

# Portals to the World



## Tasmanian Devil - *Sarcophilus harrisii*

Working with Tasmanian devils: from pouch to ouch



Week 1

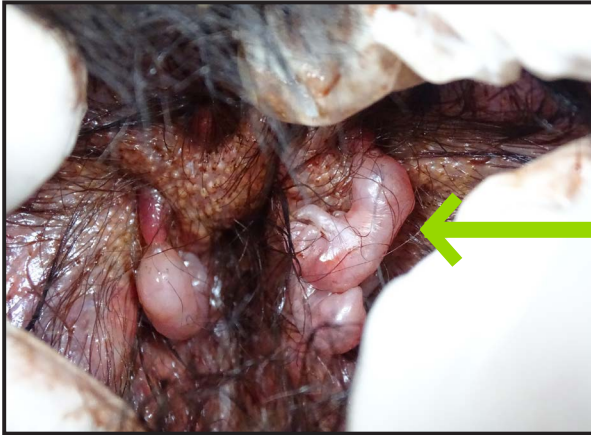
Jack Ashby

Museum of Zoology

From the comfort of your own home, join Jack Ashby and Sara Steele as they highlight Jack's research and conservation efforts on the island of Tasmania. We'll hear about Jack's research and work to supporting the declining numbers of Tasmanian devils and the challenges they face. This session will include a recorded video from the Museum of Zoology, as well as a live interview plus a question and answer period. At the end, we'll review the linked art making opportunity with Nathan Huxtable from the Fitzwilliam Museum.

# Inside the pouch of a Tasmanian devil

The Tasmanian devil is a marsupial, the babies are born after a pregnancy of just three weeks, and then they do most of their growing whilst suckling milk on a teat.



Looking inside a Tasmanian devil's pouch. Three approximately two week old devils can be seen. Each devil has their mouth on a teat.



Tasmanian devil at 2 weeks old alongside a 5 pence piece



Looking inside a Tasmanian devil's pouch. Three approximately four month old devils.

They now have fur and open eyes but are still feeding from their mother's teat.



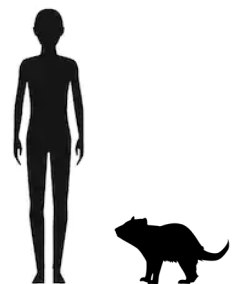
Tasmanian devil at 4 months old alongside a 5 pence piece



A young devil aged one year. At this age they are independent of their mothers.



Adult Tasmanian devil. This is a very large male - around 6 years old and 13kg or 28lbs. As big as they get!

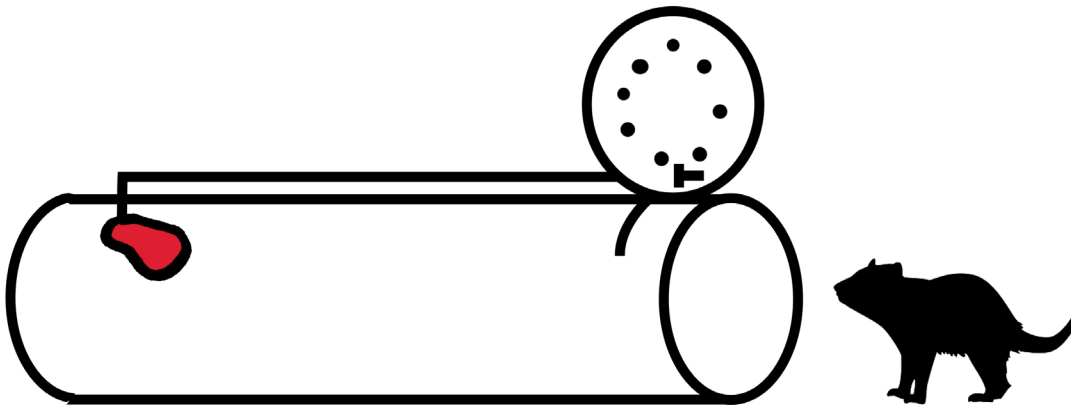


Adult Tasmanian devil alongside an adult human

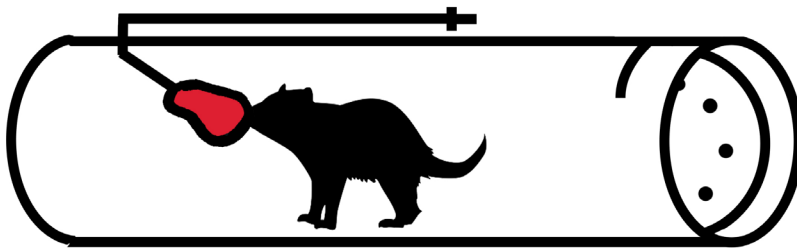
Devil's live to around 5-6 years.

# How to catch a devil...

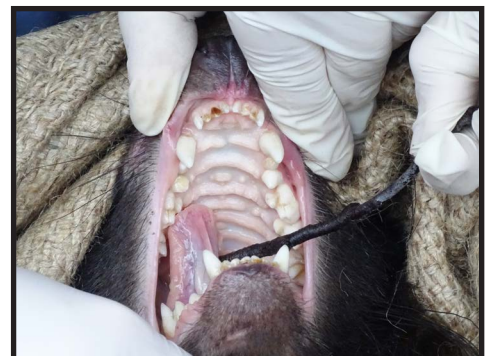
Jack Ashby volunteers with the University of Tasmania to help catch and assess the island's devils.



A tube with a trap door is placed in an area where Tasmanian devils can be found. Researchers use lamb meat as bait to encourage the devils to pull on the string. This releases a pin and the door closes behind them.



Researchers and volunteers, like Jack, take samples of blood, hair and tissue from the trapped devil before releasing it.



Checking the health of the inside of a Tasmanian devil's mouth.

# Tasmanian devil conservation

The Tasmanian Devil population is endangered. They were doing well in the wild until thirty years ago but have been ravaged by a contagious cancer. This cancer spreads from devil to devil via their normal social biting behaviour when mating and sharing food.



Tasmanian devil inside a trap, showing signs of a tumour on the face.

Researchers are working to find out how this cancer works and how we may help the devils survive.

Tasmanian devil numbers are now estimated at around 10-20,000 individuals, down from 100,000 thirty years ago.

## Speaker Biography

Jack Ashby



Author and zoologist Jack Ashby is the assistant director of the University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge. His work centres on engaging people with the natural world, chiefly through museums. Jack's recent book *Animal Kingdom: A Natural History in 100 Objects*, explores what we can learn about the incredible mechanisms behind life on earth from specimens in museums; as well as discussing how natural history museums present a potentially unnatural view of nature. Jack's main zoological passion is the mammals of Australia, where he regularly undertakes ecological fieldwork.

He considers it a "scientific fact" that the world's best three animals are platypuses, wombats and echidnas.