

# Kimberley Toad Buster's

## News Letters



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!



Prepared by Ruth Duncan, Kimberley Toad Busters Science and Education Program Co-ordinator.



### KIMBERLEY TOAD BUSTERS NEWSLETTER No. 32



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

Declared by the Federal Government 12 April 2005

**AUSTRALIANS NEED A NATIONAL CANE TOAD THREAT ABATEMENT PLAN (TAP) NOW!  
KTB CANE TOAD EDUCATION**

7th December 2009

#### Special Newsletter

This 32nd Kimberley Toad Busters' Newsletter is produced by Kimberley Specialists In Research Inc in conjunction with Kimberley Toad Busters Inc. Kimberley Specialists, a founding member of the Kimberley Toad Busters, continues to support the campaign against the cane toad by supporting [www.canetoads.com.au](http://www.canetoads.com.au), raising funds and supporting cane toad scientific research. KTBs are a tax deductible entity. Please see our website for our direct donation facility or how to sponsor one of our research projects.

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

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### What's in Your Backyard? At Kununurra District High School

Over three days from November 23rd to 25th Kimberley Toad Busters, Ben Scott-Virtue and Ruth Duncan, visited 408 school children from Pre-Primary to Year 8 at Kununurra District High School. The children were treated to a power-point presentation showing the potential distribution of cane toads, position of the cane toad front line and differences between cane toads and native frogs. The children then learned about the impacts of cane toads on the Kimberley food web. Animals impacted range from the largest predators including monitors and freshwater crocodiles to the smallest of invertebrates, the critical engine room of the Kimberley Food web.

Students and teachers then joined in to conduct a 'What's in your Backyard?' biodiversity survey of the school grounds. A brilliant effort, a range of invertebrates (incl. butterflies, cicadas, and beetles), reptiles (skinks, dragons), birds (incl. bowerbirds, eagles, kites) and frogs were found. In total over 40 species were recorded. Congratulations to each year level. Each child was provided with a KTB identification card of for a Kimberley species (snakes, geckos, monitors, birds, turtles, legless lizards, dragons) to help in keeping an eye on animals in their own backyard. A poster showing all wildlife found will be available to each class room, we are only too happy to keep adding more species as children find them! A Kimberley Toad Busters Biodiversity Kit has joined the Ecology collection at the Kununurra Library to help all students identify any new species they find. A Biodiversity Kit has also joined the Primary School teacher resources at KDHS.

All data recorded is being added to the 'What's in Your Backyard?' database. This database is a contribution of all people of the Kimberley concerned about the impact of cane toads on wildlife. 76 years after their introduction to the Australian environment the impact of cane toads on wildlife is still relatively unknown. Scientific data exists for key predator species such as Monitors (up to 90 % loss of abundance in the Daly River), Freshwater Crocodiles (up to 77% loss of abundance in the Victoria River) and Northern Quolls (100% loss of populations in Kakadu) with no evidence of recovery. However, little to no data exists for other species across the food web that will be indirectly impacted by loss of food resources due to the huge amount of invertebrates cane toads consume. Scientists alone studying a handful of research sites cannot answer this question. The 'What's in Your Backyard?' database created by the community will be freely available on the cane toads website to all scientists, school students and community members interested in assessing the impact of cane toads on the Kimberley. This data is already being used by Kimberley Toad Busters in planning where future toad busts need to be focused. Eventually it may be used to justify considerable government spending on finding a 'biological solution' for cane toad control. In the very least it will provide us with the knowledge of what we have now. It is quite possible this level of native species diversity and abundance will not be seen again, in one lifetime at least.

Thank-you very much to all teachers and students of KDHS, the three days were an absolute pleasure to be surrounded by children keen to learn about and protect their own backyard. Kimberley Toad Busters is able to provide educational material for additional classroom activities for Kimberley Biodiversity, What's in Your Backyard? Cane Toads and Wildlife First Aid. Kimberley Toad Busters look forward to visiting more schools across the Kimberley.



**Photo:** Ben Scott-Virtue delivers presentation to Kununurra District High School students on how to identify a cane toad, what to do if you see a cane toad and impacts of cane toads on wildlife of the Kimberley.

### Lake Kununurra Education Afternoon with SEEKS

Save Endangered East Kimberley Species (SEEKS) have long been concerned about the arrival of cane toads with many members joining toad busts and hearing regular updates at meetings from Kimberley Toad Busters Wendy Carter and Richard Lethbridge. SEEKS invited Ruth Duncan to join their educational afternoon on Lake Kununurra to hear more about how they can assist with the 'What's in Your Backyard?' program.

The afternoon was highly successful with 50 people attending for the Triple J boat cruise from Kununurra, to the Lake Argyle Dam Wall and return. Katya Tripp, Environmental Officer from SWEK, provided education on many of the invasive weeds which are becoming more prevalent on the Lake Kununurra foreshore. Ruchira Somaweera, PhD candidate from University of Sydney, discussed some of the initial findings from his research about the unique characteristics of freshwater crocodiles in the Lake Argyle system and entertained the group with his crocodile catching abilities. Ruth Duncan provided information why the impacts of cane toads on wildlife of Northern Australia are still largely unknown and why a community biodiversity monitoring program like the Kimberley Toad Busters 'What's in Your Backyard?' is critical to answering these types of questions. Response from many SEEKS members has been brilliant, the KTB species identification cards are very popular and more Biodiversity Kits are being prepared for distribution.

The group conducted their own 'What's in Your Backyard?' survey from the Argyle Dam Wall to Elephant Rock on Lake Kununurra. The prize for the most species identified, a KTB cap, was hotly contested by children and adults alike. The winner of the event was Mali Strutt with 40 different species! Mali was very clever at using the resources available, e.g. Grant the Triple J Skipper to assist her in identifying all her species. Well done! The Robinsons came a very close second with 37 species.

SEEKS would like to consider how they can contribute further to the 'What's in Your Backyard?' program. SEEKS has received a Kimberley Toad Busters Biodiversity Kit to accompany them on all future adventures and Kimberley Toad Busters look forward to receiving their 'What's in Your Backyard?' surveys. Thanks to Katya Tripp and Shelly Madden for organizing the afternoon. It was brilliant, a great mix of adults and children of all ages.

### Wyndham District High School students learn about the Kimberley food web, native frogs and cane toads

Although cane toads are not expected to arrive in Wyndham this year students at Wyndham District High School were keen to learn anything they could about cane toads and their impact on the Kimberley. Already teachers have reported children finding frogs in the yard and asking if it is a cane toad. Kimberley Toad Buster, Ruth Duncan, visited each class providing two different activity sessions. The first session held on Wednesday 28th October gave the children an introduction to cane toads and how to identify them from a range of native frogs. The children were given a chance to show what they had learned by creating their own cane toads out of Play-doh. The results were impressive with some very realistic creations sporting the key features of the bony ridge above the eye, large poison glands, and bumpy/warty skin on their backs and sitting up proud. Children were encouraged to take the toad's home to show family and friends how they can identify cane toads.



**Photo.** Wyndham students made some highly realistic cane toads, sporting the key features of a bony ridge above the eye, large poison glands and bumpy warty skin.

The second session held on Tuesday 2nd December provided the children with information about the global biodiversity crisis. It is estimated the current rate of extinction of species is the greatest since the loss of dinosaurs (ICUN, 2009). The impact of cane toads on Kimberley wildlife was then discussed. Cane toads have three major impacts on wildlife; 1) death to predators, 2) opportunistic predation of birds, mammals, reptiles and frogs and 3) potentially the greatest impact is competition of food (invertebrates). Children then created their own Kimberley food web showing importance of invertebrates in converting energy from plants into energy for all animals supported by the food web, including humans! Every species of plant in the Kimberley can be eaten by an invertebrate; they are the driver of the Kimberley food web. The activity and use of photos of local species was highly popular. Children were encouraged fill in their own 'What's in Your Backyard?' data forms at home.



**Photo.** Liz Cox admiring the Kimberley food web constructed by Wyndham Year 6 and 7 students.



**Photo:** Wyndham students admiring Kimberley Toad Buster Species ID cards. A set has been provided to the school.

Many thanks to Liz Cox for inviting Kimberley Toad Busters to Wyndham District High School. Liz has already begun keeping an eye on wildlife seen in her own backyard in Wyndham. A preserved cane toad (safely enclosed in a jar) and a Kimberley Toad Busters Biodiversity

Kit were provided to the school to help with any future cane toad and Kimberley Biodiversity education. We look forward to providing additional educational material and activities in the future.

## Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley School Holiday Program

On Monday 5th and Friday 9th of October Kimberley Toad Busters joined the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley to provide two separate activities for the school holiday program. The first activity on Monday was an afternoon 'What's in Your Backyard?' Biodiversity Survey. The survey was planned to take place at Thompson Springs, however due to popularity, with 16 children attending, it was quickly decided sites along Lake Argyle road and Lake Argyle were more appropriate for the Kimberley Toad Busters bus! Each child was brilliant in looking carefully for animals at each site, a full range of animals from invertebrates (incl. St Johns Cross, Golden Orb Spiders, Butterflies), Burrowing frog; birds (incl. Rock Pigeons, Sacred Herron's), mammals (Euro and Agile Wallabies) and fish (incl. Seven Spotted Rifle Fish, Rainbow Fish, Silver Cobbler) were recorded. For the afternoon over 30 different species were recorded. When the children were asked 'how could we improve the afternoon for next school holiday program?', after the ideas of motorbike races, basketball competitions and waterskiing were dually aired, the common response was, to just go bush again. This is one thing Kimberley Toad Busters can always guarantee!



**Photo:** The hardworking biodiversity surveyors enjoy a moment with Ben Scott-Virtue acting like cane toads.



**Photo:** Children discovered a beautifully kept bower of a Great Bower bird (*Chlamydera nuchalis*) as part of the SWEK School Holiday Program 'What's in your Backyard?' Biodiversity Survey

The activity held on Friday afternoon in comparison was much more leisurely with four children attending. The activity was based at Kununurra Youth Centre and children learned about cane toads and the native frogs in Kununurra. Kununurra just happens to have over twenty species of native frogs, one of the highest numbers in Australia! One species, the Flat-headed frog, was thought to have become extinct when Lake Argyle became flooded. Fortunately healthy populations have now been found on Lake Argyle and around Kununurra. The children were fantastic at identifying the differences between our native frogs and cane toads. Questions about cane toads were thick and fast, much more than anticipated for a small group, some very serious thinkers were present!

The group was then joined by Benny, Jeanette Buckland, Kimberley vet Sarah Brett and her pet Burrowing Frog to create Play-doh cane toads and other favorite Kimberley wildlife species that will be impacted by cane toads including Freshwater Crocodiles and Monitors. The photos speak for themselves. Many thanks to Jeanette, Sarah and Benny for assisting for the afternoon. Many thanks also to Ken and Wayne of SWEK for inviting Kimberley Toad Busters to participate in the School Holiday Program for a second time.



**Photos:** Some of the fantastic cane toad and Kimberley wildlife creations from the SWEK School Holiday Program.

## Year 10 KDHS students experience work at KTB Headquarters

For the first time Kimberley Toad Busters has been in a position to accept work experience students at the KTB headquarters after working through details with careers teacher Sarah Bolland at Kununurra District High School. Daniel, Kalin and Anthony joined Ben Scott-Virtue, Ruth Duncan, Kim Scott and a host of volunteers in a week of work experience. The students had a couple of exciting evening cane toad busts with Ben, finding the first toads present at Cockatoo Springs 30 km from Kununurra, trialing euthanasia methods and participating in cane toad dissections. However it was not all fun and games, the students were responsible for packing all cane toad busting equipment for each night and performing pre-trip checks for vehicles. The students also assisted in 'What's in Your Backyard?' Biodiversity Surveys for Thompson's springs and Sandalwood Sanctuary including species identification and the never ending task of data entry!

Many thanks to Daniel, Kalin and Anthony for helping out at Kimberley Toad Busters and Sarah Bolland for arranging the work experience hosting. The boys were brilliant, and have certainly set a high standard for work experience students at Kimberley Toad Busters.

## Update on Kimberley Toad Busters Biodiversity Kits

The 'What's in your Backyard?' Biodiversity Kits are flying off the shelf faster than they are being made! Kits have been provided to Wyndham District High School, Kununurra Library, Kununurra District High School, SEEKS and one is available for all cane toad busts with Kimberley Toad Busters. Jeanette Buckland and Norma Wainwright have stepped in to help with proofing and making the species ID cards for the Kits. Without the marvellous work of volunteers such as Jeanette and Norma we would not be able to cope with the demand. Species ID cards are now complete for all frogs and reptiles, with fish, birds and mammals nearing completion. Currently 350 species of ID cards have been created, when complete for all vertebrate species the total will be just under 600! Please let us know if you are interested in having a Kit at home to help with your biodiversity surveys. If there is enough demand, the Kits will have to be professionally printed. Norma, Jeanette and myself will bail up eventually. 1 laminator has already!

For those with internet access, species ID cards are kindly being loaded on to the 'What's in Your Backyard?' website by the Kimberley Toad Busters volunteer webmaster, Dean Goodgame.

An essential part of the species ID cards are excellent photos suitable for identification. To complete this for so many species we rely on people donating photos. To date there has been brilliant response with donations from right across Australia. Every photo is greatly appreciated with copyright acknowledged. To donate Kimberley wildlife photographs of your own please send to [photo@canetoads.com.au](mailto:photo@canetoads.com.au). We are currently desperately seeking shots of all mammals, a large number of birds and a BIG WHOPPA Barramundi for the fish cards.

## Announcements...

Kimberley Toad Busters is happy to announce Argyle Diamond Mines Underground Teams support for the 'What's in Your Backyard?' program with the donation of a vehicle. This donation enables the 'What's in Your Backyard?' program to be taken to the remotest of communities and surveys conducted in the hardest to reach places right across the Kimberley.

Kimberley Toad Busters have donated of a large range of Biodiversity Reference books to the Wyndham Community Library. Over 20 books are to be donated and will be showing up on the shelves before Christmas and just in time to help with 'What's in Your Backyard?' Biodiversity Surveys over the Christmas school holidays! Kimberley Toad Busters have also donated a similar Reference collection to Kununurra Community Library earlier in the year. A Reference collection also exists at Kimberley Toad Busters Headquarters. The cost of the reference collections has been met through donations made by the public. KTB will direct future public donations to purchase similar Biodiversity reference collections for libraries and schools in Halls Creek, Fitzroy, Derby and Broome.

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