

Tasmanian native animals



Mammals are warm-blooded vertebrates (having backbones). Female mammals feed their young milk.

For centuries there was just one class of mammals. After the European discovery of Australia it became necessary to have three classes of mammals.

1. The “traditional” class includes all domestic animals (dogs, cows, sheep, goats), as well as animals in the wild (bears, elephants, seals).
2. The marsupials develop their young in a pouch. These are basically Australian animals (kangaroo, wombat, koala, Tasmanian devil).
3. The monotremes are the egg-laying mammals. There are only two species—echidna and platypus. Australia is the home to this unusual pair.

Tasmania has examples of all three mammalian subclasses. There are bats and native rodents to represent the traditional mammalian class. An important distinction between Tasmania and continental Australia is the absence on the island of the dingo, widespread across Australia when white settlers arrived.

The Tasmanian tiger (thylacine) was a predator a bit like a large dog. It was widely hunted. From about 1914 the species became very rare. It is now considered extinct. The last known live specimen was in a Hobart zoo in the 1920s.

Now most Tasmanians are concerned about wildlife management. Issues such as the Tasmanian devil facial cancer, which is a threat to the animal’s survival, and the possibility of foxes establishing themselves in Tasmania have made people aware that they need to know what is happening with their wildlife.

Changes in mammal populations have resulted from changing rates of land clearance, increased tree plantings and hunting bans, especially bans affecting the more common wallabies and possums.

Native animal	Total numbers 1975–78	Total numbers 2002–05	Species composition 1975–78	Species composition 2002–05	Percentage gain
Brush-tail possum	696	1027	25%	20%	48%
Bennett’s wallaby	1083	1382	39%	27%	28%
Scrub wallaby	794	2337	29%	46%	194%
Other species	196	371	7%	7%	89%
All species	2769	5117			85%

Adapted from Tasmania Online, Department of Primary Industries and Water. The figures were obtained from selected areas, and may not represent the whole of Tasmania.

It has been concluded that from the mid-1990s the overall populations of native animals stabilised.