



Save THE Tasmanian Devil

The Tasmanian devil is the world's largest surviving marsupial carnivore and is only found in the wild in Australia's unique island state of Tasmania.

Tasmanian devils were regarded as common a little over a decade ago, when the species was numerous in population. But there is nothing common about this amazing animal. Despite its fearsome reputation, the devil is a timid creature that poses no danger to humans. People who work with devils invariably grow to love their personality – they're feisty, raucous and bursting with curiosity.

The species has suffered a major decline over the last 10 years and is now listed as endangered, due to an infectious cancer known as the Devil Facial Tumour Disease (DFTD). The first signs of DFTD were recorded in 1996. It is a new and fatal condition that is only recorded in devils and is characterised by cancers around the mouth and head.

The Save the Tasmanian Devil Program (STTD) was established in 2003 as the official response to the terrible threat posed by DFTD. The Australian and Tasmanian Governments and the University of Tasmania have established a partnership to protect this keystone species.

If the devil is lost in the wild at least 77 other species could be put at risk. The STTD is working with wildlife and disease experts and institutions from Tasmania, Australia, and overseas in an epic conservation effort. The goal is to ensure the survival of an ecologically functioning population of wild devils and to preserve the fragile balance of Tasmania's exceptional ecosystems.

The STTD is working on three key strategies: the establishment of an **insurance population** of healthy devils, **laboratory and field based investigations** of the disease, and the development of **disease suppression and management** programs in the wild.

Insurance population

The STTD has populated a number of zoos and wildlife parks throughout Australia with healthy devils as part of a long term strategic plan for insurance against extinction. These animals will form the basis of a breeding program that will need to be maintained for 30-50 years if the insurance population is to provide a viable foundation for the reintroduction of the species into the natural environment should the disease wipe out devils in the wild. The insurance population is being managed to maintain genetic diversity and wild behaviours.

Field based investigations

Trapping has confirmed the disease at 64 different locations across 60 per cent of Tasmania. The overall wild population is estimated to have declined by approximately 80 per cent since the emergence of the disease.



Laboratory investigations

The definition, transmission, and possible causes of the disease are being investigated. Research indicates that the cancer is directly transmitted between devils. Work exploring the genetic makeup of the immune system continues. Nine strains of the disease have now been identified and researchers are looking into how these different strains behave. Research into the origin of the cancer cells hints at a genetic cause of the disease.

Disease suppression in the wild

A major trial is underway in one part of Tasmania to look at isolating a population and removing diseased animals to see if the DFTD can be suppressed. The STTD is also looking into the feasibility of fencing off healthy populations in parts of Tasmania in an attempt to halt the spread of the disease.

This is a complex problem. There are no easy solutions, but we do have a window of opportunity to prevent this iconic species from becoming extinct.

The fight to save the Tasmanian devil is underpinned by government funding, but the support of the world community is vital to the success of our conservation effort. We need to be able to finance ongoing research and to implement management of captive populations for as long as it takes, which could be up to 50 years. With your support we can win this battle.

**Contact the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program
to join the historic fight to save one of the
world's most captivating animals:**

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