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to fossick through leaf litter, to search deep into the crevices of rotten logs, and even snatch flying insects. An adult female will search for food over an area of three or four square kilometres. A male's foraging area may include 15 square kilometres.

Breeding

The Chuditch 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 two to six young.

Female Chuditch carry their young in a well-developed pouch for the first nine weeks of life. After this age 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 the world 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.

Dens

Chuditch normally spend the day sleeping inside an earth burrow or hollow log. Burrow entrances are usually 8-20 cm in diameter, and are often located at the base of a living or fallen tree, in a rock outcrop, or at the base of an old stump.

Mortality

Recent studies have shown that motor vehicles are the biggest cause of Chuditch death on the Lane-Poole Reserve. Chuditch often forage near dirt tracks, and use roads as a convenient way to travel across their large home ranges. Visitors to the jarrah forest can help Chuditch conservation by driving carefully at night. Cautious drivers are

also more likely to be rewarded by the sight of a wild Chuditch staring back at them with intense interest from the edge of the forest.

Chuditch also die as a result of infections, fox and owl predation, and accidents such as drowning. Forest Chuditch are still sometimes illegally shot, and this can seriously endanger the survival of local populations.

Living with Chuditch

Campers can sometimes see this shy animal fossicking near camp after dark, although the presence of dogs will reduce the likelihood of seeing chuditch and other forest animals. Dogs are prohibited in nature reserves and national parks. In other areas, dog owners can improve the chances of a visit by keeping pets tied up at night.

Spoiled food can spread disease (such as salmonella food-poisoning) among Chuditch. When camping, it is best to put food scraps in covered bins, and let Chuditch obtain their food naturally.

Further information

The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) is responsible for the protection and management of native flora and fauna throughout W.A. Studies into the biology and distribution of the Chuditch are presently being undertaken by CALM staff at the Wildlife Research Centre, Woodvale.

CALM officers or any of our offices are happy to answer any questions you may have. Write to:



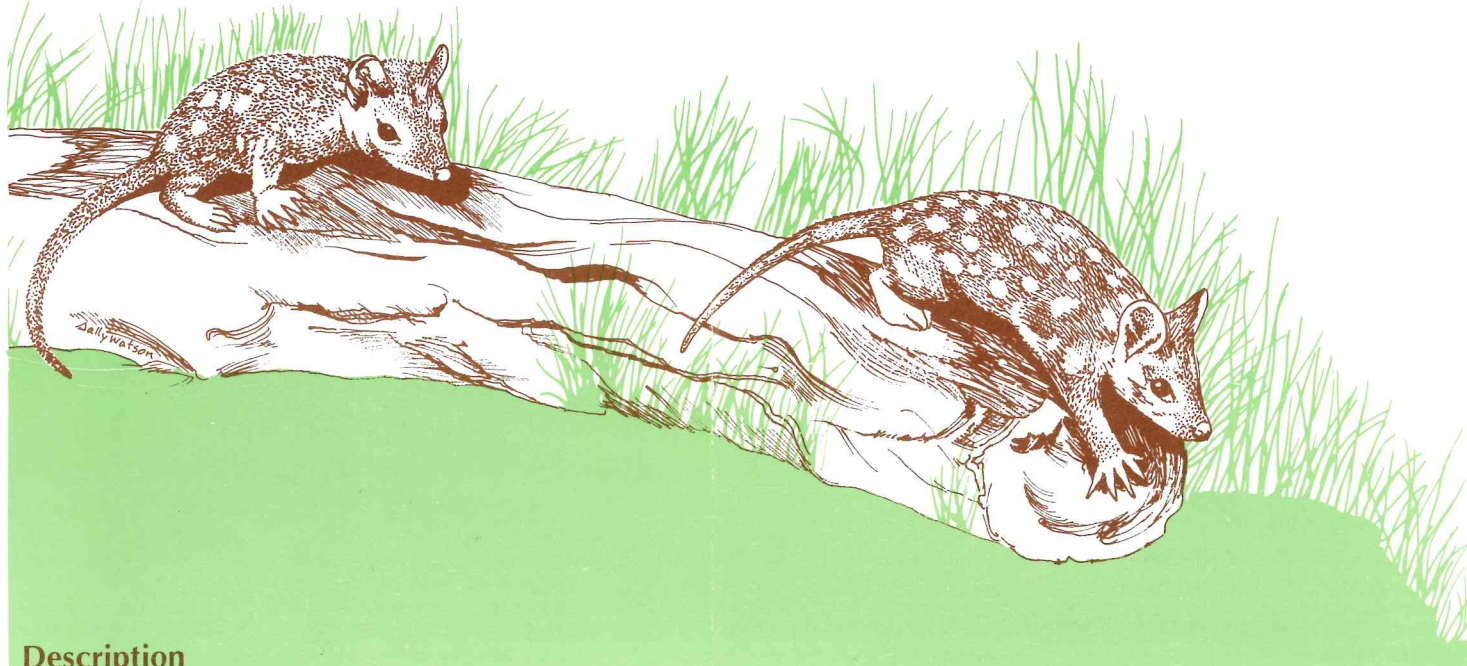
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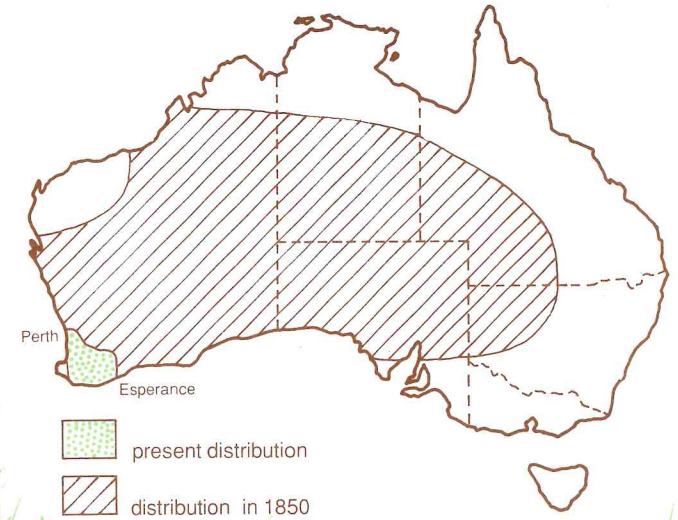
The Chuditch



Department of Conservation & Land Management



Chuditch Distribution - past and present



Description

The Chuditch or Western Native-cat, *Dasyurus geoffroii*, is the largest carnivorous marsupial found in Western Australia.

An average adult male, about the size of a very small house cat, weighs 1300 g. Females weigh about 900 g. Both sexes have pointed faces and large, rounded ears. Their eyes are large, and glow orange-red when reflecting the beam of a bright light. 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.

Status and Distribution

The Chuditch formerly occurred from the southwest coast of W.A., north to at least Derby, and eastward to the Great Dividing Range. Most populations declined dramatically after European settlement. The Chuditch vanished from eastern Australia by about 1900, and from the central desert by the late 1940s or early 1950s. It was fairly common in the Perth metropolitan area until

the 1930s. Today the species is seen regularly only in the jarrah forest. Chuditch are also occasionally seen in the southern Wheatbelt, and in areas of mallee woodland to the east of the Wheatbelt.

Even in the jarrah forest, Chuditch occur at low densities and are absent from some areas. The densest populations are found in relatively productive habitats, such as river valleys. Recent studies indicate that the entire jarrah forest supports less than 6000 Chuditch. The species is classified as rare and in need of special protection.

Diet

Most of the Chuditch diet consists of insects, ranging in size from termites to large beetles, centipedes, cockroaches and grasshoppers. Chuditch are also enthusiastic meateaters: small lizards, birds and mammals such as rats are consumed almost entirely.

Droppings collected near campsites also contain evidence of less healthy meals such as bubblegum, pieces of aluminium foil, and used elastoplasts.

Behaviour

Most foraging occurs at night, with the Chuditch becoming active soon after dusk. Chuditch are sometimes also active in daylight during very wet weather and the breeding season.

Smell is the sense primarily used to find prey, but hearing and eyesight are also keen. When investigating a distant object, Chuditch often stand up on their hind legs, ears cocked forward and nose quivering rapidly.

Although Chuditch readily climb small trees to escape from predators, most of their time is spent on the ground. The dexterous front paws are used