



THE THORNY DEVIL (MOLOCH HORRIDUS)

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HABITAT AND DISTRIBUTION

(WHERE IT IS FOUND)

- The Thorny Devil is found in the dry shrubs of Australia's centre. The Thorny Devil also lives in a shallow burrow.

APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOUR

- A Thorny Devil is about 20 cms long, the Females are larger than the males as they produce eggs. The devil's colours match those of the desert, pale browns and tans when it is warm and darker shades when it is cold, so that it is always well camouflaged. Its body is entirely covered with cone shaped spikes. On the back of its neck there is a hump that is called a 'false head' which predators grab instead of the head.
- Thorny devils often curve their tail up in the air and walk along with slow, jerky motion like a wind-up toy. In the hottest part of the day, the thorny devil digs a shallow burrow, often under a shrub for shade.

DEFENCE

- The Thorny Devil is not aggressive. It has quite a few ways of hiding or defending itself if threatened:
- It can change colour to match its surroundings.
- It can protect its head and trick a predator by hiding its head between its front legs, leaving its false head showing.
- If a predator tries to flip it onto its back, the Thorny Devil uses its spikes and curved tail to anchor itself onto the ground.
- It can imitate a leaf flicking in the breeze.
- It can puff itself up to look larger.

DIET

- The thorny devil eats only ants, eating about 1000-3000 ants in a single meal. However, it eats the ants one at a time, flicking its sticky tongue in and out quickly.
- It drinks water in a most unusual way. When either rain or dew lands on the thorny devil's back, the water flows along thousands of grooves between the spines that lead to the corners of its mouth so that it can drink.
- They feed in the cooler mornings and late afternoon. When they locate a trail of ants they licks them up with their short, sticky tongue.
- They catch them using their tongue much the same as an-eaters would do.

PREDATORS

- Aerial predators such as Brown Falcons prey on Thorny Devils.
- Predators also include Bustards and goannas.

LIFE CYCLE

- After mating in September, Female thorny devils lay 3 - 10 eggs in a burrow about 30cm underground.
- The eggs hatch after about three months. A Thorny Devil's life span is about 20 years.
- Thorny Devil's can live up to 15 years.

ADAPTATIONS

- The Thorny Devil is diurnal (active during the day time).
- Camouflage to blend in and can change colour according to sunlight and surroundings. False head to confuse predators. Spiny skin for protection. Dew forms on skin, then grooves lead water to the mouth.
- Inflates with air when threatened, making it hard to swallow.
- Digs a shallow cave to sit in during very hot days.
- Lays eggs underground to keep them at an even temperature.

IMAGES OF THE THORNY DEVIL



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