

Cane toads

A heartfelt cry from the Kununurra Community to the Nation.

We will Stop the Cane Toads getting into WA!



The aim of this website is to document the Kimberley Toad Busters fight to stop the cane toad crossing into Western Australia and to provide the Western Australian Community some understanding of the enormous efforts (and contributions) that can be made by unpaid volunteers!

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Tom Young
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2003 winner of the
Bird-Captain
Regional
Achievement Award.

2003 recipient of
the Bronwyn Gold
Blyth
award.

2004 finalist in the
category of
the WA State
Toad Busters Awards.

KIMBERLEY TOAD BUSTERS NEWSLETTER No.22

05/02/2008

By Sandy Boulter (Volunteer Cane Toad Educator and Coordinator of the Perth based Friends of the Kimberley Toad Busters) and Lee Scott-Virtue (President and Volunteer Field Coordinator for the Kimberley Toad Busters)



WWW.CANE TOADS.COM.AU

The Cane Toad is a *Key Threatening Process* to the Australian Nation

Declared by the Federal Government 12 April 2005

This Newsletter is produced by Kimberley Specialists In Research Inc in conjunction with Kimberley Toad Buster Inc. Kimberley Specialists, a founding member of the Kimberley Toad Busters, continues to support the campaign against the cane toad by raising funds. KSR and KTB are tax deductible entities.

**IF EVERYONE WAS A TOADBUSTER
THE TOADS WOULD BE BUSTED!**

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Forward

KTBs have identified that the colonising cane toad front has progressed another 13 km along the Victoria Highway corridor bringing them to within 43 km of the WA/NT border. The evidence of breeding (the presence of tadpoles) suggests that a handful of females managed to break through the KTB busting loop. Despite this it is not all bad news.

- Toad busters (now working through the week) pulled (hopefully) all adult toads out of the system and removed the bulk of the tadpoles. It is intended to focus KTB energy in this area to ensure that we have 'busted' these fore-runners.
- The main breeding colony still appears to be 20 km further east of Fish Creek (73kms from the border) and numbers of colonising toads at the forefront have been reduced to a handful (a direct result of continuous local community toad busting).
- When KTBs confronted this same front-line scenario two and a half years ago they were subjected to 'thousands' of toads and hours, days and weeks of continuous toad busting in single water systems before any noticeable difference in toad numbers was made. Now we face just dozens at a time. The KTB campaign has successfully thinned this front line.
- KTBs now have a better understanding of cane toad frontline colonising behaviour and can now essentially determine where and what habitat systems toads will populate well in advance of the front line movement.
- Cane toads will not make it into the Kimberley this wet season and if KTBs can continue their field efforts there is some chance that the toad movement can be slowed sufficiently to buy another wet season.
- KTBs have identified and are following all 6 corridors of front line colonizing cane toads now making their way towards the WA/NT border, with only two of these corridors threatening WA in the next twelve months.

KTB Recognition Box



Photo: Sister Del Collins showing our junior toadbusters how to autopsy a cane toad.

Inaugural KTB Board member and current KTB treasurer, KTB safety officer, long time KTB field leader, Kununurra Palliative Care Community nurse, Lions President, and winner of several prestigious volunteer awards Del is one of the Kimberley's most loved and respected members. Del is an extraordinary individual who, in her 55 th year, decided to devote ten years of her working life (in her spare time) to community volunteer work. With only 4 years to go and one of KTBs most committed volunteers (Del has the second most number of community volunteer hours spent in the field toad busting) and has conceded she will probably go on toad busting 'til the end'. Del 's beloved working car collection now has a vehicle dedicated to toadbusting. Del 's passion and commitment in all that she does is an inspiration to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of the Kimberley .

Frontline Update 7 February 2008

By Dave Woods: KTBs Campaign Field Coordinator

"Cane Toads continue their westerly migration and have now reached Fish Creek on Newry Station. Three male toads were found on the 27 th of January around Fish Creek culvert on the Victoria Highway . By road this is fifty three kilometres from the NT/WA border. In a Straight line it is only forty kilometres. A turkey's nest/dam roughly five kilometres back to the east was also busted on the same night. Thirty two toads were removed from this location, all male. Another fifteen kilometres to the east at the Saddle Creek area, the male and female toad population is beginning to increase steadily. This indicates that the 'breeding' front is around 73 km from the WA border. We are doing our best to reduce their numbers over this wet season, which will help keep breeding to minimum in this frontline area.

Along the Upper West Baines River cane toads are moving in a southerly direction towards the Aboriginal community of Amanbidgi. Male toads have reached Police Hole Yard, which is twenty five kilometres south of the Victoria Highway . They are still only in small numbers at present, but as there are several large dams in this location, it is perfect toad habitat. It will be high on Kimberley Toad Busters 'toad busting' priority list when weather permits access over the coming months.

A fierce battle is being fought on Bullo River Station on the lower part of the Victoria River . Both Kimberley Toad Busters and DEC Teams have been working in this area removing adult toads and minimising the numbers of metamorphs by way of spraying with a dettol solution from battery powered spray packs. The owner/managers of this station are supporting us in our fight as they too are keen to keep the toad population as low as possible on their property.

Although access into more remote areas through the wet season is limited, KTBs will keep on doing our best to slow down the toad's westerly movement, as best we can this time of year. We are presently removing as many eggs, tadpoles and metamorphs from the areas we can reach to keep their breeding success rate as low as possible. The highway area naturally becomes our priority this time of the year not just because of accessibility, but also because the cane toad can migrate quicker in this area than anywhere else this time of the year".

ALSO from Dave and Lee

KTBs are planning an Educational Field Training Weekend on the 23 rd and 24 th of February

“This is a great opportunity for people who are keen to come out and learn about what Kimberley Toad Busters do out in the field. This allows people who are interested in becoming a volunteer to gain the necessary training and education required to become a Kimberley Toad Buster. These weekends are a lot of fun and if you know of anyone who is keen to get involved please ask them to send me an email or give me a call. If you are a member and would like to get involved in our field work please get in contact with me and I can also book you in for this weekend. The Kimberley Toad Busters bus will be transporting people out on this weekend and we will also provide the food for all involved. I look forward to hearing from you ”.

Dave Woods: KTB Campaign Field Coordinator.

MEDIA

Media is very important for spreading education about the threat cane toads pose to Australian biodiversity, and thereby hopefully generating funding for the KTB campaign. If you see a report anywhere about cane toads or the KTBs, please let us know.

The following media releases generated articles in the West Australian, Broome Advertiser, Kimberley Echo; four radio interviews and two television news items (GWN and WIN). A number of these reports are podcast on the internet – see ABC website. AAP has also written a story. AAP is a wholesale news organisation that sells articles around the world.

The report of journalist Mark Dapin (who toadbusted with the KTBs last year) appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age (Melbourne) prestigious weekend magazines 26 January 2008 . These articles were 6 pages long and have been seen far and wide.

Extract of 2 recent Press Release by Sandy Boulter Friend of the KTBs.

See KTB website for full reports.

Kimberley Toad Busters Airlifted into Battle

As Cane Toads found 53kms from the WA/NT Border

(and where is the NT government?)

“While the KTB campaign is causing the little blighters to trickle west not surge en masse,”, says Del Collins, long time KTB toadbuster leader, Kununurra community nurse and KTB safety officer, “they are now a little closer. On 27 th of January 2008 we found three forward advance male toads in the Victoria Highway Fish Creek Culvert, on Newry Station . ”



Photo: Brolga dancing beside the Duncan Highway unaware that the cane toad is fast approaching from the east, and if the brologa is not first poisoned by a toad, the toads will use up the brologas' food resources or poison its water sources.

Three male toads were found and dispatched from the Fish Creek culvert beside and under the Victoria Highway where it bisects Newry Station. This culvert is fifty three kms from the NT/WA border. As the brologas fly it is only forty kilometres to WA.

A turkey nest dam five kilometres behind the Fish Creek advance was busted on the same night and our KTBs busted a male colonising advance force of thirty two. Fifteen kilometres further behind the lines (around Saddle Creek) male and female toad were found busy mixing it up (*amplexing* in frog and toad speak) and these were busted as well. KTB's latest toadbusting will reduce breeding outcomes at this critical frontline, thereby saving food for our native animals and minimising risk of death by toad *bufotoxin* of endemic fish, birds, frogs and reptiles.

Along the Upper West Baines River , toads are moving towards the Amanbidgi community. Small numbers of male toads have reached Police Hole Yard, 25kms south of the Victoria Highway . However, the several large dams nearby, are perfect toad breeding habitat from which the male will call up females with his distinctive motor bike like trill, once he has settled in. The Kimberley Toad Busters teams will bust them as soon as the water and mud subside.



Photo by Craig Mills: Rare and cute, the *Limndynastes depressus* native frog was seen at the Bullo Station Homestead January 2008 (and is now further threatened by the cane toad)

A fierce battle is being fought on the north east of Bullo River Station on the lower part of the Victoria River where it meets the Baines River . Cane toads are only 20kms from the rare pygmy crocodile population in the Bullo River gorge system over on the

western edges of Bullo River Station and are already into the rare frog populations.

KTB and DEC Teams are busting on Bullo Station by catching adult toads, and spraying the thousands of metamorphs with a dettol solution sprayed from battery powered packs (otherwise used for fire fighting). KTBs thank Franz and Marlee at Bullo station for supporting us.



Photo: 2007 – On of our first fixed wing KTB toad reconnaissance team, “in for the long haul KTB volunteers” Dave Woods, John Cugley, Trevor Dutoit, Dave Petherick, leaving for Victoria River and Auvergne Station

In this third wet season of toadbusting, we are now finding and recording the forward colonising toads by airlifting small KTB volunteer teams into flood bound breeding corridors.



Photos by Del Collins Jan 2008:

Helicopter ferries KTB reconnaissance team up and over flooded Victoria River while Coolibah Station Grader drives the KTB toadbusting equipment through the mighty Vic.!

While KTB reconnaissance team numbers are small, they take the time to destroy eggs, tadpoles and metamorphs thereby minimising breeding survival rates. The bitumen of the Victoria Highway is our priority this time of the year not just because of accessibility to us, but also because the cane toad uses the fast wet season bitumen as a prime mover.



Kimberley Toadbuster and Gyrocopter pilot, Thomas Brieg took Dave Woods, Ade Meredith and Rod King on KTB reconnaissance flights over the toad frontline area on Newry Station on 27 January 2008 . GPS records of suitable toad habitat such as permanent pools on creeks was made to guide future toadbusting. This aerial work saved hours of taxing ground reconnaissance work.

Lee Scott-Virtue says, “*This third year of KTB volunteer wet season weekly reconnaissance and toadbusting has certainly seen much lower numbers of adult cane toads present in these corridors than in previous wet seasons. Even if this was all, it alone shows we are making a difference. Even if the cane toad makes it to the Kimberley , their numbers will be low and we ALL know what they look like, how to deal with them and we are ready. We will be far less likely to witness local species extinctions...but we are not so sure that we can save the pygmy crocodile .*” Lee, the KTB Board and all their volunteers call on the Northern Territory government “*...to help the KTBs help Bullo River Station save the pygmy crocodile .*”

As Sandy Boulter, KTB Board Member based in Perth says, “*the KTBs have undertaken their entire weekly toadbusting campaign far from home in the NT National Parks, on NT stations and in NT aboriginal communities – in the harshest of conditions up to 450 kms from their own homes in Kununurra, in the public interest. While the KTBs have support from the federal and WA governments, none has come from the army or the NT government.*”



Photo: Alive with saltwater crocodiles, the rain drenched Victoria River (picture on the left) flows under the Bradshaw Bridge beside the Commonwealth controlled Bradshaw Military base on its north bank (right of picture), on which land the toads multiply and invade the south bank in their advance into the Kimberley; and (picture on the right) the mighty Vic flows across Auvergne and Coolibah Stations.

What the KTBS need from the army is for it to take responsibility for the cane toad busting on Bradshaw Military base. “*The KTBS can show the army how to run a military campaign against cane toads!*” says Dean Goodgame, KTB Board member and toadbuster since the KTBS first toadbuster in September 2005.

“*What we need from the NT government is financial support to set up a KTB aboriginal cane toad ranger and education program for the remote NT aboriginal communities between the cane toads and the Kimberley . After all, it is their bush tucker and way of life that is threatened by the cane toad. Cane Toad rangers and biodiversity monitoring is a worthy and productive occupation for experienced bushies but some of my communities do not even understand what is about to hit them*”, says Aboriginal KTB toadbuster leader and elder, MaryAnne Winton.

KTBS MEDIA RELEASE 3 February 2008

Rare Pygmy Crocodiles Newly Discovered on Bullo River Station

Face Extinction from Imminent Cane Toad Invasion



Craig Mills’ shocking photo of one of our freshwater crocodiles – poisoned and killed by eating cane toads - floating on, rotting in and polluting a pristine Australian billabong after emptying its bowel contents all over the belly of its dying carcass. This fate awaits the rare Bullo River pygmy crocodile and all other inhabitants of these systems. Craig’s photo was taken on one of his regular toadbusting trips to the Northern Territory, on a billabong between the West Baines River and the Pinkerton Ranges, shown in the extreme background reflecting their pink hue. This billabong is around 80kms from the WA/NT border as the brolga flies. Craig caught 600 cane toads that night at this billabong after snapping the dead crocodile. Craig is one of the very small Kununurra based DEC cane toad team who work closely with the KTBS.

In writing her internationally famous 1993 biography *From Strength to Strength*, Sara Henderson would not have dreamed that a rare pygmy crocodile was living and breeding on her beloved Bullo River Station.

Sara would also be horrified to find that no sooner has this rare crocodile species been discovered on Bullo, the feral, prolific breeding, and very poisonous cane toad is about to arrive ... and there is no Australian predator of the cane toad (in any stage of its life cycle) that is immune to its poison (except *maybe* the keelback snake).



Photo: Fresh water gorge on Bullo River Station – what will cane toads do to this ecosystem and its dependent inhabitants?

Remote wild Bullo and Victoria Rivers flow through spectacular freshwater gorges within the 1,200 square mile Bullo River Station. These gorges are home to frogs, reptiles, saratoga , sooty grunter and barramundi; and then finish their journey into huge tidal flows where species such as saltwater barramundi, threadfin salmon, mangrove jacks and jewfish thrive. Cane toads, in all stages of their life cycle, will kill these fish.

Dave Woods, KTBS recently appointed KTB field coordinator employee and cane toad reconnaissance expert says, *“The KTBS call on scientists working in cane toad research, to please hurry up with finding a solution, or at the very least - finding a less labour intensive way to catch, kill and dispose of cane toads.”*

The KTBS wonder just how many unknown Queensland species suffered extinction from cane toads? The Arnhem Land population of pygmy crocodiles at the Liverpool River was overrun by cane toads in 2000/2001 and their fate is unknown?

Bullo River Station owners, Franz and Marlee Ranacher need help to build pens to protect these crocodiles from cane toads, and to catch and kill cane toads. The Kimberley Toad Buster volunteers are working closely with Marlee and Franz to help them save the pygmy crocodile, and the pristine Bullo River Station ecosystems (and their dependent biodiversity) from the imminent ravages of the cane toad.

Lee Scott-Virtue, *“The KTBS call on the NT and federal governments for their help and for private sponsorship to help the Bullo River Station owners face this difficult challenge .”*

Cane toads will reach Bullo River Station through the upper reaches of creek systems flowing into the Victoria River north of the glorious and remote Pinkerton Ranges . This particular colonising corridor of the westwards moving cane toads (moving steadily west from Fancy Creek) is being fed primarily by toads crossing the Victoria River from their safe breeding grounds on the Commonwealth controlled Bradshaw Military Base, located on the northern banks of the Victoria River.

Sandy Boulter, *“The KTBS call on the army to start taking responsibility for toadbusting on the land it controls. ”*



Photo: Bullo River Station – just imagine smelly loud cane toads carpeting the homestead grounds, on an otherwise glorious desert evening...

See KTBS [KTB Media Release 31 January 2008](#)

If everybody became a Toad Buster,

The Toads would be Busted!

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