

Chuditch the largest carnivorous marsupial out west



Chuditch (*Dasyurus geoffroii*) is the Noongar peoples of south-western Australia's name for the Western Quoll, one of four quoll species native to Australia. The chuditch is listed as a vulnerable threatened species, and despite previously being found across eighty per cent of Australia, the species is now restricted to the south-west of Western Australia.

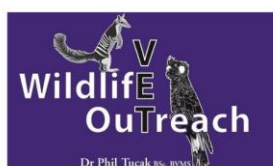
Recognisable by their distinctive white spots and black brush on their tail, chuditch are about the size of a domestic cat and are the largest carnivorous marsupial in Western Australia. The species is primarily nocturnal and solitary, hunting at night for birds, reptiles, small mammals and large invertebrates like spiders or insects.

Despite their carnivorous nature, chuditch have been predated upon by introduced species such as foxes and feral cats. Loss of habitat due to land clearing and inappropriate fire regimes have also contributed to their threatened status. Western Australia's Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) has implemented a Chuditch Recovery Plan for the species, which is coordinated through a national recovery team led by DBCA.

"Implementing recovery actions outlined in the Chuditch Recovery Plan has improved knowledge of the issues impacting the species' recovery. Research has resulted in improved information and a better understanding of chuditch distribution and the extent of occurrence, the positive impact of feral predator management on the species' survival, and translocation techniques," explained a DBCA spokesperson.

Recovery actions to protect the chuditch also have an umbrella effect through improving ecosystem function for the benefit of other native species.

"Key conservation activities that are being undertaken to support conservation of chuditch are feral predator control, monitoring of key populations and research to understand the ecological requirements of the species. Research is currently being undertaken to refine monitoring protocols. The increased use of motion sensor camera traps, an innovative technique that has boomed over the last decade, is integral to this methodology," said DBCA.





As the chuditch is an avid hunter, one threat to the species is succumbing to rodenticide toxicity when they eat animals which have ingested rodenticides. Rodenticide baits are typically used to control introduced rodents and the baits cause anticoagulation of the blood, resulting in the animal slowly bleeding to death.

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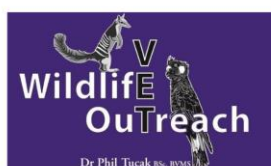
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If a rat or mouse that has ingested a rodenticide bait is then eaten by a bird or other animal, they too can be poisoned, and so on – if they in turn are eaten by species such as the chuditch. Conservation campaigns are underway by organisations like Birdlife Australia to raise awareness of the threat of anticoagulant rodenticide toxicity to native wildlife species.

“It is important to make informed choices when controlling introduced rodents. Chuditch can be weakened and killed through ingesting rodenticide when consuming animals that have ingested it. People can also share information and promote education material so future generations are aware of the threats and management actions required to conserve our threatened species,” said DBCA.

The chuditch is one of the priority mammal species for conservation under Australia’s national Threatened Species Strategy 2021-2031. In New South Wales, where the species is considered extinct, a chuditch breeding program is underway at Taronga Western Plains Zoo in Dubbo.



The program recently welcomed several litters of young chuditch after several adults were translocated to the zoo from reserves in Western Australia and South Australia. Once they grow to a suitable size, the plan is for the new offspring to be released into fenced feral predator-free re-wilding sites, helping to bolster the population of the threatened species.



Image: Morrigan Guinane/ Taronga Western Plains Zoo

“This program is integral to chuditch conservation in Australia. The goal of this program is to breed a number of these animals for reintroduction into former areas of occupancy, thus rewilding Australia whilst reducing the pressures on wild populations”, explained Taronga’s Wildlife Conservation Officer Rachael Schildkraut.

The chuditch breeding program at Taronga Western Plains Zoo in Dubbo is focussed on allowing the animals to maintain their wild behaviours, and interactions with the animals are kept to a minimum, with the chuditch monitored by CCTV and only occasional health checks undertaken.



Image: Rebecca Bloomfield/DBCA

To learn more about the conservation work underway to preserve threatened species like the Chuditch, visit: <https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/plants-and-animals/threatened-species-and-communities/threatened-animals> and for more information about the conservation programs underway at Taronga Western Plains Zoo, visit: <https://www.taronga.org.au/>

Article by Dr Phil Tucak, [Wildlife Outreach Vet](#). Images thanks to DBCA and Taronga Western Plains Zoo.

