Preface

This book is a summary of current knowledge on the biology and natural history of tree-kangaroos. While there are 10 species currently described, readers will find a heavy emphasis placed on the two Australian species, Bennett's Tree-kangaroo (*Dendrolagus bennettianus*) and Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo (*Dendrolagus lumholtzi*). In a book that purports to be on the tree-kangaroos of both Australia and New Guinea this is an unfortunate bias but it is an accurate reflection of the present state of knowledge. Largely because they are relatively abundant and far more accessible to wildlife biologists, almost all recent field research on tree-kangaroos has been done on Australian species. There is still comparatively little known about the New Guinea species.

Readers will also find that of the two Australian species I focus more on Bennett's Tree-kangaroo, particularly when discussing the finer points of tree-kangaroo natural history. The main reason for this is that it is the species I know best. Apart from a brief period spent working on Scott's and Grizzled Tree-kangaroos in New Guinea, and the odd foray working on Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo, almost all tree-kangaroo research I have done over the past 15 years has been on this species.

When I started my field studies of Bennett's I wasn't planning a comparative study of all members of the genus. I was simply trying to determine the conservation status of this one species, which was very poorly known at the time. However, as the work progressed and I became more familiar with Bennett's Tree-kangaroo and its habits, 'dendrolagophilia' set in. I realised I was dealing with a truly extraordinary marsupial and this led me to ask broader questions about the biology and origins of the genus as a whole. It is only now, in writing this book and attempting to give plain answers to these questions, that I realise the serendipity involved in selecting Bennett's Tree-kangaroo as a study animal in the first place. It has given me insights into tree-kangaroo biology that I doubt would have been available had I studied any other species.

For a start, Bennett's Tree-kangaroo belongs to the ancestral grade of tree-kangaroos. That is, with its two sister taxa Lumholtz's and the Grizzled Tree-kangaroo, it is thought to be the least differentiated from the original stock of kangaroos that abandoned their terrestrial ways and took to living in the trees. And thus it is directly linked to the big question, the great paradox of kangaroo evolution: why did an animal so beautifully adapted for terrestrial living