



## Itjaritjari

### Marsupial mole ~ *Notoryctes typhlops*

#### What do they look like?

Itjaritjari are small but very unique animals that are covered in pale golden fur. They grow to about 150mm and weigh between 40 and 70g. They have no visible eyes and a leathery shield across their snout. The front feet have shovel-shaped claws and they have a short, leathery tail. Females have a backward opening pouch.



Photos: J. Benshemesh

#### Where do they live?

Itjaritjari occur in sandplains and sand dunes throughout the central and western deserts and have been recorded at Walalkara, Watarru and Nyapari. They live underground, rarely coming to the surface. They do not construct a permanent

burrow; instead they tunnel through the sand and backfill as they travel. In a trench cut into the soil the paths can be distinguished by a difference in sand compaction. Itjaritjari paths have been recorded to a depth of over 2.5 metres.

#### What do they eat?

Itjaritjari probably feed on a range of invertebrates (eg termites, ants, beetles), particularly in the larval form. Anangu also report that they feed on tjala (honey ants).

#### Why are they threatened?

The behaviour and biology of the Itjaritjari is poorly understood by Piranpa science and Indigenous knowledge of the species has contributed significantly to our understanding. Their listing as endangered is primarily due to an absence of records; however there is anecdotal evidence that there has been a decline in abundance. Threatening processes may include a change in fire management and introduced predators.

#### What is APY Land Management doing?

- Working with expert Anangu trackers to find and record Itjaritjari tjina.

- Collecting and analysing predator kuna for signs of Itjaritjari. Predators are better Itjaritjari trackers than any human.
- Working with Itjaritjari scientist, Joe Benshemesh, to dig trenches and analyse the number of Itjaritjari tunnels which may remain within the sand for months or even years.
- Working with Itjaritjari scientist, Joe Benshemesh, to listen for Itjaritjari digging through the sand. 'Geophones' used at Walalkara in 2003 can help us learn about the different behaviours of this unique animal.



*Tinpulya Mervin and Mary Pan with an Itjaritjari (left), Iluwanti Ken with an Itjaritjari (centre left), Robin Kankanpakantja listening for digging Itjaritjari (centre right), An Itjaritjari surfaced for a short time and left this tjina (track) near Watarru (right).*

### **How you can help?**

Look after and de-sex your pet cats and dogs so that they don't escape into the wild and kill Itjaritjari. Look after fire and only burn with advice from your elders. Listen to stories about Itjaritjari. Learn what different tjina and kuna looks like from your elders. Go to school and get a job with APY Land Management to help look after Itjaritjari.

### **More information:**

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