

Development of young Fat-tailed Dunnarts

Story and photographs by B. A. and A. G. Wells. (copyright)

About May, 1972, when the Naturalists' Club was preparing for its Annual Wildlife Show, a farmer from Mingenew offered for display a pair of Fat-tailed Dunnarts, which had been disturbed during plowing and seeding operations on his property. On behalf of the Club, we undertook the care of these animals for the period leading up to the Wildlife Show.

A few days after receiving the animals, we discovered that the female was pouch-gravid and eventually six lively young were revealed. We immediately built a large cage designed to provide adequate space for exercise, material for nesting, and various natural objects (mallee roots etc) to encourage normal activity. As a

precautionary measure against the risk of aggression between the two adults, the enclosure was divided in a way which separated the male without entirely restricting interaction.

We procured a copy of *A Preliminary Survey of the Behaviour in Captivity of the Dasyurid Marsupial* (Sminthopsis crassicaudata—Gould) by R. F. Ewer, Dept. of Zoology, University of Adelaide 1967. This thesis was a valuable aid to our management of this pair. Professional advice regarding a suitable balanced artificial diet was also obtained. The diet was frequently supplemented with grasshoppers, moths, other insects, and mealworms. In spite of prodigious effort however, it seemed

we were never able to fully satisfy the appetites for natural food.

The development of the six young dunnarts to healthy full adulthood was uneventful. However, about the time they gained independence, the female parent sustained a disease in the tail which failed to respond to veterinary treatment. Although she survived, the tail eventually became detached. The cause was not established.

In those early days of our increasing interest in natural history, regrettably, we did not record information and observations which we now know to be important to such an exercise. At the time, it seemed sufficient satisfaction to have the privilege of photographing the dunnarts' development.

▼ View of the pouch area between the mother's hind legs showing young a few days after birth.





▲ The young grow rapidly to fill the pouch.

▼ They soon outgrow their accommodation.





▲ The young dunnarts are now furred.

▼ Just before weaning the young dunnarts are dragged about as they cling tenaciously to their mother's nipples.

