

# Squirrel Glider

*Petaurus norfolcensis* (Kerr, 1792)

**Other common names** Flying Squirrel, Sugar Squirrel, Squirrel Flying Opossum, Squirrel Flying Phalanger

## Conservation status

The Squirrel Glider is listed as an **Vulnerable Species** on Schedule 2 of the New South Wales *Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995* (TSC Act).

**Description** (summarised from Suckling 1995)

*Head and Body Length*

180-230 (210)mm

*Tail Length*

220-300 (270)mm

*Weight*

190-300 (230)g

The Squirrel Glider is very similar in appearance to the smaller Sugar Glider, *Petaurus breviceps*. However, the Squirrel Glider has a longer, more pointed face, longer and narrower ears and a bushier tail. The fur is blue-grey to brown-grey above and white or cream below. A distinctive dark mid-dorsal stripe extends from between the eyes to mid-back. The tail is bushy and is covered with grey to black fur.

Vocalisation is a deep and throaty gurgling chatter.

## Distribution

The Squirrel Glider is sparsely distributed along the east coast and immediate inland districts from western Victoria to north Queensland. The species is found inland as far as the Grampians in Victoria and the Pilliga and the Coonabarabran areas of NSW (Quin 1995; NPWS 1999). Suitable habitat also exists in the River Red Gum Forests and Yellow Box woodlands of the Murray Darling Basin (Quin 1995).

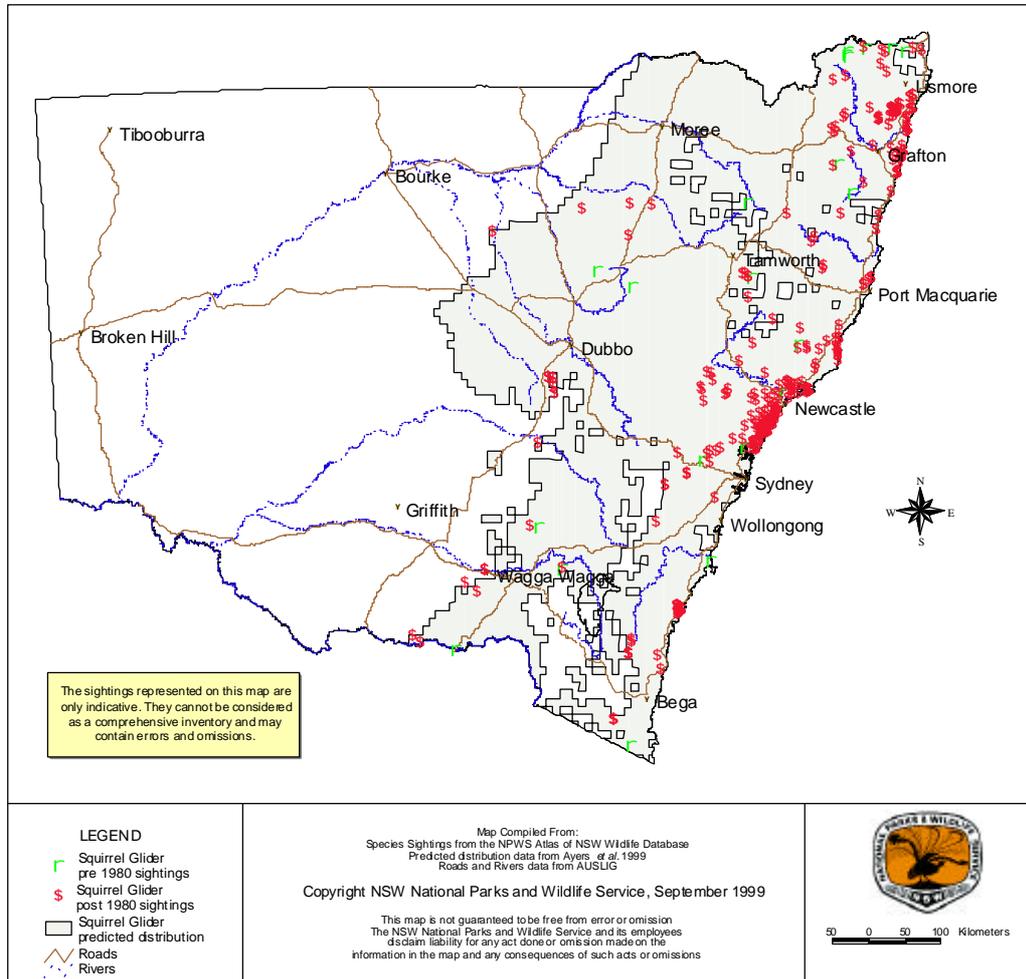


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Squirrel Glider

## Recorded occurrences in conservation reserves

Blue Mountains NP, Brisbane Water NP, Toooloom NP, Border Ranges NP, Mount Warning NP, Warrumbungle NP and Binnaway NR (NPWS 1999).



## NPWS records of the Squirrel Glider in NSW

### Habitat

The Squirrel Glider inhabits dry sclerophyll forest and woodland and is generally absent from rainforest and closed forest (Menkhorst *et al.* 1988).

In NSW, potential habitat includes Box-Ironbark forests and woodlands in the west, the River Red Gum forests of the Murray Valley and the eucalypt forests of the north-east. Individuals have also been recorded in a diverse range of vegetation communities, including Blackbutt, Forest Red Gum and Red Bloodwood forests, Coastal Banksia heathland and Grey Gum/Spotted Gum/Grey Ironbark dry hardwood forests of the Central NSW Coast (Quin 1995).

The Squirrel Glider requires abundant hollow-bearing trees and a mix of eucalypts, acacias and banksias. Within a suitable vegetation community at least one flora species should flower heavily in winter and one or more of the eucalypts should be smooth-barked (Menkhorst *et al.* 1988; Quin 1995).

### Ecology

The Squirrel Glider is nocturnal and shelters in tree hollows (Suckling 1995). This species lives in family groups of between 2 and 10, generally comprising of one male, at least 2 females and juveniles (Quin 1995; Suckling 1995). Births occur throughout the year and are likely to reflect the

availability of food, particularly pollen and nectar . Females are capable of raising two litters in a year and young are thought to leave the nest at around 6 months. Juveniles remain in their natal range for approximately 1 year after emerging from the nest, with juvenile males experiencing aggression from the dominant male. Juvenile mortality following dispersal is high, but established individuals are thought to survive for up to 6 years (Quin 1995).

Squirrel Gliders are agile climbers and can glide for more than 50m in one movement. Nightly movements are estimated as between 300 and 500m. Home-ranges have been estimated as between 0.65 and 8.55ha and movements tend to be greater for males than females . The home-range of a family group is likely to vary according to habitat quality and availability of resources (Quin 1995).

As an ecological specialist, the species feeds on nectar, pollen, flowers, acacia gum and insects, particularly caterpillars (Menkhorst & Collier 1987). Sap from the Yellow-bellied Glider's feeding scars may also be eaten. Squirrel Glider's forage in the upper and lower forest canopies and in the shrub understorey. During winter when other food resources are scarce the Squirrel Glider may obtain its energy from the winter flowers of the Coastal Banksia, Red Ironbark, River Red Gum, Grey Ironbark, Spotted Gum, Forest Red Gum and, in some areas, Blackbutt (Quin 1995). Xanthorrhoea and mature acacias may also provide a valuable food source. Smooth-barked eucalypts are preferred as these eucalypts form hollows more readily than rough-barked and support a greater diversity of invertebrates (Quin 1995).

**Threats** (Gilmore & Parnaby 1994; Menkhorst *et al.* 1988)

- Loss and fragmentation of habitat through clearing and associated activities
- Logging of old growth elements removes hollow bearing trees
- Inappropriate fire regimes may deplete food resources and isolate populations making them susceptible to regional catastrophic events
- Predation by foxes and cats

### **Management**

- Protection and maintenance of known or potential habitat, including the implementation of protection zones around recent records
- Introduced animal control programs, specifically targeting recently disturbed areas with known or potential habitat for the species
- Alteration of prescribed burning and grazing regimes to ensure the enhancement and maintenance of floristic and structural diversity of the vegetation within known or potential habitat

### **Recovery plans**

A recovery plan is being prepared for this species.

## References

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- NPWS 1999. Atlas of NSW Wildlife. NPWS, Hurstville.
- Quin D.G. 1995. Population Ecology of the Squirrel Glider (*Petaurus norfolcensis*) and the Sugar Glider (*P. breviceps*) (Marsupialia:Petauridae) at Limeburners Creek, on the Central North Coast of New South Wales. *Wildlife Research* 22: 471-505.
- Suckling G.C. 1995. Squirrel Glider, in R. Strahan (Ed.) *The Mammals of Australia*. pp 234-235. Reed Books, Chatswood.

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