

Tasmanian Devils



ABQ BioPark Zoo

Volunteer Information Guide



Tasmanian Devils

Sarcophilus harrisii

Scientific Name: *Sarcophilus lanianus*, Greek for “flesh loving”

Order: Dasyuromorphia

Family: Dasyuridae

Range or distribution: Found only in Tasmania. They occupy territories of 5-13 square miles, which can overlap considerably amongst different animals. They are predominantly solitary animals and do not form packs.

Habitat: Tasmanian devils are found throughout Tasmania. Found in all habitats on the island, including the outskirts of urban areas, they particularly like dry sclerophyll forests and coastal woodlands. The term sclerophyll refers to arid, largely treeless areas, most Australian bush land is sclerophyll forest.

Diet: Carnivores. Mainly eating large prey such as wombats, wallabies, sheep, and rabbits. Tasmanian devils are considered also scavengers, eating everything even bones and fur. Other food items, such as insects, insect larvae. Mainly using their keen sense of smell foraging for food at night.

Life span: In the wild 5 years; 8 years in captivity.

Size: Females are slightly smaller than males. Large males may reach 26.43 lbs and about 12 in at the shoulder. Females may reach up to 17.6 lbs and 8.6 in at the shoulder. Range length is about 20.67 to 31.50 in.

Behavior: Devils are crepuscular or nocturnal and usually solitary. Young devils can climb trees, but this becomes more difficult as they grow larger. Devils can also swim. Devils can run at speeds of up to 8 miles per hour. When agitated, the devil can produce a strong odor, its pungency rivaling the skunk. Occasionally, when coming across a food source such as carrion, they will interact aggressively but they are not territorial. When fighting they will use vocalization such as growls, screeches, and vibratos. Both males and females build nest out of bark, grass and leaves which inhabit throughout the day. Tasmanian devils stay with their home range, traveling an average of only 2 miles in the night. Devils have a keen sense of smell, sight, touch and taste. They communicate through a wide variety of vocalization and physical gestures such as yawning, raising their tail. When a group is scavenging a carcass they will growl at one another.

Adaptations: Tasmanian devils have a keen sense of smell. Tasmanian devils will also produce an odor as a defense mechanism when threatened. They have dark fur that helps blend into their environment when hunting for food at night. Tasmanian devils are the largest carnivorous marsupials.

Reproduction: Females reach sexual maturity in their second year. At this point, they become fertile once a year, producing multiple ova while in heat. Mating occurs in March, in sheltered locations during both day and night. Males fight over females in the breeding season, and female

devils will mate with the dominant male. Devils are not monogamous, and females will mate with several males if not guarded after mating. Gestation lasts 21 days, and devils give birth to 20–30 young weighing in at roughly 0.01 ounces. The pouch, however, has only four nipples, so no more than four young can survive birth. They leave the pouch 105 days after birth and are fully weaned at five or six months after they leave the pouch. Like the Wombat the Devil has a backward facing pouch. Tasmanian Devils live up to 8 years.

THE TASMANIAN DEVIL

Sarcophilus harrisi is the world's largest marsupial carnivore.

Marsupials are mammals that are warm-blooded, furred and feed their young on milk. They are born in an embryonic state and reared in a pouch. Tasmanian devils are nocturnal and though they do hunt for food, they mainly scavenge carrion, which means they find and eat animals that are already dead.

Tasmanian devils are an endangered species. They are a vital part of the ecosystem. If Tasmanian devils were to become extinct in the wild many other native animals would be put at risk.

DEVELOPMENT

BIRTH: eyes closed, no hair, front legs prominent, back legs not developed.

IN THE POUCH: by three months their eyes are open, hair starts to grow and they are beginning to regulate their own body heat.

IN THE DEN: fully furred, can call loudly, can cling on to the mother and can move around.

MATURITY: Both sexes are fully grown by two to three years old and generally live for about six years. An adult female weighs about seven kilograms while an adult male weighs about 10 kilograms.



**SAVE THE
TASMANIAN
DEVIL
PROGRAM**

www.tassiedevil.com.au



LIFE CYCLE OF THE TASMANIAN DEVIL

APRIL

BIRTH

Females give birth to 20 – 40 babies, each the size of a grain of rice. The young follow a trail of mucus up to the mother's pouch to compete for a place at one of only four teats. The young attach themselves to the teats where they will stay for the next few months.



Photo credit: Amygdala/Photography.com (1) Williams

MARCH

MATING

Females normally start to breed when they are two years old. They reproduce generally for three to four seasons. Males fight over who will get to mate with a female. One litter may have several fathers.

Pregnancy (March – April)

The gestation period is around 21 days.



Photo credit: Swamp Don, Amy Gold Smith

DECEMBER – JANUARY

DISPERSAL

From six months old the imps start exploring the den vicinity by themselves, catching small invertebrates and learning skills through play. They are fully weaned and independent by nine months and start to disperse and establish their own dens.



MAY – AUGUST

POUCH LIFE

After four months the young begin to leave the pouch to explore. The mother will leave them safely in a den while she scavenges for food.



SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER

DEN LIFE

The mother regularly comes back to the den to:

- feed milk to her imps,
- teach them what to eat, and
- teach them about dangers.

When they hear a noise they will hide in crevices in the den, keeping very quiet, until the mother calls to let them know it is safe.

Status: Endangered in the [IUCN](#) list. At one time, Tasmanian devils were thought to be really close in danger to become extinct in the wild due to over human population and forest destruction in their natural habitat. In recent years the population the Tasmanian devils population was slowly declining, but due to a new lethal, cancer- like disease that was rapidly spreading through Tasmanian. Tasmanian devils are protected in Tasmanian.



QUICK FACTS

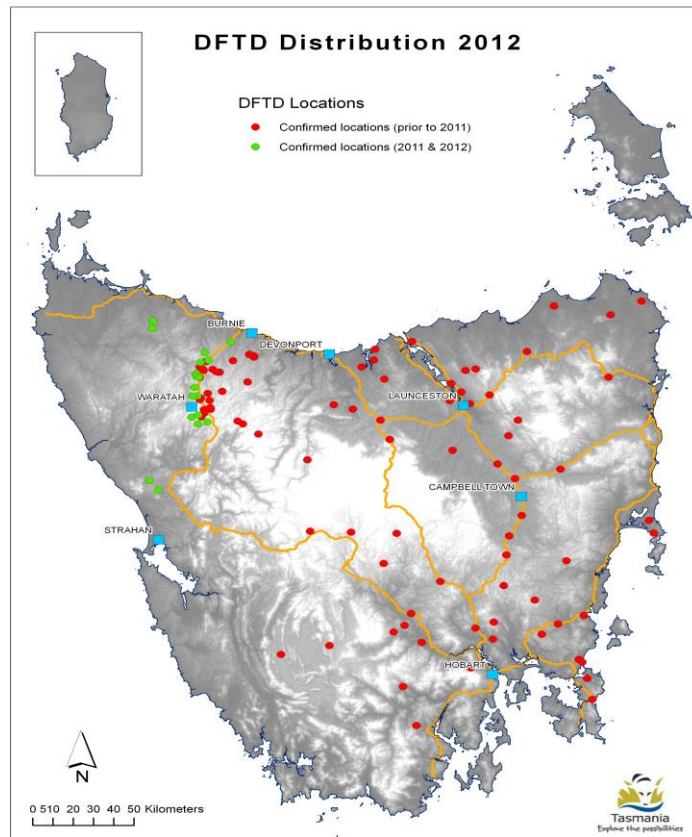
- Tasmanian devils are the largest carnivorous marsupials in the World.
- They are generally solitary animals, but will sometimes come together to feed on carcass.
- The devils got their name from European explores who heard their loud screeching noise, and saw their ferocious behavior when eating or mating.
- In the 1800's farmers tried to eradicate the ferocious marsupials, cause of thoughts that the devils was hunting their livestock and valuable fur stocks.
- Tasmanian devils have been protected since 1941, but their total population has decrease by more than 60 percent in the past decade.

CONSERVATION

- In September of 2006 the devil facial tumor disease (DFTD) was listed as List B notifiable diseases.

- Population of DFTD was only declined by only 95% according to researches survey. With no evidence of the disease slowing down or stopping
- The Tasmanian devils have been listed on the endangered species list by the federal and State government, as well as the Red List of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. The Tasmanian devil is now fully protected.
- In diseased areas, all sexually mature Tasmanian Devils (older than two years of age) become affected to the disease. Juveniles as young as one years old are also sometimes affected by the disease. This is resulting in declining of population for the Tasmanian devils. Females who become affect with DFTD usually only have one breeding season and usually females will have three.

DFTD as of 2012



Threats:

- ❖ Spreading of the DFTD in 1996 is the main part of the Tasmanian devils population declining.
- ❖ The 1800's farmers thought of the devils was mainly the problem that they were hunting the livestock. As a result farmers where trapping the devils to almost the break of extinction.
- ❖ DFTD has taken over 60% of the devils population in Tasmania.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP THE Tasmanian Devils?

- **Support breeding programs.** Tasmanian devils are endangered like other species that are endangered also, can be helped by supporting the BioPark Society and also the ABQ BioPark Zoo.
- **Support eco-tourism.** Animals like the Tasmanian devils can be saved if their tourism value is used to help them coexist with human populations.
- **Promote habitat conservation.** Help spread the word about Conservation and making it a big part of people lives. Cause Our Actions does Matter!!
- **Learn more about how to save Tasmanian Devils.**
<http://www.tassiedevil.com.au/tasdevil.nsf>

References:

- Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service
<http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/?base=387>
- Save the Tasmanian Devil
<http://www.tassiedevil.com.au/tasdevil.nsf/>