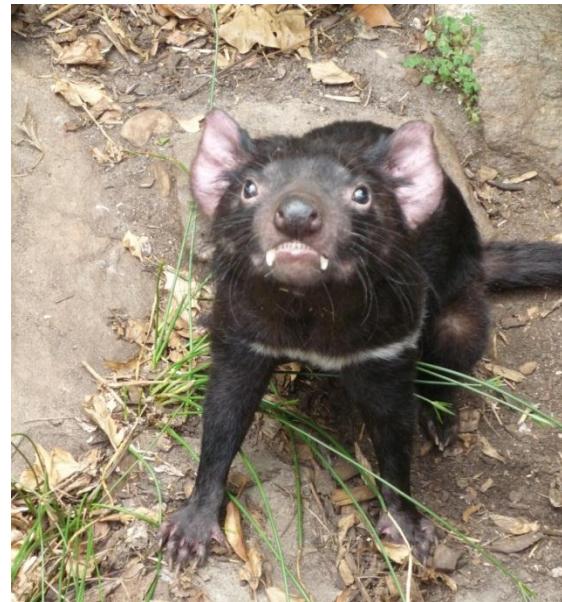


TASMANIAN DEVIL



Sarcophilus laniarius harrisii

STATUS

- Endangered (2009). Previous status from 1996 was Low Risk (least concern). This shows that the threat to this species' survival has increased drastically in the last 2 decades: this is mostly due to the Devil Facial Tumour Disease (DFTD)

ORIGIN

- Tasmanian Devils were once found on the Australian mainland, but disappeared from there 400-2000 years ago. They are now found across most of Tasmania, but the population has declined sharply in the last decade.

HABITAT

- Tasmanian Devils are found in all terrestrial habitats in Tasmania, including forestry plantations and pasture. Their densities are highest in the dry and mixed sclerophyll forests and coastal heath of Tasmania's eastern half and north-west coast.

DESCRIPTION

- Tasmanian Devils are the largest marsupial predator in the world today.
- They grow to 50-65cm in length and can weigh up to 8kg. Males are bigger than females.
- Tasmanian Devils can open their mouth 130°, and have the strongest jaws and bites for any animal their size.

DIET

- Tasmanian devils are meat eaters, eating both live animals, which they actively hunt and the carcasses of dead vertebrate animals. Sometimes they eat large invertebrates such as the Bogong Moth.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

- Although Tasmanian Devils tend to be solitary, they have overlapping home ranges and generally are part of a large contact group.

- They come together at food sources and “fight” over food, pulling carcasses in different directions to help tear edible hunks of meat off. They often bite each other on the face in this process.
- When fighting over food or mates, Tasmanian Devils make loud and disturbing growls, yells and screams, leading to their demonic common name.
- Tasmanian Devils live in 3 or 4 dens throughout their life, and these are very important to their survival. Often the dens are deserted wombat burrows.

REPRODUCTION

- Tasmanian Devils are sexually mature at 2 years of age and generally breeding season is from late summer to autumn.
- Tasmanian Devils do not mate for life, but after mating the male stays around the female to keep other males away.
- Because Tasmanian Devils are marsupials, they give birth to very immature babies which mature and develop in the mother’s pouch.
- The pregnancy (gestation) is only 21 days and a female usually has 20-30 babies which weigh about 0.2g. (About as much as a grain of cooked rice). They look a little like a pink grain of cooked rice, too!
- The mother only has 4 nipples, so the first 4 babies that crawl to the teats (probably the strongest or fastest), will attach to these. The rest die and the mother eats them when she cleans herself!
- The babies develop in the mother’s pouch. At 49 days the fur starts to grow and at 105 days they leave the pouch, to live in the den. They finally leave the den for good and are independent at 10-11months

THREATS

- The greatest threat to Tasmanian Devils is the Devil Facial Tumour Disease or DFTD . It was first seen in 1996. It has spread from the North East of Tasmania to now affect most of the island and numbers of Tasmanian Devils has drastically crashed, by 90% in some areas.
- DFTD is a transmissible cancer, spread when Devils bite each other when fighting over food or during breeding season. Tasmanian Devils have low resistance to cancers and the transmitted cells are not destroyed by the Devils’ immune systems, as would be expected in other animal species.
- As the tumours grow around the mouth, the Devils usually starve to death. Their bodies are usually cannibalised by other Devils, further spreading the disease.

CONSERVATION EFFORTS

- The Zoos and Aquaria association of Australasia, ZAA, is collaborating with the Tasmanian government to try to establish a population of disease-free Tasmanian Devils in mainland institutions. In 2006 the first 36 animals were imported and they were located at a number of institutions around the country, including Monarto Zoo. They have been successfully breeding for 3 seasons now and the offspring moved around the group to protect genetic variability amongst the group.
- Efforts are being made to develop a vaccine to use on wild Tasmanian Devils, but success is still years away.
- If this species does become extinct in Tasmania, DFTD will also cease to exist, and animals from the mainland could be reintroduced to the wild. This may be necessary in the future.