small mammals.

Ensure all food is stored in containers that prevent access, and are kept in secure cupboards or pantries.

Block up any entrances, holes or gaps through which animals may be gaining entry to living areas. It may be impossible or impractical to prevent them getting into the roof, walls or beneath the building but blocking their access into your living areas is possible.

#### DO NOT USE SNAP TRAPS OR POISON BAITS.

Purchase a small mammal trap for \$5 from Resort Management, a user friendly, reusable, catch and release trap.

Love and appreciate them. It is illegal to kill or distantly relocate them. Penalties apply for killing native wildlife. The presence of small native mammals equals a healthy environment and functioning ecosystem.



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Antechinus agilis - Photo © Kim Wormald - ilirralira.com

## Small Native Mammals



## Antechinus

Antechinus are one of the most common animals at Mt Buller. There are two species of this small, predatory marsupial that inhabit the Resort: Agile Antechinus *Antechinus agilis* and Dusky Antechinus *Antechinus swainsonii*.

Antechinus have a long, pointed muzzle, grey, brown or black fur with a pale whitish underside. The Dusky Antechinus is slightly larger and usually has darker fur than the Agile Antechinus. Dusky Antechinus has a head-body length of 120mm and a tail length of 95mm, whereas the Agile Antechinus has a head-body length of 95mm. They weigh about 45g and 25g respectively.

Both species build their nests in hollow logs or trees or in burrows underground, lining the nest with leaves or bark. Agile Antechinus nest communally, taking advantage of their combined body heat to reduce their energy needs. The Dusky Antechinus is normally solitary. In winter, Antechinus go about their lives beneath the snow, at ground level between the boulders, logs and bushes known as the subnivean space.

### DIET

Antechinus' diet consists mostly of beetles, moths, grasshoppers, flies, centipedes, spiders and lizards and occasionally some vegetable matter. In winter the scarcity of food may explain their migration into lodges and clubs in ski resorts.

### BREEDING

Mating occurs in August for both species. Males are reported to mate almost continuously during the mating period, neglecting to eat and subsequently dying within about two weeks of mating. Females give birth to eight to ten young. Newborns are less than 3mm long and have to make their own way into the pouch. They remain in the pouch for about 5-8 weeks.

### IDENTIFYING THE ANTECHINUS

The following features can assist in the identification of the Antechinus:

- Long pointed nose
- Carnivorous teeth (like dogs and cats, not rodents)
- Completely furred tail
- Very fast and agile movement

## Southern Bush Rat

The Southern Bush Rat *Rattus fuscipes* is the most common species of native rats, and is found in many heathlands of Victoria and New South Wales, sometimes venturing into our alpine lodges and apartments. These marsupials are found in snowgum woodlands, heathland and boulderfields where logs, rocks and soil allow for good cover and food provision.

### DIET

The Southern Bush Rat consumes mainly fruit, various available insects, seeds and fibrous plant material.

### BREEDING

The Southern Bush Rat begins breeding early summer, with litter sizes ranging between 4-5 young. As the structure of the population shifts seasonally (these Rats may only live for 1 year) they do not usually live to a second breeding cycle. The nursery of the Southern Bush Rat is its burrow, where a tunnel leads to a nest chamber, and is lined with grass and other vegetation.

### IDENTIFYING THE BUSH RAT

The following features can assist in the identification of the Bush Rat from the introduced (and pest) Black Rat:

- Fairly short naked tail
- Ground dwelling
- Shy (but beware—sometimes cheeky!)
- Round ears



Southern Bush Rat *Rattus fuscipes*

## Broad Toothed Rat

The Broad-toothed Rat *Mastacomys fuscus* is a rare native rodent that occurs in remnant populations in alpine and subalpine regions of southeastern Australia. It is commonly associated with snowgrass *Poa* spp. which provides food, and dense heath or boulders that provide protection from predators. It lives in a complex of runways in dense vegetation. During winter, the species remains active but lives in communal nests made of grass, under the snow in areas where the subnivean space is optimised. Individuals may change their nest locations when the snow melts to take advantage of warmer aspects, better food resources, or to avoid flooding.

The species is similar to the Swamp Rat *Rattus lutreolus* but has a bicoloured, narrower tail, broader incisors, and longer, more slender hindfeet. Adults weigh between 95 to 150g with a head-body length of 145 to 195mm.

### DIET

The Broad-toothed Rat is a specialist herbivore, whose diet consists almost solely of greenery - grass and sedge stems, supplemented by seeds and moss spore cases.

### BREEDING

Breeding is seasonal with births occurring during summer months. The gestation period is around 5 weeks and litter size ranges from 1-4 young.

### IDENTIFYING THE BROAD-TOOTHED RAT

The following features can assist in the identification of the Broad Toothed Rat:

- Tubby, chubby cheeks
- Short nose, face more like that of a hamster
- Tail is shorter than head and body length
- Tail is ringed, with very little fur



Broad-toothed Rat *Mastacomys fuscus*