

MONITORING OF RAT POPULATIONS, MONTEBELLO ISLANDS
14-18 MARCH 1997

TO: Andrew Burbidge, Director WATSCU
Chris Muller, Regional Manager, Pilbara

FROM: Fran Stanley, Pilbara

24 March 1997

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
& LAND MANAGEMENT

Pilbara Region staff (Peter Kendrick, Peter Moore, Bob Taylor and Fran Stanley) undertook a monitoring trip to the Montebello Islands from 14-18 March, 1997, with the assistance of the Australian Customs Service who provided the use of their vessel, ACV Andrew Fisher and crew.

The larger islands in the Montebellos group were visited and searches were undertaken for rat tracks in sandy areas, including beaches, dunes and other sandy soils. Each island visited is listed below with a summary of findings and actions (if any) taken.

All islands were covered in dense, green vegetation, an indication that rainfall has been quite substantial over recent months. The bait stations were very brittle and many had collapsed. The red bottles seem to be hardier than the blue. The bait in each bottle had solidified into a lump and had begun to go mouldy in some cases.

TRIMOUILLE ISLAND

Visited on 15 March. Two staff checked southern area north end of Cocoa Beach while two staff checked from northern end of Main Beach southwards. The radiation zone at the northern end of the island was not checked. No rat tracks were seen on any of the sandy areas of this island. However, there were areas where animals had been digging at the roots of grass species. Rat skulls were found near rocks in the centre of the island. There was a lot of evidence of lizard activity and it is possible that these diggings were caused by lizards and not rats. Two adult white-breasted sea eagles were seen perching on radiation signs. Hare wallaby skull collected.

ACTION: Re-check island in July 1997.

NORTHWEST ISLAND

Visited on 15 March. Two staff dropped at eastern end, two about two thirds the length of the island to the west, teams checked areas and met in the middle, concentrating around rocky points. No rat tracks and no diggings. Intact rat skeleton still with some fur attached seen on rocky point on northern side of island.

The west end of the island was revisited and checked after the discovery of rat tracks on Primrose Island. No evidence of rats was seen.

ACTION: Re-check in July 1997, paying particular attention to the west end.

PRIMROSE ISLAND

Visited on 15 March, two staff. Rat tracks, diggings and empty bait stations found on grassland behind mangroves on eastern side of island. Tracks were only patchy and it

did not look like there was a large population of rats on the island. Many Ospreys seen on this island.

ACTION: Laid new bait stations on 18 March, took approximately 2.5 hours with four staff. Put 3/4 to 1 cup of bait in each bait station. Re-check in July 1997.

CARNATION ISLAND

Visited 15 March, two staff. No signs of rats.

ACTION: Re-check in July 1997, keeping in mind presence of rats on Primrose Island.

GARDENIA ISLAND

Visited 15 March, two staff. No sign of rats.

ACTION: Re-check in July 1997.

BROOKE ISLAND

Visited 16 March, two staff. No rat tracks or diggings. A number of skeletons found, some with fur still attached and one with green colouring in the stomach area (photos). Silver gulls completing breeding, large fledgling chicks, many juveniles flying around. Bridled terns also acting nervously, but did not see any eggs or chicks.

ACTION: Re-check in July 1997.

HERMITE ISLAND

16 March - two staff visited Turtle Lagoon. No sign of rats but many cat tracks, including kittens.

17 March - two staff walked from hut to Claret Cove, checking Sherry Bay on the way. No sign of rats, but cat tracks evident in dunes and on beaches at both sites.

ALPHA ISLAND

Visited 16 March, two staff walked from north-eastern tip southwards around Chianti Bay. Radiation zone at north-western end not checked. No tracks seen but small turds found in diggings at grass roots (collected). These appear too small to be rats, may be lizards or (horror!) perhaps mice.

ACTION: Re-check in July 1997, paying particular attention to areas closest to Crocus Island.

BLUEBELL ISLAND

Visited 16 March, two staff. No rat tracks or other evidence. A lot of lizard, particularly varanid, tracks and diggings.

ACTION: Re-check in July 1997.

CROCUS ISLAND

Visited 16 March, two staff. Rat tracks seen in central and southern sandy areas. Small turds and diggings the same as on Alpha Island (not collected). Lizard turds with rat hair and no green colouring collected.

ACTION: Laid new bait stations on 17 March, took approximately 2.5 hours with four people. A lot of rat tracks seen on sandy and beach areas, empty bait stations also found. Re-check in July 1997.

MORGAN ISLAND

Visited 16 March, one staff. Checked only beach area at southern end as all else rocky. No sign of rats.

ACTION: Re-check in July 1997.

CAMPBELL ISLAND

Visited 16 March, two staff. Possible rat tracks seen in central area of island, very very faint. No other signs of rats.

ACTION: Re-check in July 1997, paying particular attention to central area of island.

DELTA ISLAND

Visited 16 March, two staff. No signs of rats, dead animals seen. Checked carefully around cave and mangrove areas. Cave used fairly recently.

ACTION: Re-check in July 1997, keeping in mind possible presence of rats on Campbell Island.

AH CHONG ISLAND

Visited 18 March, three staff. No sign of rats. A lot of juvenile silver gulls flying around, eggshells seen. Bridled terns also acting nervously but no eggs or chicks seen.

ACTION: Re-check in July 1997.

ISLAND TO NORTH OF AH CHONG

Visited 18 March, three staff. No sign of rats, many dead animals seen.

ACTION: Re-check in July 1997.

From the evidence collected during this short visit to the islands, it appears that baiting has been successful on many. However, monitoring needs to be continued on a regular basis, particularly on those islands which were rebaited (Primrose and Crocus) and those islands adjacent to them. Many of the islands are rocky and so rat tracks cannot be seen. Trapping needs to be done on these to ensure that no rats remain.