

# Chuditch in the suburbs

By Rhianna King, Keith Morris and Julia Cullity

**A recent discovery of a dead chuditch (*Dasyurus geoffroi*), or western quoll, in Bateman is shedding light on the distribution of this threatened carnivorous marsupial that was thought to have been displaced from most of metropolitan Perth.**

## Chance discovery

The chuditch was reported to Parks and Wildlife by a member of the public, Francis D'Souza, who noticed it on a footpath outside Bateman Primary School during a morning walk on 9 June 2016. After being buried by the school gardener, the animal was recovered and added to the State's fauna collection at the Western Australian Museum. It was a male, estimated to be around two years old, in good condition, showing no signs of predation but with a broken rear leg indicating it likely died after being hit by a car.

## Characteristics

Chuditch are about the size of a small domestic cat with distinctive large white spots on brown fur, rounded ears, pointed nose, a long tail with a black tip and non-hopping gait. They are solitary animals with large territories (1000ha for males and 600ha for females) and can regularly travel several kilometres in a day, more so during the April–July breeding season.

Chuditch once occurred throughout most of southern mainland Australia but now the threatened species occurs in just over five per cent of their former range, predominantly in the south-west of WA in jarrah forest, some Wheatbelt areas and along the south coast. Chuditch were fairly common in semi-rural blocks on the Swan Coastal Plain during the 1930s to the 1950s when they were considered a pest for preying on backyard chickens and often shot or poisoned. Factors such as habitat clearing, changed fire regimes, disease, predation and vehicle strike have also contributed to their decline.

## How did it get there?

Bateman Primary School is near the Piney Lakes Reserve, where two people advised they had seen the chuditch in the weeks before. However the 32ha bushland and wetland reserve is not large enough to support a viable population. It must have travelled from elsewhere.

One possibility is that it came from the Perth Hills more than 20km in the east and used the bushland corridor associated with the Canning River. Another possibility is that it travelled even further from Paganoni Swamp, a 700ha bushland in the Rockingham Lakes Regional Park where chuditch were trapped in a 2010 [study](#) by researchers from The University of Western Australia. The chuditch could have moved through the bushland and rural areas of Baldvis and Mandogalup and then via the Beelihar Wetlands, a theory supported by subsequent reports from the public of dead chuditch on the Kwinana Freeway and Forrest Highway and a previous [record](#) from Wandii. Even using these patches of bushland as ecological stepping stones, it's remarkable that the chuditch avoided predators such as cats, dogs and foxes, along with vehicles for such a distance until it did meet its end in Bateman.



Chuditch have distinctive large white spots on brown fur, rounded ears, pointed nose, a long tail with a black tip, are the size of a small domestic cat and do not hop. Photo - Ry Beaver.

## Community knowledge

Little would be known about chuditch movements in suburban Perth without the sightings reported from community members. This information helps build a profile about where this threatened species might still occur and informs land managers and owners and developers about the distribution and significant habitat for chuditch in the Swan Region. Anyone with information about chuditch sightings or any threatened species can [report online](#) to Parks and Wildlife.

**Contact:** Keith Morris, Department of Parks and Wildlife on 0400 746 645 or [email](#).

