

Tenkile Conservation Program

Conserving tropical biodiversity in Papua New Guinea through saving tree-kangaroos.



Scott's Tree-kangaroo or Tenkile, *Dendrolagus scottae*, is the most threatened tree-kangaroo in the world and restricted to 150km² in the Torricelli Mountains of north-west Papua New Guinea (PNG). The Tenkile Conservation Alliance (TCA) was established in 1999 to manage the conservation of this species, based on a conservation assessment of all PNG's tree-kangaroos facilitated by the IUCN in 1998.

The program goal is to conserve the biodiversity of the Torricelli Mountains, using the Tenkile and Golden-mantled Tree-kangaroo as flagships. A 90,000ha Conservation Area in the core of the mountains will be managed by village-based management committees. Zoos Victoria is the TCA's main partner, providing funds, advice on field and social research, advocacy and staff to support project administration.

The program integrates wildlife conservation goals and social development needs across 39 villages and more than 120,000ha. Recognising that these are very remote, poor communities and that more than 97% of land in PNG is under customary ownership, active community engagement is crucial for program success. The social impact of the program is evaluated through the recording of Most Significant Change stories.



When the program started, hunting by villagers was the main threat to tree-kangaroos. That has now ceased through hunting moratoria that are enthusiastically implemented by the villagers. Analysis of research data collected by 70 trained villagers across seven research sites is highlighting a 60% increase in Tenkile numbers – to approximately 300 in 2009. Other wildlife, such as cassowaries and Crowned Pigeons, is also returning.

Critical to program success is training and sustainable alternatives to hunting wildlife. Village-based rabbit farming is providing much-needed protein for families, significantly improving their diet and continuing to reduce pressure on wildlife. A fully-equipped training centre enables program staff to strengthen local capacity for field research and management of the Conservation Area.

At the heart of the program is a strong relationship between program staff and villagers, built on respect and trust and sustaining accountability. More than 120 villagers are employed, making the program the largest employer in the mountains and generating broader biodiversity awareness across the entire Torricelli Mountains. Aligning this with social outcomes is critical for sustainable long-term ecosystem conservation in Papua New Guinea.

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