

Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee ANIMAL CARE INFORMATION SHEET

The document provides guidelines for the care and handling of dunnarts in a classroom setting, emphasizing supervision, proper housing, and dietary needs.

Dunnarts



Fat Tailed Dunnart (Sminthopsis crassicaudata) - This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA

Scientific Name:	<i>Sminthopsis crassicaudata</i>
Activities requiring School Principal approval only:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The appropriate care of classroom pet dunnarts b. Measurement of body weight, body condition, growth, and body proportions (non-invasive) c. Observation of a particular behaviour in dunnarts d. Animals on loan from the Nature Education Centre.
Approval Level:	Where an activity is not listed in this Animal Care Information Sheet (ACIS) , advice must be sought from the Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee (NGSAEC) and confirmed before it can be undertaken.
Authority:	Independent and Catholic Schools – Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee
Disclaimer:	This document is reviewed annually. You should check the website regularly to ensure that you are meeting the most recent recommendations. If you note any concerns with the information provided (inadequate, incorrect) please contact the NGSAEC.
Licensing Requirement:	Not applicable. Check the Department for Environment and Water website for further details www.environment.sa.gov.au
Compliance Requirement:	The keeping of this species requires approval from the School Principal. It is recommended that this Animal Care Information Sheet (ACIS) be followed as a minimum in the provision of appropriate care and housing for this species.
General Information:	There are many species of dunnart. The Fat-tailed Dunnart (<i>Sminthopsis crassicaudata</i>) is the most wide-spread and comprises of two sub-species, The <i>Sminthopsis crassicaudata centralis</i> , found in the more northern arid areas of Australia and the <i>Sminthopsis crassicaudata crassicaudata</i> , which occurs in the less arid southern areas, including Victoria. Fat tailed dunnarts occupy open habitats, including woodlands, arid and low shrublands. They are insectivorous, though they have been known to also eat small lizards and juvenile mice. Both species can store fat in their tails, giving it a swollen appearance which helps them survive periods of food shortage.
Physical Attributes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size (adult): head and body length of approx. 60-90mm and tail length of approx. 45-70mm. • Weight (adult): 10-20 grams. Their tail can be used to store fat and is thinner in winter when food supplies are lower. • Life span: 18 months in the wild and 30 – 48 months in captivity • Sexual maturity: approx. 5 months in females and eight months in males.

Behaviour:	<p>Dunnarts are nocturnal marsupials. Normal behaviours exhibited by dunnarts in captivity include huddling to transfer scent between individuals and social grooming characterised by licking or rubbing the face, muzzle, or body of another. During winter they may enter a temporary torpor reducing their energy demands. They take shelter against cold, heat and predators under rocks, stumps, logs or within deep cracks in the soil. Here they create nests made of grass or other natural litter. At times, several of them may congregate in a single nest aiding conservation of body heat. Enrichment should be provided to prevent the development of stereotypical behaviours such as pacing. Toilet rolls and empty egg cartons can be used for environmental enrichment. During the breeding season dunnarts tend to be solitary nesters but they are more social when not breeding, with several dunnarts found in a nest when not breeding.</p>
Environment:	<p>Housing/Space: Housing should consist of a galvanised cage with minimum space requirements of 0.25m² per dunnart. Additional dunnarts require 0.25 x 0.25m of floor area per animal. Cages should be a minimum height of 40cm and have a plate-glass front, a removable tray floor and a galvanised mesh top with a hinged flap at the front. Loam is used to cover the floor (sawdust is unsuitable) and a nest-box loosely filled with shredded paper provided for shelter. Nest boxes should be a minimum of 10 x 10 x 10cms with a removable lid. The entrance hole must be at least 5cm wide. Grass tussocks, rocks, natural foliage and blossoms and logs can be used as enclosure furniture.</p> <p>Water: Water is available via a cage bird seed/water dispenser (sipper tubes are ineffective).</p> <p>Shelter: Several hollow logs of varying diameter should be provided for shelter and grass tussocks can provide alternative options.</p> <p>Coverings: Dunnarts are escape artists so all enclosures should be enclosed.</p> <p>Cleaning: Enclosures should be checked daily, and spot cleaned weekly, with spoiled food removed and clean water always provided. Dunnarts tend to have specific toileting areas, which should be cleaned weekly to maintain hygiene and odour control, or more often if needed. Water containers and food bowls should be cleaned weekly. Nesting material and enclosure furniture (e.g. logs) arrangements should be changed weekly. Full enclosure cleaning should be done monthly including floor substrate replacement and log cleaning or replacement.</p>
Feeding:	<p>Diet: Superior quality canned cat food (meat variety only) e.g., Jelly meat Whiskas, is a good basic diet. Live insects and dry cat food in small amounts can also be fed. Always supply fresh water with dry cat food. Please note that dried dog food is usually unacceptable unless soaked first.</p> <p>Daily requirements: The daily rations for dunnarts are made up of Whiskas wet cat food supplemented with mealworms and dry cat food. (See Husbandry guide in the resources for daily meal plan ideas).</p> <p>Supplementary diet: mealworms (<i>Tenebrio larvae</i>) can be provided as a treat but only a few times a week due to their high fat content. Dry cat food can also be used but water must be provided if fed.</p>
Breeding:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gestation period: 13-16 days • Number of offspring: 6-8 per litter • Birth weight: 14-16 grams • Weaning of young: 70 days <p>Dunnarts are seasonal breeders with litters born between July and February. Females may raise two litters in this period. During gestation, the young attach to nipples for about 40 days and then wean at 70 days. Dunnarts can raise a</p>

	<p>maximum of 10 young though more may be born than they can feed. The pouch is well developed in both species. Females are sexually mature at five months and males at eight months of age in both species.</p> <p>Sexing dunnarts: In the males the testes, covered by a well-furred scrotum, are very prominent and thus the presence/absence of pouch- testes makes sex determination simple.</p>
Handling:	Observational activities should be undertaken only (e.g. monitoring feeding habits). Dunnarts move quickly and can bite if provoked and scared. Handling of dunnarts should be avoided where possible and if handling them use a small catching bag to do so. Adults should only handle dunnarts, not children.
Hygiene:	Thoroughly wash hands with soap and running water for at least 15 seconds after working with or handling dunnarts. Dry hands with clean paper towel or air dryer. Turn off the tap with the paper towel if possible. Follow first aid procedures should a bite occur.
Signs of Illness:	<p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loss of appetite; • weight loss; • lethargy; • inactivity; • hair loss; or • injuries.
Treatments:	Schools are encouraged to develop relationships with a Veterinarian or animal industry representative (e.g. pet shop staff) familiar with small animals. These contacts can be used for disease diagnoses, treatment options and dietary, husbandry and welfare advice, Veterinarians can also assist with emergencies particularly when euthanasia is needed, Treatments must be documented in the appropriate records.
Euthanasia:	When an illness or injury is such that recovery is unlikely then the dunnart must be euthanised by a Veterinarian. Schools should contact their local Veterinarian to discuss emergency treatment options prior to an event occurring when keeping dunnarts. Any adverse event including death must be reported to the NGSAC using the Adverse Events form. Forms must be returned to the NGSAC within seven days of the event occurring.
Disposal/fate planning:	When no longer required Dunnarts must be rehomed. Dunnarts can be loaned from the Nature Education Centre preventing the need for rehoming. As a captive species they must NEVER be released into the environment. Bodies must be disposed of correctly in accordance with local council regulations.
Holiday and weekend care:	<p>Dunnarts can be sent home for weekends or holiday care with students providing consent is received from the school principal and the parents.</p> <p>Staff should provide carers with animal care and record-keeping instruction, emergency contacts and provide appropriate equipment and food. Animals must be checked daily, records kept, and any problems reported to the school immediately whether kept onsite or taken offsite.</p>
Approved activities:	Where an activity is not listed in this ACIS, advice must be sought from the NGSAC and confirmed before it can be undertaken.
Activity:	a. The appropriate care of classroom dunnarts
Objective:	<p>To demonstrate the appropriate care of dunnarts to students</p> <p>Staff must supervise students all times when interacting with or observing dunnarts in the classroom. Handling must be kept to a minimum. Dunnarts are</p>

	nocturnal and during winter may enter a temporary torpor reducing their energy demands. Staff should be aware of this behaviour when planning activities.
Activity:	b. Measurement of body weight, body condition, growth and body proportions (non-invasive)
Objective:	<p>To demonstrate the measurements of weight and growth variables to students</p> <p>Staff must supervise students all times when interacting with or observing dunnarts in the classroom. Any equipment required must be ready prior to handling a dunnart. Dunnarts are nocturnal and during winter may enter a temporary torpor reducing their energy demands. Staff should be aware of this behaviour when planning activities. Other species may be more suitable for this activity.</p>
Activity:	c. Observation of a particular behaviour in dunnarts
Objective:	<p>To demonstrate to students the observation of a particular behaviour in dunnarts</p> <p>Staff must supervise students all times when interacting with or observing dunnarts in the classroom. Handling must be kept to a minimum.</p>
Activity:	d. Animals on loan from the Nature Education Centre
Objective:	<p>To provide adequate care for animals on loan from the Nature Education Centre.</p> <p>When borrowing dunnarts from this Centre, schools must ensure that they have resources and experienced staff available to provide adequate care and welfare for those they are planning to use in activities. Schools are recommended to contact the Nature Education Centre prior to commencing any activities to discuss the needs to a particular species they are interested in. Teaching kits are also available that may provide an alternative to using live animals in the classroom.</p>
Resources:	<p>Statewide Integrated Flora and Fauna Teams - Fat Tailed Dunnart www.swifft.net.au/cb_pages/sp_fat-tailed_dunnart.php</p> <p>Soft Schools - Fat Tailed Dunnart facts www.softschools.com/facts/animals/fat_tailed_dunnart_facts/1868/</p>
Document Control	<p>Document Inception date: 1 August 2010 (Standard Operating Procedure)</p> <p>Approved by: Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee</p> <p>Approval date: October 2024</p>
Revision Record	<p>Review Date: August 2024 (amended to Animal Care Information Sheet (ACIS))</p> <p>Brief description of changes: Renaming of document</p> <p>Next Review due date: October 2025</p>