

Natural Planet

Ep.26 – Tasmanian Devils

These small marsupials (meaning they have a pouch for their young), are the largest meat eating marsupial on Earth. The Devils are the size of a dog and look like a cross between such a dog and a very large rat. They have black fur, are muscular, very smelly and have a habit of screaming, hence their name, the Tasmanian Devil. Once covering all of Australia but now only native to Tasmania, they are survivors. They will eat virtually anything from animals they have caught themselves to old dead bodies and even taking to peoples washing and chewing on their shoes should any tasty footwear be left outside. Another unusual fact about their appearance is their tail. Like their relative the kangaroo they use their tail as a counter weight to balance when running quickly, they have this weight because of the fat that is stored in the tail itself. A fat tail, means a healthy Devil.

They are nocturnal hunters (meaning they hunt at night) and also are active at sunrise and sunset (also giving them the name of crepuscular hunters). They need to eat fifteen per cent of their body weight every day, but if rushed can eat up to forty per cent in 30 minutes. That is like myself, a six foot male human weighing at eighty kilograms, eating a small sheep in half an hour! They will hunt fish, small kangaroo, large rats and most moving things. What makes them unique in their hunt is the fact they hunt on their own or in pairs but as soon as they have made a kill will scream very loudly while eating it. The dinner table for them is a social event; they may meet new Devils in the area and see how last year's pups are getting on. The main reason for all screaming at their food is in fact so all of the food gets eaten. The more Devils there are, less of the food goes to waste and the small mammals will not waste much, eating the hair and the bones of the animal.

However since the 1990s a rare and contagious cancer has been transmitted killing tens of thousands of Tasmanian Devils. The Devil Facial Tumour Disease is lethal and has put the Devils on the endangered list. But the work that humans are doing to maintain the health of these animals and the ecosystem is working and just shows that humans are not just destroying our planet, but saving it. Be one of those people, stand up for our home, stand up for our Earth.