

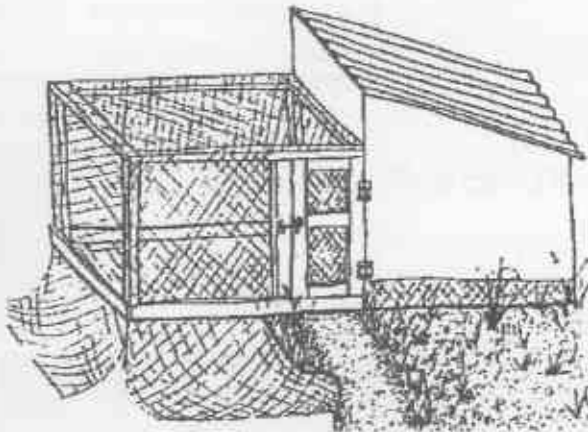
PRACTICALITIES

CHUDITCH-PROOF YOUR CHOOK PEN!

Teagan Smith



Chuditch (*Dasyurus geoffroi*) numbers appear to be increasing, especially in the Chittering area. This dramatic increase in chuditch sightings, and presumably chuditch numbers, is due to large scale fox baiting efforts as part of CALM's *Western Shield* initiative. This program encompasses reserves such as Julimar state forest and Avon Valley National Park.



Some landholders have reservations about the increase in numbers of these amazing carnivorous marsupials. The reason for this is chuditch have been noticed checking out the menu in backyard chook pens! Chuditch are opportunistic feeders and forage primarily from the ground during the night. Due to this opportunistic feeding habit their diet is quite varied consisting primarily of a large range of invertebrates such as crickets, scorpions and spiders, and can include rodents, birds, small lizards and eggs.

Do you enjoy takeaway? Well, it appears that chuditch are just as enthusiastic about take away from convenient locations as we are!

Thankfully for those of you who enjoy freshly laid eggs from the chook pen, help is at hand with some simple steps to make living with chuditch easier. Within the coming months an information sheet on making your chook pen chuditch-proof will be available from CALM's NatureBase website: www.naturebase.net.

In the meantime, here are some quick tips.

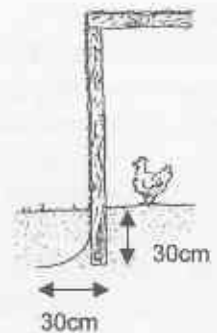
How to chuditch proof your chook pen:

Poultry owners, not just those of us who have chickens, should keep chuditch in mind when they are building or refurbishing their sheds/pens.

Requirements:

- Gaps and holes around the chook pen should be no more than 1-2 cm wide.
- Installation of wire mesh around the exterior of the coop with a mesh size no greater than 1.27 cm (0.5") and a wire diameter of 0.71 mm.
- The walls of the shed need to be two metres or higher, with tightly fitting vertical palings or corrugated iron.
- The structure should be on a secure floor or wire mesh dug well into the ground.
- It is important the enclosure has a mesh roof as chuditch and foxes can both climb.

If the chook pen is not secured to a floor then it is important that the wire mesh is dug 30 cm below the surface of the ground and 30 cm away from the enclosure to deter animals from digging beneath the enclosure.



CALM would love to hear from anyone who has seen chuditch in recent months. Contact Christine Freegard on 9334 0579 or email her christinef@calm.wa.gov.au

Teagan Smith is Land for Wildlife Officer at Kensington, contact: teagans@calm.wa.gov.au Illustrations: Christine Freegard and Western Shield