

IDNYA e-NEWS

Welcome to the second edition of "Idnya e-News", a regular update on the trial reintroduction of the western quoll to the Flinders Ranges National Park. Idnya is the Adnyamathanha name for the western quoll.



During April and May 2014, 41 idnya (21 females and 20 males) were released into the Flinders Ranges National Park after an absence of more than 150 years. The release heralded the start of a partnership between the Foundation for Australia's Most Endangered species (FAME), the South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) and the Western Australian Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW).



The weather has turned cold and wet in the Flinders Ranges and the idnya have gone underground, sheltering in rabbit warrens, rock crevices and holes under tree stumps. During trapping in June and July we recorded our first pouch young with six females now averaging 6 pouch young each. The pouch young were 17mm long and only a week or so old.



Carrying traps in to catch and check collared idnya in the Wilpena Pound



First idnya pouch young recorded

All captured idnya had maintained or increased in weight since release suggesting food resources are plentiful in the release area, and more than sufficient to support at least the early stages of breeding. Initial diet studies suggest they are feeding on a wide range of food items including house mice, rabbits, carrion, lizards, centipedes, moths and spiders. More will be learnt about the food resources that the idnya are using when numerous scats that have been collected are analysed using a microscope to identify food items.

Of the 41 idnya released we have now lost 10 animals (6 females and 4 males), at least 8 due to cat predation. One male idnya fell off a cliff and died due to misadventure, another male died from an injury that may have also been predator-related. The cat deaths have followed a similar pattern where large male cats over 4kg have been responsible for multiple deaths. Cats have been recorded on camera in the vicinity of kill sites. Quoll remains have been found in their stomachs or they have been captured at fresh carcasses. Autopsy results and DNA swabs have confirmed cat predation is the cause of death.

An intensive cat trapping and shooting program prior to the release removed more than 50 cats but, as expected, new cats have moved into the area. In contrast to foxes, which readily take poison baits, feral cats are extremely hard to control. They don't take baits readily, preferring to hunt and catch wild prey. While controlling cats through cage trapping and shooting is very labour intensive, costly and not always successful, these are the best options available to control problem cats in small areas. To date 3 cats that are thought to have been responsible for up to 6 idnya deaths have been trapped or shot, with an additional 10 cats trapped in a monthly trapping program in the Wilpena precinct. We have also trialled using Eradicat poison baits but must ensure that these do not impact on the resident idnya.

At present there is a large male cat in the pound that we suspect is responsible for the last three idnya deaths. He is regularly seen on camera but is elusive and currently evading capture. Feral cats are secretive and are not always detected by shooters, even over many nights of searching.

There is some evidence to suggest idnya can escape from cats under some circumstances. One female idnya was captured in a cage trap with a large wound on her back, consistent with a cat attack. She is receiving treatment and will be re-released when she has recovered. At least two other idnya appear to have escaped initial attack and died later from their wounds.



The large male cat in the pound thought to be responsible for recent idnya deaths.

Interestingly, all cat predation deaths have occurred in or near Wilpena Pound whilst the Wilcolo Track animals have so far yielded no mortalities. The flat, open ground in the pound may support more rabbits and enable cats to hunt more effectively. At present we are using shooters and traps to target cats seen on camera.

The four captive-bred animals from Alice Springs were given access to the release area in June and remained close to their release pens. The female, Narelle, was killed by a feral cat soon after her release but the three males are persisting in the release area. One of the males, Zeus, displayed tame behaviour whilst in the release pens on site but has since settled into the wild and is usually found sheltering down rabbit warrens.



Zeus, an Alice Springs Desert Park idnya, inside the release pen.

At present we have 24 idnya radiocollared, 6 males and 5 females in the pound and 6 males and 4 females along the Wilcolo Track. There is one collared female receiving treatment and two collared males currently missing. There are also 5 uncollared females and 2 males in the release area but we do not know if they are currently alive.

A recent visit by Adele Thomasz from Murdoch University involved taking scat and blood samples so Adele can look at parasites present in the idnya before and after release. University of Adelaide PhD candidate Mel Jensen has also been collecting information on idnya behaviour and monitoring their use of artificial den sites. Mel has also been assisting us with identifying our idnya caught on cameras by using their unique spot patterns.

Although the recent spate of cat predation events has reduced the idnya population there have been encouraging signs including the presence of pouch young in nearly all females and weight gain. Idnya are in good condition and finding suitable food and shelter sites. Cat control is continuing in the form of shooting and cage trapping, with an investigation into the use of cat baits also progressing. Some idnya deaths are to be expected after release and results are being used to learn about the threats to idnya and how they might be managed. Importantly, this is a trial release and all information obtained will be used to guide future reintroductions.

Report by Ecological Horizons Pty. Ltd.

THE IDNYA TEAM

Idnya Reintroduction Team- Rob Brandle, Trish Mooney, Greg Patrick, Dave Peacock, Cheryl Hill, Elizabeth Davis, Keith Morris, Peter Copley, Katherine Moseby, Jenny Barker, Nicki Stewart

Idnya Project Coordinator- Katherine Moseby, Ecological Horizons Pty. Ltd.

Idnya contractors- Tina Schroeder, Pat Hodgins

Idnya volunteers- Charlotte Mills, Ben Parkhurst, Rob Brandle, Lauren Engledow, Bronwyn Fancourt, Alyson Stobbo-Wilson, John Read

Idnya Pilot- Matt Graham

Idnya research students- Mel Jensen, The University of Adelaide, Adele Thomasz, Murdoch University, Alyson Stobbo-Wilson, University of Tasmania

Idnya cat trappers- Dave Armstrong and Darren McKenzie

Idnya cat shooters- Frank Bernhardt, Dylan Koerner, Arthur Coulthard

Idnya W.A. DPaW trappers- Brent Johnson, Kelly Rayner and team

“Idnya hotel” owners- Native Animal Rescue, Perth

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Last seen in the Flinders Ranges during the 1880s, the Western Quoll is a small Australian native carnivorous marsupial which once thrived across 80% of the Australian continent. Until the start of the trial re-introduction project, the nation's western quoll population could only be found in the south-west of Western Australia.

Expected to bring ecological and tourism benefits to the Flinders Ranges, the western quoll also has great cultural significance for the Adnyamathanha people, for whom the quoll (Idnya) is a totem and an integral part of their Dreaming.

Since their release the quolls' survival rates and well being have been actively monitored by radio tracking individuals and, once the re-introduced quolls have established themselves in their new habitat, trapping will be undertaken to assess their condition and breeding status.

If there are positive signs of the population re-establishing itself, then a full re-introduction will be considered.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Through its Bounceback program, the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources has been controlling predators such as foxes and cats, and herbivores such as goats to protect the habitat in the Flinders Ranges needed for the quoll's long term survival.

FAME is leading the drive to raise approximately \$1.7 million over a five year period that will support the recovery of the species in one of its former territories.

Western Australia's Department of Parks and Wildlife has donated the Western Quolls from their conservation parks. Thanks to the many donors, land managers and partners of *Bounceback* for their support for this project.

TO MAKE A DONATION...

FAME needs your help to continue this vitally important project and make it the success it deserves to be. Please send your generous contribution to FAME's Western Quoll project as soon as you can. Visit <http://fame.org.au/projects/western-quoll> or contact fame@fame.org.au for more information about how you can help.

If you have already contributed we thank you sincerely.

KEEP INFORMED!

To receive these regular e-updates please email SAAridlands@sa.gov.au with the subject 'Quoll update' and you will be added to or contact the Natural Resources Centre in Port Augusta 8648 5300.



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of South Australia

Department of Environment,
Water and Natural Resources



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Parks and Wildlife

