

Fawn-footed Melomys

Author: Robyn Howard

This beautiful little native mammal has provided me with delightful surprise sightings in mangrove forests, rainforests, wet sclerophyll forests, coastal lowlands and occasionally in gardens.

Although it is nocturnal, I have found the Fawn-footed Melomys (*Melomys cervinipes*), during daylight by investigating quiet rustles in leaf-litter or leaves of vines and palms. Somewhat mouse- or rat-like, the melomys can be variable in size and colouration. The head and body length is 100-200 mm (commonly 115 mm), with a hairless mosaic-scaled tail up to 200 mm (commonly 140 mm). Upper body colour may be grey with a rufous tone, through to rufous, with the under-body creamy-white to buff. The small grey ears are rounded and the dark eyes appear to bulge.

Although the Fawn-footed Melomys lives mostly in the canopy of rough-barked trees and vines, it is an agile climber and can spend time on or near the ground where dense cover and logs exist. It feeds on leaves, fruit, seeds and shoots obtained in the canopy and is important in the dispersal of seeds and fruit in the forests. During breeding season, I have watched males and females leap and chase one another through vines, fig roots and loose bark. Peak breeding times are in spring to summer but breeding can occur at any time other than winter, and more than one litter per year may be raised. The spherical nest of leaves is built in the canopy, and the young – usually 2, but up to 4 – cling to the mother's teats, being dragged around as she feeds. Later, as they grow, they will spend longer times roosting in the nest until weaned at about three weeks. As with many of our small mammals, normal life-span is two to three years.

At the Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary, I have spied the Fawn-footed Melomys climbing the Callistemons near the Information Centre, as well as in the large fig tree in the rainforest habitat, and on the margins on the Melaleuca forest.