

Endangered chuditch takes biggest predator crown

May 14 2018, by Samille Mitchell

Conservation efforts have brought Western Australia's biggest native mammal predator, the chuditch, back from the brink of extinction.

Cute? Yes. Courageous? You betcha. An endangered [population](#)? I'm afraid so. So how is it that the diminutive WA marsupial the chuditch is the state's biggest native [mammal](#) predator?

It may seem strange, but our lack of large predatory mammals means this carnivorous marsupial, weighing in at just 1.5kg, takes the crown as the state's largest native mammal predator, except for the introduced dingo.

But more recently, the lightweight predator is earning applause for a new reason.

Populations of the chuditch have begun bouncing back from the [brink of extinction](#).

Bouncing back

So good is the recovery that conservationists have [translocated](#) 100 Western Australian chuditch to South Australia's Flinders Ranges.

The translocated chuditch are breeding and spreading in the SA region they last inhabited some 100 years ago.

And recently, residents have reported [chuditch sightings outside Perth](#)—a place they last occurred in the 1950s.

Good news story

It's a good news story amid a sad era for many small to medium-sized native mammals whose populations are in decline.

That's the word from Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) animal science programme leader Keith Morris.

Keith says chuditch once ranged through most of Australia's southern half.

But their population plummeted after foxes and [feral cats](#) entered Australia in the 1800s.

The chuditch's fearsome reputation as a chicken thief didn't help. Early settlers trapped and [shot chuditch](#) to protect their chickens.

Eventually, their population shrunk to just [southwest](#) WA.

New hope

Then, in 1996, the then Department of Conservation and Land Management unleashed its [Western Shield fauna recovery programme](#).

As part of the programme, the department (now DBCA) controlled foxes over 3.5Mha of southwest WA with baits.

The baiting slashed fox populations by up to 80%. But feral cats continued to thrive and predate native animals.

Fortunately, the chuditch was not as vulnerable to feral cat predation. Their feisty nature and agility make them more than a handful for a feral cat.

"Cats don't seem to impact as badly on chuditch as other animals like the [numbat](#) and [woylie](#)," Keith says.

Meat eaters

Chuditch prey on animals including birds, reptiles and other mammals.

Keith has even heard of cases of them dining on kittens in a rare instance of a native marsupial getting its own back.

Still vulnerable

DBCAs estimates about 10,000 chuditch occur in the southwest. They range from Kalbarri to Esperance.

The translocated Flinders Ranges population will further boost its numbers. And conservationists also plan to reintroduce chuditch to New South Wales.

But despite the improvements, conservationists are unsure just how stable the chuditch population remains.

As such, our biggest native predator retains its endangered listing as [vulnerable](#).

This article first appeared on [Particle](#), a science news website based at Scitech, Perth, Australia. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by Particle

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