

## Western Quoll/ Chuditch (*Dasyurus geoffroii*)

### Conservation Status

**NATIONAL: Vulnerable** (*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*)

### Description

The Western Quoll is roughly the size of a small domestic cat and is Western Australia's largest native carnivore. It is reddish-brown to grey in colour with distinctive white spots and a long tail with a black brush on the last half. Females are smaller than males, weighing 900 g on average compared to 1300 g for male.



### Habitat

The Western Quoll was previously found in a range of habitats including dry forests, beaches and deserts. However the densest populations have been found in areas adjacent to lakes, rivers and wetlands.

### Distribution

The Western Quoll used to be found in every State and Territory of mainland Australia over an area of about 70% of the Australian mainland. It is now only present in south-western Western Australia.

### Behaviour

Western Quolls are solitary animals with a large home range of over seven kilometres. The range of a male quoll will often overlap with those of several female quolls. Interestingly they use shared toilets sites in open spaces such as rock ledges, for marking their territory and other social functions.

Western Quolls are typically active at night but can be active during the day, particularly during the breeding season and when cold, wet weather restricts nocturnal foraging. They use hollow logs or earth burrows as dens and refuge. Amazingly the Western Quoll can save energy by lowering their body temperature several degrees while sleeping in the daytime.

### Diet

The Western Quoll eats a variety of insects, reptiles, freshwater crustaceans, mammals, birds (up to the size of bandicoots and parrots) and fruits. They kill larger prey by a bite to the back of the head. They mainly hunt for food on the ground but will occasionally climb small trees to catch prey or escape from predators. Interestingly Western Quolls obtain most of their water from their food.

### Breeding

Males and females are capable of breeding at one year of age. Litters of up to six young are born from May to September. A newborn quoll is about the size of a rice grain, hairless and blind. By seven weeks they have developed fur and are too big for the mother's pouch. However they continue to depend on the mother's milk for several more weeks. They are fully weaned by 22-24 weeks and shortly after, in summer, leave the mother.

### Threats

As a predator at the top of the food chain, the Western Quoll is dependant on, and a good indicator of, the abundance of its prey and the health of the ecosystem. This is affected by many factors including weather, disease and habitat destruction. For instance, clearing of land or removal of suitable den logs can reduce the area that is suitable for Western Quolls to live.

Other significant threats are predation by, and competition with, foxes, feral cats and raptors; being hit by motor vehicles; illegal shooting, poisoning and trapping; accidental drowning in water tanks; and entanglement in barbed wire fencing.

### Recovery Plan

Research and monitoring of existing populations to gain a better understanding of the threats is ongoing. To increase numbers and ensure there are a number of populations, a captive breeding program and re-introduction of the Western Quoll to areas where they once occurred are also planned. FAME is working with the South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources on a project to re-introduce the Western Quoll to the Flinders Ranges.

### References & More Information

Strahan R (Ed) 1995. *Mammals of Australia*. The Australian Museum Trust. Reed New Holland, Australia.

Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. *Dasyurus geoffroii* in *Species Profile and Threats Database*. [www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicspecies.pl?taxon\\_id=330](http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicspecies.pl?taxon_id=330)