

# BiblioChuditch: The Chuditch, *Dasyurus geoffroii* (Gould 1841), a Wildlife Science Library subject-specific bibliography

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## Abstract

This bibliography contains 294 items of information concerning the chuditch, *Dasyurus geoffroii*. Most of these have been published and reviewed outside the Department of Conservation and Land Management. They have been arranged into the broad subject areas of Behaviour, Conservation Status, Description, Diet, Diseases, Distribution, Ecology, Evolution, General, Genetics, Management, Physiology, Reproduction and Threatening Processes. The majority of these titles can be viewed in the Wildlife Science Library.

## INTRODUCTION

This is a bibliography of information about the chuditch, *Dasyurus geoffroii*. Most are very specific, but general articles on forestry practices that relate to the chuditch have also been included. The bibliography is updated as new materials become available. Updates can be obtained from the Wildlife Science Library on request. Notification of relevant materials for inclusion can also be sent to the Library.

The bibliography was started with titles extracted from the CONSLIB, the Departmental Library Catalogue. The references contained within these titles were checked and added. This process continued until all relevant references had been included. Internet searches were also performed, and the site specific information printed out. The URLs have been included, but because of the temporary nature of URLs they should not be relied upon. More references from these and other World Wide Web sources were added.

Every effort has been made to obtain a copy of each reference and lodge them in the Library. However in some cases this has not been possible. A Library file has been created to hold a copy of complete articles and cover pages of shelved items.

For ease of use the references are listed alphabetically and have been allocated an item number. This item number can be found under one or more of the 14 broad subject categories.

## DESCRIPTION

The chuditch *Dasyurus geoffroii*, first described by John Gould in 1841, is also known as the Western Quoll. Some refer to it as a native-cat, however this is misleading as it is a dasyurid marsupial related to marsupial mice and the Tasmanian Devil, rather than cats. The Noongar people from the south-west of Western Australia had many names for this species, including 'djoeditj' and 'dju-tytch'. From these the term 'chuditch' was derived by early settlers and collectors (Abbott 2001). This word closely mimics the animals' characteristic call of short, sharp guttural cries. Serena (1987) describes this call as an aggressive sound used to defend its food supply or when threatened by a predator.

This species is recognisable by brown fur and distinctive white spots (up to 60) covering the head and body. The tail has an attractive black brush. This nocturnal animal is the largest native mammalian predator in WA with males attaining weights of 1.5 kg and females 1 kg. Chuditch are known as the scavengers of the forest, moving quickly and foraging for a variety of prey including insects, mice, birds, reptiles and mammals up to their own body size. They have the added ability to climb for food and to avoid predators. Breeding usually takes place in autumn and early winter with gestation lasting 15-19 days. Up to 6 young are born, measuring around 5 mm (the size of a grain of rice) and at about 61 days old they are deposited in dens, usually around August. Females are susceptible to

predators at this stage as they forage for food for their young. Chuditch tend to live alone and may utilise as many as 100 den sites within their home range (Johnson 1997). The average home range for a male chuditch is 900 ha and a female 400 ha. Home ranges may overlap for the male particularly when looking for a mate but females tend to keep to their own home range. First year born females have to find their own home range once they leave the mother's den. Common refuge sites for chuditch includes hollow logs and burrows.

## DISTRIBUTION AND CONSERVATION STATUS

At the time of European settlement, chuditch were relatively abundant and occupied nearly 70% of the Australian continent, occurring in every mainland State and the Northern Territory. However, a drastic decline of geographic range has occurred over the last 200 years (Collett 1887, Whittell 1954, Johnson and Roff 1982, Burbidge *et al.* 1988). Specimens were last collected in New South Wales (Liverpool Plains) in 1841, Victoria (near the junction of the Murray–Darling rivers) in 1857 and Queensland (Coomooboolaroo and Peak Downs) between 1887–1907 (Wakefield 1966, Krefft 1866). In South Australia, chuditch were last collected in 1931 in the north west of that State. Chuditch were last reported in the central arid zone in the 1950s (Finlayson 1961). In arid parts of WA, the species was last collected in Shark Bay in 1858, Canning Stock Route in 1931 and on the Nullarbor Plain in the 1930s (Boscacci *et al.* 1987). Chuditch were still abundant in the wheatbelt in 1907 (Thomas 1906, Shortridge 1909) and persisted on the Swan Coastal Plain around Perth until the 1950s (Kitchener *et al.* 1978, Kitchener and Vicker 1981). They were still sufficiently common at this time to be regarded as a pest by poultry farmers in the outer metropolitan parts of Perth. Since the 1970s the chuditch has been confined to the south-west part of WA, occupying a

roughly triangular area bounded by Moora in the north, Cape Arid to the east and Cape Leeuwin in the south. There is an unconfirmed record of chuditch along the Gascoyne River on Doorawarra Station in 1982 (McKenzie *et al.* 2000). By the end of the 1980s it was estimated that the wild population numbered fewer than 6 000 and that the majority of these were confined to the jarrah forest in the south-west part of WA (Serena *et al.* 1991). They also persisted in low numbers in the drier woodlands and mallee shrublands of the wheatbelt.

In 1983 the chuditch was listed as 'fauna that is rare, or is likely to become extinct' pursuant to the WA *Wildlife Conservation Act* 1950, and in 1991 it was listed as an Endangered species under the Commonwealth *Endangered Species Protection Act* 1992. The 1992 Action Plan for Australasian Marsupials and Monotremes regarded chuditch as Endangered (Kennedy 1992), however a revision of this plan in 1996 regarded it as Vulnerable using IUCN (1994) criteria (Maxwell *et al.* 1996). This species is currently included in the list of threatened species (Vulnerable) established under Section 178 of the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* 1999.

Many factors have contributed to the decline of chuditch including predation (and competition for food) by feral cats and foxes and clearing of habitat. A recovery plan was prepared for the chuditch (Orell and Morris 1994) and recovery actions included researching the impact of timber harvesting and prescribed burning on chuditch in the jarrah forest, researching the impact of fox control, monitoring known populations, maintaining a captive breeding program and translocating chuditch to parts of their former range. Progress on these actions is documented in Morris *et al.* (2001).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## SUBJECT CATEGORIES

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