

# Australian Threatened Species

## Northern Quoll *Dasyurus hallucatus*

### CONSERVATION STATUS

**COMMONWEALTH:** Endangered

(Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999)

**NORTHERN TERRITORY:** Vulnerable

(Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2000)

**QUEENSLAND:** Near Threatened (Nature Conservation Act 1992)

The Northern Quoll is a medium-sized carnivorous marsupial that lives in the savannas of northern Australia. It is found from southeastern Queensland all the way to the northern Western Australian (WA) coast. Populations have declined across much of this range, particularly as a result of the spread of the cane toad.

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

The Northern Quoll is the smallest in the quoll family, growing to about the size of a small cat. It has a dark grey to brownish body with large white spots and a long furry tail. In Queensland the Northern Quoll lives in the same areas as the Spotted-tailed Quoll, but it is easy to distinguish between them - Northern Quolls are smaller and don't have (you guessed it!) spotted tails.

### WHERE DOES IT LIVE?

Northern Quolls live in a range of habitats, but prefer rocky areas and eucalypt forests. The quoll is a good climber but spends most of its time foraging and sleeping on the ground. During the day it likes to hide in hollow logs, rock crevices, caves and hollow trees.

The species was once found from north of Brisbane right across to the northern WA coast. It is now reduced to small populations in the Northern Territory's (NT) Top End, WA's Kimberley and Pilbara regions, and Queensland's Cape York, Wet Tropics and a small area just north of Brisbane.

### WHAT DOES IT EAT?

The Northern Quoll eats a wide range of insects, reptiles, small mammals, figs and other soft fruits.



Photo: Viewfinder Australia Photo Library

### DID YOU KNOW...

- Although they are marsupials, female Northern Quolls do not have a pouch. At the start of the breeding season the area around the nipples become enlarged and partially surrounded by a flap of skin. The young (usually 6 in a litter) live here for the first 8-10 weeks of their lives
- Almost all male Northern Quolls die at about 1 year old, not long after mating.

# CANE TOADS: A MAJOR THREAT!



## WHY ARE CANE TOADS A PROBLEM IN AUSTRALIA?

Cane toads were brought to Australia in 1935 to control a beetle in cane fields. They are now found across northern Australia from the top of New South Wales (NSW) through the NT to near the WA border.

Cane toads breed quickly in suitable habitat (they can reach densities of over 2000 per hectare!), and by sheer weight of numbers impact on their surrounding environment. The toad will eat almost anything that fits in its mouth - native insects, frogs, small reptiles, mammals and birds. It also competes with native species for food and shelter.

Cane toads are poisonous at all stages of their life cycle. Native species often mistake toads for native frogs, eat them and then die from the poison. Studies show that 59 per cent of northern Australia's dragons, 85 per cent of monitors, both crocodile species, and all freshwater turtles could be at risk from cane toads.

## WHY ARE THEY A THREAT TO NORTHERN QUOLLS?

Northern Quoll populations have declined for various reasons, such as changed fire patterns and hunting by feral cats. The rapid decrease in recent years has been due to the spread of the cane toad into areas where Northern Quolls live. A recent study in Kakadu National Park found the species was completely gone from sites where cane toads had recently arrived.

## WHAT'S BEING DONE?

Communities, scientists and governments are working together to coordinate the research and management effort.

The Northern Territory Government has visited remote island communities to talk about the toad impact and to try to ensure the pests do not reach the islands. The Tiwi Land Council has already taken action, installing a hose-down facility at a barge landing to discourage toads from 'hitching a ride.' Some Aboriginal communities have been involved in releasing quolls onto islands to protect them from the mainland threat. In the Darwin area 'ToadBuster' communities are placing traps in rural regions to try and prevent the toads from reaching the city.

The Western Australian, Northern Territory and Australian Governments are co-operating on cane toad control in northern Australia and the NT/WA border area. Activities to prevent cane toads from entering the east Kimberley region include a trapping and monitoring program at key waterholes where cane toads will be forced to look for water in the late dry season. The Western Australian Government has provided significant funding for this on-ground work, including support for the community-based Stop the Toad Foundation to purchase and install traps. The east Kimberley community is volunteering its time to install and monitor the traps.

The West Australian and Australian Governments are also working together on an awareness-raising campaign to reduce 'hitchhiker' toads on road vehicles.

In addition the Australian Government is leading the national effort to find long-term solutions, providing funds for research projects at Charles Darwin, James Cook and Sydney Universities as well as biological control studies at the CSIRO. The Government also recently gave conservation group Frogwatch NT funds from the Natural Heritage Trust's Envirofund to install cane toad traps at key wetland sites around Darwin.



Photo: Bureau of Resource Sciences

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Be careful when travelling – make sure you don't allow cane toads to hitch-hike in your camping gear
- Contact the Threatened Species Network to find out more about cane toad trapping.

### CONTACTS AND REFERENCES

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Stop the Toad Foundation  
**Visit:** www.stopthetoad.com

You can also find out more information about Australia's threatened species by visiting [www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened](http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened) or contacting the Department of the Environment and Heritage Community Information Unit on free-call 1800 803 772.

- Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory (2003) Threatened Species Information Sheet, Northern Quoll
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- <http://www.nt.gov.au/ipe/pwcnt>
- <http://www.calm.wa.gov.au>
- <http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/>
- <http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/information/factsheets/quoll/northern.html>



The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government & WWF-Australia.