



The carnivorous Tasmanian devil is a scavenging marsupial still widespread in Tasmania. It was formerly common in mainland Australia but became extinct through competition from dingos.

Jane Burrell, *The South West Book*.

although control of much of this area has been ceded by an Act of Parliament to three woodchip companies (see map). The Forestry Commission's only contribution so far to the protection of a representative network of natural areas are its 32 Forest Reserves. These total 15,300 hectares and have been set aside since 1975 "for the pleasure of local communities and visitors". These are primarily small scenic and recreational areas featuring waterfalls, lakes, big trees and even pine plantations.

Mountain dominated National Parks

Tasmania's national park and reserve system, like New Zealand's is mainly comprised of high rainfall mountainous areas usually with no merchantable timber. Two of the National Parks, Mt Field and Hartz Mountain, have had their best lowland forest excised (1950s, 1970s respectively) for logging!

Lowland rainforest in the north-west and drier lowland areas of dry eucalypt forest and native grasslands in the east of

The rainforest shrub (*Tasmannia lanceolata*), like New Zealand's peppertrees (*Pseudowintera*) belongs to the most primitive family of flowering plants and dates back to the rainforests of ancient Gondwanaland.



the state are poorly represented in reserves.

Pure rainforest has been reduced by at least a third since European settlement. Today it is still being cleared for farming and is threatened by fire, flooding, hydro dams and by logging and woodchipping. There is a moratorium until 1988 on the logging of State-owned pure rainforest [defined by the Forestry Commission as forest over 8 m in height having "less than 5% eucalypt canopy cover"]

However this narrow definition has allowed extensive logging of "mixed forests" which contain only between 5% and 10% eucalypt canopy cover which in reality are also rainforests. The NPWS and conservation groups spearheaded by the Wilderness Society and the Australian Conservation Foundation are seeking extensive rainforest reserves in the north-west and south of Tasmania.

by plants and animals from land links with Asia and *Eucalyptus*, *Acacia* and other species adapted to a hotter, more arid climate.

However temperate rainforests still flourished in the cool wet climate of the south. Finally, 14,000 years ago Tasmania became separated from mainland Australia when sea levels rose to form Bass Strait at the end of the last ice age. Since that time, repeated Aboriginal burning has substantially reduced the area of rainforest. This is replaced by fire-tolerant eucalypts, through which rainforest only regenerates slowly. Rainforest today still dominates the south and west of Tasmania while drought and fire tolerant eucalypt, wattle and paperbark (*Melaleuca*) forest dominates the east, centre and north of the State.

Because of the original Gondwanaland link, Tasmania and New Zealand still share many common genera and even species of plants, particularly in rainforest and alpine areas [eg *Phyllocladus*, *Astelia*, *Coprosma*, *Aristotelia*, *Cyathodes*, *Pimelea* and *Lagarostrobos* (formerly *Dacrydium*)].

Tasmania's great diversity of plants and animals makes the state a naturalists paradise. Rufous wallabys are widespread. Although protected in National Parks and Reserves, nearly a million are shot each year in Tasmania for sport and to reduce grazing competition with sheep and cattle.

Huge diversity

The combination of species of ancient, tropical and arid-Australian origins, subject to a great range of climates and altitude, result, in Tasmania's enormous variety of plant and animal species. Although only a quarter the area of New Zealand, Tasmania has 1543 species of plants (1460 species in New Zealand) 306 of which occur only in Tasmania and not in mainland Australia. Tasmania also has 280 bird species and 32 species of mammals. Because the dingo never invaded Tasmania, a number of carnivorous marsupials including the Tasmanian Devil, native cats (quolls), (and until recently the Tasmanian tiger or thylacine) survive here but are extinct or endangered in mainland Australia.

About 13% of Tasmania is protected within National Parks or State Reserves administered by the Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). The 13 National Parks cover a total area of 890,000 hectares. Significantly both mining and domestic stock grazing are prohibited in these Parks. There are a small number of other reserves administered by the Forestry Commission, Lands Department and local authorities which have conservation value but do not have strong legal protection and may permit incompatible uses. The Tasmanian Forestry Commission manages a huge area of the State

