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Chuditch



Class	Mammalia
Subclass	Marsupialia
Order	Polyprotodonta
Family	Dasyuridae
Genus	Dasyurus
Species	geoffroii
Status	Endangered

Description

The Chuditch or Western Quoll is the largest carnivorous marsupial found in Western Australia. An average adult male weighs about 1300g and females about 900g. Both sexes have pointed faces and large rounded ears. The eyes are also large. The coat is strikingly marked, with 40-70 white spots scattered randomly over the brown fur on the head and back. The tail is shorter than the head and body length and has a brush-like appearance.

Reproduction

Breeding season extends from late April to early July. Each female may mate with several different males over a period of about a week. Gestation takes less than three weeks and newborn young are about the size of a grain of rice (4.6 mm long). Litters range in size from 2 to 6 young. Female Chuditch carry their young in a rudimentary pouch for the first nine weeks of life. After this, the young have grown quite heavy and are left in a burrow whilst their mother forages. By the age of 16 weeks, the young are exploring outside their den. They learn to hunt without their mother's help. In fact, females hastily depart from the den each evening as if to actively discourage their young from following. Weaning occurs at the age of 23-24 weeks.

Lifespan

While Chuditch have been known to live for at least 5 1/2 years in captivity, wild individuals normally die before their fourth year.

Habitat

Chuditch require dense bush or scrub (usually jarrah or mallee) in order to provide abundant cover and den sites. Dens are located in hollow logs or burrows are dug at the base of the tree or rock.

Social Organisation

Chuditch are solitary, with both males and females occupying territories. They only come together to mate and then separate again. In November the young are dispersed before taking up their own territories.

Predators

Chuditch fall prey to foxes, feral cats, raptors (birds of prey) as well as humans in the form of road kills and illegal shooting.

Diet in the Wild

Consists of insects, ranging in size from termites to large beetles, centipedes, cock roaches and grasshoppers. They also eat small lizards, birds and mammals such as rats.

Diet at the Zoo

Cat kibble, prawns, fish, chicks and mice.

Distribution

Formerly occurred from the south-west coast of WA, north to at least Derby, and eastward to the Great Dividing Range. Most populations declined dramatically after European settlement.

Today the species is seen regularly only in the jarrah forest and occasionally in the southern wheatbelt and areas of mallee woodland to the east of the wheatbelt. Even in the jarrah forest, Chuditch occur at low densities and are absent in some areas. Recent studies indicate that the jarrah forest supports less than 6,000 Chuditch.

Conservation Measures

Attempts to breed this species in 1989 in the Zoo were at first unsuccessful. However, later success has ensured the foundation of a program of habitat management and captive breeding to restock the natural habitat.

At Perth Zoo

Chuditch are usually on display in Perth Zoo's Nocturnal House. Breeding areas are not accessible to Zoo visitors.

As of June 1995 eighty four Chuditch have been bred at Perth Zoo, sixty three of which have been released into the Julimar Nature Reserve - part of the Chuditch's former range. Only two of those have not survived. Some wear radio collars for tracking and research. At least six females had pouch young when last reported and so the signs for the future look good. Further releases are planned for the future.

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