

THE TASMANIAN DEVIL

The blood-curdling scream of the Tasmanian devil, which was likened to a demon, accompanied by its fierce appearance and the fact that it is only found in Tasmania, gave this unique animal its name.

They are the largest of the carnivorous marsupials (dasyurid). Dasyurids range in size from the Tasmanian devil *Sarcophilus harrisii*, who weighs 8 to 10 kg, to the narrow-nosed planigale, who weighs 5 to 9g.



CHARACTERISTICS

Tasmanian devils have a black coat, with white markings on the chest, shoulders and rump. This dark colouring camouflages them as they move around at night.

When angry, their ears turn red due to an increased blood flow.

BEHAVIOUR

Being strictly nocturnal, Tasmanian devils rest in underground burrows, hollow logs or caves during the day. They are solitary, but not territorial and may use a number of burrows or dens in their home range.

DIET

Tasmanian devils can travel up to 8 km in one night in search of food. They are largely carrion (dead flesh) eaters, but will also hunt. When hunting they capture prey through ambush or persistent pursuit.

Their strong teeth and powerful jaws enable them to feed on a variety of prey eg. small mammals, birds, insects and beached fish. All flesh, fur, feathers and small bones are consumed, with only the large, indigestible bones being left. Tasmanian devils are often seen feeding together on carcasses of larger animals eg. wombats or sheep. This group feeding is a noisy and intense affair as animals jostle for positions in the feeding hierarchy.

DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

Tasmanian devils inhabit most habitats with a preference for eucalypt forests and woodlands.

They are only found in Tasmania and are classed as common.



REPRODUCTION

Mating occurs between March and April. After a gestation period of 31 days, up to 50 offspring are born. They are a little larger than a grain of rice.

Females have a backward opening pouch with four teats. This means that only the first four young to attach themselves to a nipple may survive. An average of 2 to 3 will reach maternal independence.

The young leave the pouch at 15 weeks of age. At this time, they are left in a den, while their mother searches for food. Lactation continues for a further 15 weeks. Towards the end of this period the young accompany their mother on her outings. Young are independent in November or December at approximately 8 months of age.

The average lifespan of the Tasmanian devil is six years.

THREATS

The biggest threats to this unique animal are being hit by cars on roadsides when they feed on road kill and habitat destruction.



Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary

Jesmond Road
Fig Tree Pocket QLD 4069

Phone: 07 3378 1366

Email: education@koala.net