

First quolls born in Australian wild in half a century

July 9 2018



Eastern quolls—a furry carnivore that grows to about the size of a domestic cat—disappeared from the mainland in the 1960s but clung on in the island state of Tasmania

The first eastern quolls in 50 years have been born in the wild on the

Australian mainland, with the rice grain-sized pups offering hope to a species of marsupial devastated by foxes.

Eastern quolls—a furry carnivore that grows to about the size of a domestic cat—disappeared from the mainland in the 1960s but clung on in the island state of Tasmania.

Twenty of them were returned to their native environment in the Booderee National Park, south of Sydney, in March to see if they could survive and thrive.

It is the first time in Australia that a carnivore extinct on the mainland has been re-introduced to the wild and followed a 15-year [project](#) to bring [feral predators](#) in the area under control.

Booderee National Park Natural Resource Manager Nick Dexter said on Monday babies had been confirmed in three of the females' pouches.

"There remains challenges ahead to establish a sustainable population, but to have 30 percent of the female quolls produce pouch young from this pilot project is a move in the right direction," he said.

Quoll babies stay sheltered in the pouch for around three months while they gain weight and grow fur.

"We've been tracking every animal in this project with a GPS collar, and unlike other translocation projects we've been able to quickly discover and manage threats," Dexter added.

Eastern quolls, which primarily eat insects, were present on the mainland for thousands of years. But large numbers were killed in the early 1900s by a mysterious epidemic, and their population was then devastated as foxes spread across south-eastern Australia.

They were last regularly seen on the mainland in the 1960s in the Sydney region.

Australian National University researcher Natasha Robinson said the new colony had demonstrated several vital points needed for a successful long-term future.

"We've proven the quolls can find food, shelter and breed. We've also shown a capacity to make changes to improve the quolls survival rate," she said.

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Citation: First quolls born in Australian wild in half a century (2018, July 9) retrieved 2 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-07-quolls-born-australian-wild-century.html>

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