



## Western Swamp Tortoise Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the Western Swamp Tortoise and why is it endangered?

The Western Swamp Tortoise, *Pseudemydura umbrina*, is the most endangered tortoise in the world. It is listed as critically endangered and there are estimated to be less than 50 adults in the wild. They require a special type of shallow winter-wet swamp on clay or sand over clay with nearby suitable aestivating refuges. Clearing and drainage have destroyed most of their original habitat within its very small former range. Increased predation through the introduction of foxes and feral cats, which eat the tortoise, and a series of low rainfall years caused a continual decline in numbers. Ellen Brook and Twin Swamps Nature Reserves were fenced to control predation by foxes in the 1990s.

### What does the Western Swamp Tortoise look like?

The Western Swamp Tortoise's colour varies with age and the type of swamp it lives in. It can be yellow-brown or black on top and black, yellow or cream underneath. The animals grow to around 15 cm in length and are the smallest Australian tortoise. Their legs are short and covered in scutes (similar to fish scales) and their feet are webbed, with large, well developed claws. They have a short neck, which is why they are sometimes referred to as 'short necked tortoises'. The only other native tortoise that occurs in the Perth region is the Long Necked or Oblong Tortoise. It can easily be distinguished from the Western Swamp Tortoise by its very long neck, which is almost the same length as the shell.



### Where do they live?

The Western Swamp Tortoise is found only in two remnant habitats (Ellen Brook and Twin Swamps Nature Reserves) and two translocated (re-introduced) habitats (Moore River Nature Reserve and Lake Wannamal Nature Reserve at Mogumber) in Western Australia.

### What does the Western Swamp Tortoise get up to?

The Western Swamp Tortoise is carnivorous, feeding on animals such as crustaceans, insects and their larvae, and only feeds on live prey. They only feed when the water temperature is between 14 and 28 degrees Celsius. There are records of the Western Swamp Tortoise living for over 60 years and still reproducing. The tortoise goes underground during summer and autumn to escape the intense summer heat and dehydration from the dry conditions in a process called aestivation. It comes out of aestivation and becomes active in winter when the swamps fill with water, and remains active through to spring until it becomes too hot and dry again. In November to early December mature female tortoises (10-15 years of age) lay from three to five hard shelled eggs in a shallow underground nest, hatching the following winter.

# Western Swamp Tortoise FAQs

## What is being done to help the Western Swamp Tortoise?

The Western Swamp Tortoise Recovery Program is coordinated by the Department of Environment and Conservation in partnership with Perth Zoo, the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise, the State Natural Resource Management Program and the University of Western Australia. The Recovery Plan delineates, justifies and schedules management actions necessary to support the recovery of the Western swamp Tortoise.

## Are there breeding programs for the Western Swamp Tortoise?

Perth Zoo has been breeding Western Swamp Tortoises since the 1990s, and has released over 500 back "to the wild".

Adelaide Zoo has the only Western Swamp Tortoises outside of WA. Two are displayed in the Nocturnal House, for educational purposes, and five others are in outdoor enclosures where seasonal changes should trigger a natural breeding cycle. The aim is to establish a breeding group at Adelaide Zoo.

## Are there new provisions in the policy?

The policy is essentially the same as the 2002 policy. There are no new provisions. The only changes are the date change, very minor textual changes to make the intentions clearer, listing of the GPS coordinates for the boundary and updating the references to Western Australian legislation.

## Has the boundary changed?

The boundary is the same as the 2002 policy.

## Can I still keep my horses and other stock?

You can continue to keep stock on your property subject to the current local government laws, zoning and current approvals. This policy has the same intent as the 2002 policy and so the law has not changed.

The policy sets the objectives for protecting the Western Swamp Tortoise habitat. The effect of these objectives on the practical things you can do on your property will be determined through the development of a Special Control Area or a similar mechanism. Local landholders will be fully consulted during the development of any Special Control Area.

In the meantime please refer to [Guidance Statement No.7](#) from the Environmental Protection Authority website for guidance on development proposals, and the Local Planning Scheme for any provisions or zoning requirements for your property.

### For more information, contact:

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