

AN EXTENSION TO THE KNOWN RANGE OF THE EASTERN GREY KANGAROO *MACROPUS GIGANTEUS* ON CAPE YORK PENINSULA

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THE eastern grey kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*) is one of Australia's widest-ranging large macropodids, occurring in open forests, woodlands, subalpine woodland, farmland, and semi-arid regions throughout most of eastern Australia (Menkhorst and Knight 2001). However current general accounts (e.g., Poole 1995, Menkhorst and Knight 2001) regard *M. giganteus* as being absent from the northern Cape York Peninsula.

As part of a study of the macroecology and conservation of the antilopine wallaroo (*Macropus antilopinus*) on Cape York Peninsula, I collected locality data for all macropodids encountered during surveys. Here I report on a significant northern extension of the known range of *M. giganteus* to Bramwell Station (Latitude -12.15, Longitude 142.72), approximately 330 km beyond its reported range. I sighted one adult male and two adult female *M. giganteus* on 22 May 2004 from a vehicle in mixed, open *Eucalyptus* woodland. I distinguished *M. giganteus* from *M. robustus* and *M. antilopinus* (the other two large sympatric macropodids) by its distinctive hairy muzzle, uniform grey coat and distinct black tail tip. In contrast, both *M. robustus* and *M. antilopinus* have relatively bare muzzles, lack a distinct black tail tip, are shorter and of more muscular build and differ in their colouration, particularly *M. antilopinus*, which is red and white (see Poole 1995; Menkhorst and Knight 2001). Fig. 1 shows the new locality data for *M. giganteus* and all other Queensland records. I have made numerous sightings outside of *M. giganteus*' reported range,

with Bramwell Station representing the most northerly. The two western-most Cape York Peninsula sightings are from Strathgordon Station (Latitude -14.76, Longitude 142.12) and Mungkan Kandju National Park (Latitude -13.58, Longitude 142.68).

Whether this is a genuine range shift remains unclear: it is possible that *M. giganteus* has always occupied this area but has not been recorded because of observer error or low survey effort due to the relative inaccessibility of the area. It is also important to note that the edges of range maps are known for their inaccuracy. If there has been an expansion of range it is presumably a consequence of habitat change, possibly associated with the effects of cattle grazing, the dominant land use on Cape York Peninsula (e.g., altered fire regimes, the establishment of permanent water, removal of dingos (*Canis lupus dingo*); see Calaby and Grigg 1989; Flannery 1994). Alternatively the shift may be the result of subtle habitat alteration associated with climate change or other unidentified factors.

Establishing the cause of this range extension is important. There is much conjecture over the way in which European settlement has shaped the current distribution and abundance patterns of Australia's macropodids (Calaby and Grigg 1989; Auty 2004). However, perhaps the most interesting element of these changes to macropodid distributions is the effect they are having on interspecific interactions and macropodid community ecology in general.

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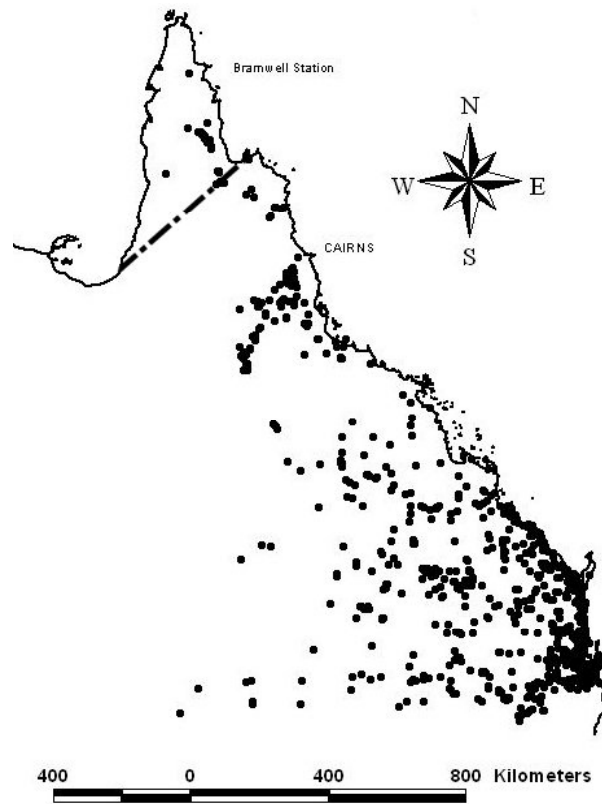


Fig. 1. Distribution of the eastern grey kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*) in Queensland. The broken black line represents the approximate previously assumed limit to *M. giganteus*' range (Poole 1995). Dots on Cape York above the black line occur outside *M. giganteus*' current known range. The most northerly dot indicates the record from Bramwell Station.

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