



ENDANGERED WILDLIFE AROUND THE WORLD

Western Swamp Tortoise (*Pseudemydura umbrina*)

- This short-necked, freshwater tortoise is Australia's most endangered reptile.
- It is the smallest freshwater tortoise, measuring just 11 to 13 cm from nose to tail.
- It has a brown or black shell, a short neck and webbed toes with five claws on each foot.
- The Western Swamp Tortoise is a carnivore and eats small invertebrates, tadpoles and frogs.
- It lives in swamps that only fill with water in winter and spring. In the warmer months, when the swamps are dry, the tortoise aestivates (summer equivalent of hibernates) in holes in the ground or under deep leaf litter.
- The tortoise is only found in two locations in a small area of the Swan Coastal Plain, Western Australia.
- With limited numbers and habitat remaining, this little tortoise is very vulnerable to changes including land clearing for housing and agriculture, use of pesticides, fertilisers and fire. If swamps dry too early, (possibly a consequence of climate change), females might not produce eggs. Feral predators like cats, rats and foxes also eat the tortoises and their eggs.
- The Western Swamp Tortoise was feared extinct for over 100 years, but was rediscovered in 1953. The number of tortoises has, however, dropped dramatically from more than 300 in the mid-1960s to less than 50 in the mid-1980s.
- The Western Swamp Tortoise is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List and under the EPBC Act.



Western Swamp Tortoise range





ENDANGERED WILDLIFE AROUND THE WORLD

What is being done?

Intensive habitat management, captive breeding and translocations guided by a 'National Recovery Plan' developed by the Department of Parks and Wildlife (WA) have increased the number to around 200 in the wild. Conservation planning for Western Swamp Tortoises has been at the forefront of conservation practice.

Captive breeding began at Perth Zoo in 1988 and more than 500 tortoises have been bred at the zoo and released into the wild. Since 2003, Adelaide Zoo in partnership with the Western Swamp Tortoise Recovery Team, has been a part of the captive breeding program to ensure the long-term survival of the species.