

# TASMANIAN DEVIL

*Sarcophilus  
harrasii*

**STATUS**  
Endangered

Once very common, the species has been listed as Endangered under the Tasmanian Threatened Species Act as well as the IUCN Red List.



## WHERE DO THEY LIVE?

- Tasmanian Devils are found throughout Tasmania, in all native habitats, as well as in forestry plantations and pasture, from sea level to all but the highest peaks of Tasmania.
- Dens are typically underground burrows (such as old wombat burrows), dense riparian vegetation, thick grass tussocks and caves. Adults are thought to remain faithful to their dens for life so den disturbance is destabilising to populations.

## AT WILD LIFE SYDNEY ZOO

- Oreo – (Female, 5 years old).
- Big John – (Male, 6 years old).
- Our devils were brought in from Healesville Sanctuary, Victoria and were part of the STDP.
- Big John was very successful in his endeavors. He has fathered 4 joeys and 8 grand-joeys (and counting). Oreo was unfortunately found to be infertile.
- Both our devils are in retirement as they are reaching very old age.
- We feed our devils rabbits, kangaroo, beef, chicken, cow bones (they digest everything!), crickets.
- Enrichment is used to elicit natural foraging behavior.
- We use a bungee to encourage wild behavior; As they are gregarious (social) feeders and often fight with other individuals for food, the elastic bungee simulates the natural tugging they would feel during feeding.
- Our Devils also have starve days. While this may seem cruel, it is perfectly normal for a carnivore to go without food for days at a time. During starve days we give them a treat ball filled with dog kibble.

## WILD FACTS

- They are Australia's largest carnivore marsupial (Dasyurid).
- Tasmanian Devils have been thought to have become extinct from mainland Australia due to the migration of the Aborigines and the introduction of the Dingo.
- The devil is nocturnal (active after dark). During the day it usually hides in a den, or dense bush.
- They engage in bouts of copulatory aggression (biting during sex) and fight over food, pulling carcasses in different directions to help edible chunks of meat off. The often bite each other on the face in the process.

### VIDEO

- The noise displays being used to establish dominance amongst the pack.
- They can open their mouth 130 degrees, and have the strongest jaws and bites for any animal their size. VIDEO
- Devils usually gorge themselves, eating approximately 40% of their body weight in 3 days.
- They roam considerable distances (up to 16km) along well defined trails in search of food.
- Gestation is only 18 – 21 days.
- Joeys are accommodated inside of a backwards facing pouch, which has 4 teats. She will have an average of 2 or 3 joeys attached to a teat for about 4 months.

## DIET

- They are carnivorous marsupials which mainly rely on scavenging on Insects and carrion of birds and mammals.



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*Sarcophilus harrasi*



## CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION RELEVANCE

- As a source of carcasses, roads attract Tasmanian Devils and put them at risk of becoming roadkill themselves.
- In the past long acting poisons and baits would endure to poison devils eating the carcasses.
- Low genetic diversity makes it difficult for both the wild and captive populations.
- Currently the eastern Tasmanian devil populations are suffering from a disease outbreak in the form of a contagious facial tumour disease (The Devil Facial Tumour Disease -DFTD).
- Tumour cells are transferred as an allograft between animals with apparently no effective immune response or host resistance.
- Once devils are infected, signs of the disease appear in the mouth usually in the form of small lesions or pimple like lumps. These small blemishes quickly develop into large tumours that grossly distort the face and neck. Devils soon find it difficult to eat and drink, and usually die from starvation. Affected devils usually die within 3 to 6 months.

**WEIGHT**

7-9kg

**LIFESPAN**

7-9 years

