

Rare species go on show for centenary

SOME of the most interesting, rare and endangered mammals indigenous to the Sunraysia region will be on public display during Merbein Centenary celebrations over the next week.

Mildura writer, collector and historian Bert Curtis, whose family has a history going back to Merbein's pioneering days, says few people will get a better chance to 're-visit' some of our most precious species than during the celebrations.

The mammals include specimens gathered by the 1857 expedition led by German-born zoologists William Blandowski and Gerard Kreft while based at their main camp at what is now known as the Chaffey Landing below Mildara Winery.

According to Bert, this expedition remains a benchmark in scientific discovery because of its observations and collection of mammals, fish, reptiles, birds and insects, many of which have either vanished from, or become very rare in, the region.

"Since European

ily recognisable because of its large ears, big eyes, long muzzle, sharp teeth and long fat tail.

Bert says that although seldom seen, it is still widespread through the more arid parts of southern Australia. It lives on insects such as grubs and beetles, and lives in both woodlands and open grass country, where it shelters in cracks in the ground or under stumps.

Then there is the Yellow-footed Antechinus, a nocturnal marsupial still existing in eastern Australia, with a small pocket found in the mid-Murray region near Swan Hill. It is small enough to live virtually under the forest floor of sticks, leaves and branches, and lives off insects or flowers. Unusually, the male dies after mating.

Examples of these, and others, will be on display during the week-long Merbein Centenary, and the Mildura Weekly will try to keep readers up to date with other interesting creatures documented by Bert in coming issues.



settlement, competition from domestic stock, rabbits, and predators such as foxes and cats has caused the demise or depletion of many native species," he said.

Bert has put together more information detailing more recent observations of rare mammals, to go alongside those believed to be now extinct, and they make for interesting reading.

They include Mitchell's Hopping Mouse, a small nocturnal marsupial with a long tufted tail, and which has been sighted near Manangatang and at Hattah, and which is also believed to be 'resident' on farmland on the outskirts of Merbein.

And the Fat-Tailed Dunart, a species larger than a normal mouse, and eas-



• PINT-SIZED: The Yellow-footed Antechinus, ABOVE, is a nocturnal marsupial still existing in eastern Australia, with a small pocket found in the mid-Murray region near Swan Hill, while the Fat-Tailed Dunart, BELOW, is easily recognisable because of its large ears, big eyes, long muzzle, sharp teeth and long fat tail.

