

ANTECHINUS SPECIES IN OUR AREA – DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE?

... *Mike & Kaye Traynor*

... *Drawings Kaye Traynor*

The name antechinus derives from the resemblance to a hedgehog, or sea urchin, and refers to the bristly texture of the fur. Three species of antechinus live in our general area.

Swamp Antechinus *Antechinus minimus*

Length: 95–140 mm; Tail: 65–100 mm; Weight: 28–100 g; Number of Teats: 6 in Tasmania, 8 on the mainland.

The Swamp Antechinus is similar in appearance to the Dusky Antechinus, but is distinguished by its slightly shorter snout. It occupies dense, wet heath and heathy woodland, sedge and grassland habitat, and is found along the coast from Corner Inlet to Robe, S.A. It is also in Tasmania.

Swamp Antechinus is more active at dusk, although it regularly forages during the day, for a diet, which includes insects, spiders, worms and lizards.

Breeding occurs during a short winter season, followed by die-off of nearly all the males. The female gives birth after four weeks. Up to six young are carried in the pouch for up to eight weeks, after which the young are left in a den before independence about three weeks later.



Dusky Antechinus *Antechinus swainsonii*

Length: 90–185 mm; Tail: 75–120 mm; Weight: 38–100 g; Number of Teats: 6–10.



The Dusky Antechinus is larger than the Swamp Antechinus, and dark grey to black in colour. It is usually found in dense wet forest, coastal heath and rainforest.

Diet comprises worms, insects, lizards and even small birds, and is supplemented with vegetable matter.

Also nocturnal, it spends the day in a nest, a hollowed log or among thick leaf litter on the forest floor. Like the Swamp Antechinus, breeding occurs in winter following frenzied mating activity. Almost all males die after three weeks. The gestation period for the female is about 4 weeks. Six to eight young are born, and are carried in the

pouch for up to eight weeks.

Agile Antechinus *Antechinus agilis*

Length: 80–116 mm; Tail: 75–102 mm; Weight: 16–44 g; Number of Teats: 6–10.

Agile Antechinus is the smallest of the three species. It is greyish brown above and pale below. It is similar to the Brown Antechinus *Antechinus stuartii*, and used to be considered to be the same species. Its habitat is usually moist forest, heath and woodland, where they can be found in dense ground cover and fallen logs.

Its diet consists of beetles, cockroaches, spiders, lizards and soft berries.

6–8 young are born after four week's gestation. The female does not have a pouch, the young being carried around attached to a teat. After 5 weeks the young are left in a nest. Like the other species, the males die at the end of a short, violent, breeding season.

References:

Menkhorst, P.W. & Knight, Frank 2010. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Australia* 3rd edition, Oxford University Press, Melbourne

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