

Chuditch

Dasyurus geoffroii (Gould, 1841)

Size

Head and body length

310–400 (360) mm in males

260–360 (310) mm in females

Tail length

250–350 (305) mm in males

210–310 (275) mm in females

Weight

0.70–2.00 (1.30) kg in males

0.60–1.12 (0.90) kg in females

Subspecies

None



Photo. Babs & Bert Wells/Department of Conservation and Land Management

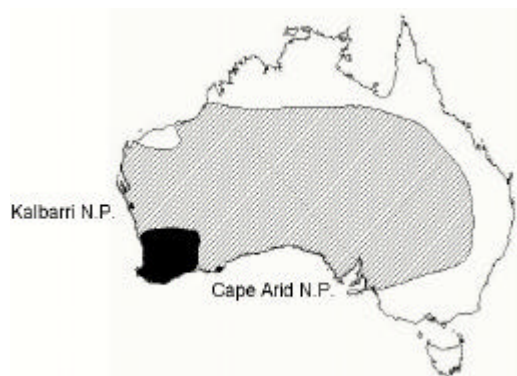
Description

Largest carnivorous marsupial in Western Australia. The chuditch has a soft, white spotted, brown pelage, large rounded ears, pointed muzzle, large dark eyes and a non-hopping gait. The tail is about three quarters of the head and body length, and has a black brush over the distal portion. Its granulated footpads readily distinguishes the chuditch from its more arboreal relative, the northern quoll (*Dasyurus hallucatus*), which has striated footpads. It is usually active from dusk to dawn.

Other common names

Western quoll, western native cat. Chuditch refers to its indigineous (Nyoongar) name from south-west Western Australia

Distribution



Key To Map: Black = present distribution;
Hatched = historic (> 30 years)

Formerly occurred over nearly 70 per cent of the Australian continent from Western Australia across to Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

The chuditch now has a patchy distribution throughout the Jarrah forest and mixed Karri/Marri/Jarrah forest of south-west Western Australia. Also occurs in very low numbers in the Midwest, Wheatbelt and South Coast Regions with records from Moora to the north, Yellowdine to the east

and south to Hopetoun. Chuditch have been translocated to Julimar State Forest east of Bindoon (1992), Lake Magenta Nature

Reserve (1996), Cape Arid National Park (1997), Mt Lindsay National Park (1999), and Kalbarri National Park (2000).

Habitat

Chuditch are known to have occupied a wide range of habitats from woodlands, dry sclerophyll (leafy) forests, riparian vegetation, beaches and deserts. Chuditch at Lake Magenta Nature Reserve have shown a preference for woodland and mallee habitat.

Behaviour

Chuditch are solitary animals for most of their life. In parts of the Jarrah forest where foxes are not controlled, male chuditch have a home range of approximately 15 kilometres squared and females have a home range of three to four squared kilometres. Male home ranges overlap with other males and with females, whereas female home ranges seldom overlap with other females. In baited Jarrah forest home ranges may be smaller. Home range size in other habitats is currently unknown. A home range includes a smaller 'core area' defined by den locations, and these are about four squared kilometres for males and 0.9 squared kilometres for females.

Chuditch den in hollow logs and burrows and have also been recorded in tree hollows and cavities. Suitable hollow or burrow entrance diameters are often at least 30 centimetres in diameter. An adult female chuditch may utilise an estimated 66 logs and 110 burrows within her home range. At Lake Magenta, chuditch have been found resting in bird nests.

Diet

Chuditch are opportunistic feeders, and forage primarily on the ground at night. Their diet can include mammals (including southern brown bandicoots, numbats, woylies, brush-tail possums, and rodents), birds, small lizards, bird and reptile eggs, but the majority comprises a range of large invertebrates including crickets, scorpions and spiders. The red pulp surrounding *Zamia* seeds is sometimes consumed, as well as small fruits and parts of flowers. Food is scarcest during the colder months from June to August.

Breeding

Chuditch in the Jarrah forests are seasonal breeders. Mating occurs late April to early July and chuditch are very mobile and more readily trapped at this time. Gestation is between 17 and 18 days and females give birth to two to six young. Young remain in the pouch for about 61 days, and are then deposited in a den. This is usually in late August to early October. The young are fully weaned by four to five months. Young chuditch begin to disperse in December. Both males and females are sexually mature and probably breed in their first year.

Threatening processes

Habitat alteration and removal of suitable den logs and den sites following land clearing, grazing and frequent wildfire have contributed to a decline in chuditch numbers. Competition for food and predation by foxes and cats, hunting and poisoning have also contributed to its decline.

Conservation status

2000 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species	Vulnerable
Western Australian Wildlife Conservation Act	Threatened
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act	Threatened (Vulnerable)

Management

- Exotic predator control, eg. fox control programs using 1080 meat baits.
- Habitat management – maintenance of refuge sites in the Jarrah forest.
- Monitoring chuditch populations at sites within the Jarrah forest.
- Translocation to suitable areas within the semi-arid zone.

Other interesting facts

- Occasionally chuditch will climb trees to catch prey or to escape from predators.
- Average life-span in the wild is two years, though five years has been recorded.

Selected references

Serena, M. (1987). The Chuditch: A Spot-on Marsupial. *LANDSCOPE* 2(4): 36.

Morris, K. (1992-93). Return of the Chuditch. *LANDSCOPE* 8(2): 10.

Serena, M. and Soderquist, T. (1995). Western Quoll. In R. Strahan (Ed.) The Mammals of Australia. Australian Museum and Reed Books. Chatswood, NSW.

Maxwell S., Burbidge A.A, Morris K. (Eds) (1996). The 1996 Action plan for Australian Marsupials and Monotremes. Wildlife Australia, Canberra.

Website links

http://www.naturebase.net/projects/west_shield.html

<http://www.ea.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/action/marsupials/19.html>

<http://www.perthzoo.wa.gov.au/chuditch.html>