

Spotted-tailed quoll



Despite its larger size, the spotted-tailed quoll still treads an ecological tightrope. Gerhard Körtner

Mainland Australia's largest marsupial carnivore, the spotted-tailed quoll, is a creature now verging on the mythical. Populations plummeted within decades of European settlement in their forest habitats along Australia's eastern seaboard and in Tasmania, where they are second in size only to the Tasmanian devil.

Their position near the top of the food-chain, low densities, reproductive traits and dangerous behaviour make spotted-tailed quolls highly sensitive to landscape changes that accompany settlement. Even today, their mobility and opportunistic behaviour exposes them to a range of threats, including dogs, foxes, cane toads, cars, and retaliatory killing at chook-pens.

This ecological fragility may explain why spotted-tailed quolls are not found in many areas of suitable and protected habitat. Most protected areas are not large enough to sustain a long-term spotted-tailed quoll population, as many individuals in smaller reserves will travel into the dangerous world outside the park boundaries. This highlights the importance of larger tracts of national park and private land for conservation of threatened species.

Eastern quoll

The eastern quoll is extinct on the mainland and has declined rapidly across Tasmania. Bronwyn Fancourt



Once found across much of south-eastern Australia, the eastern quoll is now found only in Tasmania. Disease is thought to be responsible for a sudden crash in mainland populations in the early 1900s, although foxes, cats, rabbits, poisoning and persecution have all been linked to their decline.

Despite their mainland demise, eastern quolls continued to thrive in Tasmania, until recently. In the 10 years to 2009, their numbers had [fallen by](#)

[more than 50%](#) with no sign of recovery.

While meeting [international criteria](#) for being considered endangered, there has been [reluctance to add the eastern quoll to the state threatened species listing](#). Exactly what is causing the decline is being investigated, but otherwise there are no management plans for the species in its last refuge. As an insurance policy, [captive populations of eastern quolls](#) should be established in zoos and in [larger fenced sanctuaries](#), in case they are lost from the wild before the cause of their decline is discovered.