

# In search of disappearing Eastern Quolls

**Eastern Quolls once lived across Australia. They are now listed as vulnerable under Federal legislation, and extinct on the mainland after no confirmed sightings have occurred outside of Tasmania for over 50 years. The last recorded mainland sighting was in Sydney in the early 1960s.**

At 60 cm in length and between 900-1300 grams in weight, the Eastern Quoll *Dasyurus viverrinus* is smaller than a pet cat.

Eastern Quolls are carnivorous and have soft black or fawn coloured fur, dotted with distinctive white spots. Compared to the larger Spotted-tailed Quoll, the Eastern Quoll is slighter in size and has a more pointed muzzle.

Until recently, Eastern Quolls were considered widespread and locally common in Tasmania. Quolls were found in a variety of habitats including rainforest, heathland, alpine areas and scrub. They seemed to prefer dry grassland and forest mosaics which are bounded by agricultural land, particularly where pasture grubs are common.

Tasmania once seemed the last remaining refuge of Eastern Quolls.

Today, however, spotlighting and live-trapping surveys are finding that Eastern Quoll numbers are declining rapidly.

Reasons for the rapid attrition rate are not currently understood. The recent introduction of foxes into Tasmania, and their contribution to the Eastern Quolls' extinction on the mainland, may represent a significant contributing factor.

Native marsupial carnivores such as the Tasmanian Devil, the extinct Tasmanian Tiger or Thylacine, and Quolls are considered iconic species not only in Tasmania and Australia, but also worldwide.

Sadly, these species have suffered disproportionately over recent history, with the Thylacine becoming extinct in 1936 and the Tasmanian Devil suffering local population declines in recent years as a result of the fatal Devil Facial Tumour Disease.

This year, funding from the Foundation is helping to prevent the Eastern Quoll from going the way of the Thylacine.

The Foundation is funding the research of Bronwyn Fancourt, PhD candidate at the School of Zoology, University of Tasmania.

Bronwyn is researching key threats and agents of decline for the Eastern Quoll. She is monitoring Eastern Quoll populations at Cradle Mountain National Park, Judbury and Bruny Island and Cradoc, near Hobart.

Bronwyn recently returned from a 16-day stint in the field, "chasing the little critters around!" She has completed two blocks of field work so far, visiting each of the monitoring sites and collecting samples for analysis and data from each quoll during May and July this year.



Monitoring Eastern Quolls in Tasmania.  
Photo: Bronwyn Fancourt.

Bronwyn will be out in the field every second month until the end of 2013, collecting information to help discover the reasons for the decline of this charismatic species, and her findings will have important implications for future Recovery Plans for the Eastern Quoll.

With sponsorship provided by Leisure Solutions®, an ecotourism tour operator, the Foundation is funding Bronwyn's research at Cradoc. Tourism operators that contribute to wildlife conservation projects, particularly those which benefit wildlife and habitats that attract tourists, set an example to the industry.

Thank you Bronwyn Fancourt for your help with this story.



Eastern Quoll.  
Photo: Kathy Sutherland.