

CHUDITCH IN PERTH ZOO

By Glen Gaikhorst

DESCRIPTION

- * The Chuditch or Western Quoll is Western Australia's largest carnivorous Marsupial.
- * They are nocturnal, active from dusk to dawn but have been noticed foraging on dull winter days. They also like to sun bake.
- * They have a brown pelt which is covered with 50 to 70 white spots. The spots are randomly scattered and the arrangement is unique to each animal. Their tail is long and black.
- * The average Chuditch is about the size of a small cat. A male Chuditch weighs about 1400grams and a female about 900grams.

CLASSIFICATION

- * Chuditch were classed as rare and endangered but now have been down-listed to Vulnerable. This means secure in the wild but human intervention help is still needed. ie continuing predator control (foxes and cats).

PERTH ZOO'S ROLE

- * Breed for release, as per recovery plan. Have close liaisons with CALM on numbers needed etc. All the animals are the property of CALM.
- * Education
- * Development of husbandry and working practices for each species. Maintain good genetics within our breeding colony using studbooks.

BREEDING

- * Breeding season from April to July.
- * Females build nests, become more secretive, and develop fat collars on their neck to help.
- * Gestation 18 days where 2-6 young are born. They are about 5mm long (size of a grain of rice).
- * They are in the pouch for 61 days then are deposited into the nest. At this stage they are just starting to get fur and spots are noticeable. Their eyes are closed and they cannot yet maintain body temperature.
- * At 110 days old their eyes are open, they are fully furred and can generate their own body heat. They start to wander around with their mother and start to eat their first solid foods.
- * At 170 days old they are weaned from their mothers.
- * To date we have bred 281 animals, and 207 of these have been released.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

- * Chuditch are solitary animals only coming together for a short time in the breeding season.
- * Home ranges; Males about 14 square kms and females about 9 square kms.
- * Young disperse from Nov to Jan.

DIET

- * Wild; insects, reptiles, birds and small mammals.
- * Zoo; mice, chicks, rats, fish and insects.

HABITAT

- * Requires dense scrub or bush, Jarrah or Mallee. Do adapt well also to other habitats.
- * They live in dens or other animals burrows, hollow logs, or granite out crop crevices.

DISTRIBUTION

- * Now restricted to the south west of WA. Once were found in every mainland state except Vic.
- * In 1994 was estimated less than 6000 animals left in the wild.

REFERENCES

- * 1994 Chuditch Recovery Plan, Keith Morris, Peter Orrell. Conservation and Land Management.
- * Mammals of Australia, R Strahan, Revised edition 1994.