



Chuditch

Dasyurus geoffroii (Gould, 1841)



Photo: Babs & Bert Wells/DEC

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

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 indigenous (Noongar) name from south-west Western Australia.

Distribution

Formerly occurred over nearly 70% 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, Wheat belt 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).

For further information regarding the distribution of this species please refer to www.naturemap.dpaw.wa.gov.au

Habitat

Chuditch are known to have occupied a wide range of habitats from woodlands, dry sclerophyll 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 (area of occupancy) of approximately 15 km² and females have a home range of 3-4 km². Male home ranges overlap with other males and females, whereas female home ranges seldom overlap with other females. In the 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 4 km² for males and 0.9 km² 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 cm 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, especially those of white-browed babblers.

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 generally comprises of 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-early July and Chuditch are very mobile at this time. Gestation is 17-18 days and females give birth to 2-6 young. Young remain in the pouch for about 61 days, and are then deposited in a den. This is usually in late August-early October. The young are fully weaned by 4-5 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

Western Australian Wildlife Conservation Act 1950

Schedule 1 – Fauna that is rare or is likely to become extinct
(Threatened ranked as Vulnerable)

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Vulnerable

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species

Near Threatened (Version 3.1)

Management

- Exotic predator control, e.g. 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

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Last updated 8 February 2012, for further enquiries please contact fauna@dpaw.wa.gov.au

Further information

Contact your local office of the Department of Environment and Conservation.

See the department's website for the latest information: www.dec.wa.gov.au.

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