

# Rat baiting successful

**TWO trips were made to the Montebello Islands in 1997 to monitor the success of the major 1996 rat eradication project, in which about 40 CALM staff and volunteers were involved.**

The first was from 14 to 18 March, when staff visited Ah Chong, Alpha, Bluebell, Brooke, Campbell, Carnation, Crocus, Delta, Gardenia, Hermite, Kingcup, North West, Primrose, Trimouille and several smaller islands, searching for tracks and other signs of rats.

Small numbers of rats and a number of empty bait stations were located on Primrose and Crocus Islands. Clearly, some bottles on these islands were insufficiently baited during the re-baiting visits in 1996. Both islands were re-baited with new bait stations during the March visit. No sign of rats was seen on any of the other islands.

Staff were transported to and within the islands by the Australian Customs Service Vessel *Andrew Fisher*.

The second trip was from 14 July to 31 July 1997, when lines of Elliott traps were laid in three locations on Alpha; two locations on Bluebell; two locations on Campbell, Carnation and Crocus; in seven locations on Delta, Foxglove, Gardenia and Hermite, in two locations on Kingcup, Marigold and North West, and six locations on the Trimouille Islands.

In addition to searching these islands for rat tracks or fresh scats, searches were also made

by Andrew  
Burbidge and  
Fran Stanley

of Ah Chong, Brooke, Butter-cup, Ivy, Pansy and several smaller islands. Bait stations laid in 1996 were checked to ensure that they still contained bait.

No rats were trapped and no rat signs were seen on any island. No empty bait stations were found, except on Crocus Island, and these had been replaced in March.

Staff on the second trip were transported to the islands on the Australian Customs Service Vessel *Charles Kingston*.

Transport back to Karratha was by helicopter, courtesy Woodside Petroleum, and by helicopter to Barrow Island and jet to Perth, both courtesy West Australian Petroleum.

A 4.5-metre aluminium dinghy (unofficially dubbed the 'Osprey'), with outboard motor was used to get around the archipelago.

All indications are that Phase I of *Montebello Renewal* has been a success. However, because of the scale of the project and the many islands involved, it will be necessary to conduct additional monitoring trips over the next few years.

There was originally some concern that animals such as ospreys, white-breasted sea eagles and bungarras (*Varanus gouldii*), otherwise known as sand monitors (a species of lizard), may have suffered from eating poisoned rats. However, they were as common or

more common during this visit than in past years. There was also no evidence that native animals were eating the bait remaining after the rats had departed.

Of the two grain-eating birds, bar-shouldered doves were considerably more common than in previous years, and brown quail were also seen on many islands.

New storage was also needed at the hut for the new dinghy and other equipment. Pilbara Region purchased a seatainer for this purpose, but the problem was how to get it to Hermite Island.

Fortunately Woodside Petroleum came to the rescue and offered to deliver it by barge when doing some work in the area. It was delivered by a Mermaid Marine barge with a Bristow 'Puma' helicopter lifting all 2.1 tonnes of it from the barge to its new position near the Hut. They don't do things by halves in the Pilbara!

CALM would like to thank everyone involved in Montebello Renewal so far, especially the volunteers and sponsors, and the Pilbara companies who helped this year.

Without their support, work in this remote area would be very much more difficult and expensive. Our thanks go to West Australian Petroleum, Apache Energy, ACI Plastics Packaging, Crop Care Australasia, Selleys Chemical Company, Australian Customs Service, Pilbara Regiment Australian Army, Woodside Petroleum and Mermaid Marine.