



# Tasmanian Tiger: The Tragic Tale of How the World Lost Its Most Mysterious Predator

*David Owen*

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Once the world's largest marsupial predator, the doglike Tasmanian tiger (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*) ranged across Australia and as far north as New Guinea. After humans introduced dingoes to the area 4,000 years ago, the misnamed "tiger" was driven to extinction everywhere except the island of Tasmania. With the arrival of European settlers there in the 1800s, however, its days became numbered. Unsubstantiated tales of its blood-thirst and its unnaturally savage attacks on sheep led to the creation of "extermination societies" and ultimately to the introduction of a law in 1886 that mandated the destruction of the species. Hunted indiscriminately for fifty years, Tasmanian tigers were granted a reprieve in 1936, when the government was persuaded to protect the species. But it was too late: the last specimen died in a Hobart zoo two months later.

In *Tasmanian Tiger*, David Owen tells the tragic story of the thylacine, from its evolutionary origins and its physical and behavioral characteristics to its ill-fated encounter with European civilization and the ongoing fascination with the "Tassie Tiger" as a potent symbol of wildlife conservation. Elegantly written and full of interesting facts and first-hand stories from those who saw the animal in the wild, *Tasmanian Tiger* offers a compelling account of how fear and ignorance doomed an entire species over the course of a century. And in recounting numerous recent sightings of the thylacine in Tasmania, Owen explores the power that this once-despised creature continues to hold on the imagination today. Indeed, as described in this book, serious efforts are being undertaken to bring back the Tasmanian tiger through cloning, a controversial project that raises a number of ethical questions for scientists and conservationists everywhere. For both those familiar with the thylacine and those discovering this remarkable animal for the first time, *Tasmanian Tiger* is a poignant cautionary tale of human folly and the fragility of the natural world.

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