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Mine rehabilitation and pygmy possums

THE vast expanse of the Goldfields is a good place to hide if you are the size of a mouse.

But the western pygmy possum, all 13 grams of it, has fallen victim to a series of pit traps laid around the Goldfields by PhD student Scott Thompson, exposing its inconspicuous existence.

Mr Thompson has developed a mine site rehabilitation index which compares the reptile make up of an undisturbed ground with that

of a rehabilitated area. When the reptile populations are similar a site is deemed to be well-rehabilitated.

But with 60,000 trap-nights

and 3500 specimens picked up over the past two years, the study has provided information of benefit to general biological studies and the mining industry which sponsored Mr Thompson's research.

"We discovered there are a lot more pygmy possums in the Goldfields than was previously thought," Mr Thompson said.

Papers on the pygmy possum and also the bearded dragon are being published in scientific magazines.

Mr Thompson has discovered the dragons' eggs take 105 to 120 days to hatch, which was not previously known.

The work is being sponsored by OMG Cawse, Placer Dome Asia Pacific, the Minerals and Energy Research Institute of WA and the WA Chamber of Minerals and Energy. "The PhD is being wrapped up at the end of August but there is the possibility Placer Dome and OMG will want the study continued," Mr Thompson said.

The premise of the study is that vertebrates are the last type of plant or animal to return to a site after it has been disturbed.

And hardy reptiles, which survive in some of the country's most inhospitable landscapes and are easily trapped, make a good sampling choice.



Gecko count: Scott Thompson presented an update of his PhD study on minesite rehabilitation to the WA Chamber of Minerals and Energy's environmental forum last week.