

# Quolls are in danger of going the way of Tasmanian tigers

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Quolls have been hit hard by the introduction of cane toads, foxes, cats and other big changes over the past 200 years – but if we act fast, we may be able to save them. Bronwyn Fancourt, [CC BY-NC-ND](#)



With sharp teeth and an attitude to match, quolls are some of Australia's most impressive hunters. Ranging from around 300g to 5kg, these spectacularly spotted marsupials do an out-sized job of controlling invasive pasture grubs and rodents, as well as cleaning up carcasses. They are even credited with [thwarting early attempts to establish the rabbit](#) in Australia.

But our quolls are in trouble. The recent [Action Plan for Australian Mammals](#) highlighted their extraordinary decline. Collectively, these species once occurred in high numbers across the country. Now they are all considered threatened, although not all state, federal and international listings reflect these current assessments.

Fortunately there are some signs of hope for one group of quolls, which we need to learn from if we're to save these small but fierce Australian predators from going the way of too many other unique mammals, including the Tasmanian tiger.

## Northern quoll



The endangered northern quoll has been virtually wiped out from areas since the arrival of cane toads. Ian Morris

Our smallest and most endangered quoll once occurred across northern Australia, from eastern Queensland to the West Australian Pilbara. But over the last century, it has disappeared from vast areas, while numbers have crashed in many others, probably due to the effects of pastoralism, changed fire regimes and [feral cats](#).

However, its nemesis has been the [cane toad](#), which poisons and kills quolls that try to eat them. Northern quoll populations have disappeared from vast areas immediately following the spread of toads. Even island populations of northern quolls have disappeared as toads rafted in on debris or flood-waters. It is a most unusual ecological quirk, with a prey species wiping out a predator over vast areas.

However there is hope. Some populations have persisted in toad-invaded areas, possibly because some individuals were never keen frog-eaters or because they have learnt to avoid

toads. In an interesting piece of ecological engineering, researchers have also had some success teaching quolls to avoid toads following [taste-aversion training](#).

Despite these hopeful signs, their outlook in the next few years is for ongoing catastrophic decline, mainly in the [recently toad-invaded Kimberley region](#).