

WA cane toad update



Department of Environment and Conservation

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Dept of Environment and Conservation, Western Australia

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Government delivers \$1.2 million to KTB

Toadbusting exercises have been stepped up as cane toads move closer to the Western Australian border.

Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) officers and community groups have had great results from recent toadbusting trips into the Northern Territory, with tens of thousands of toads removed during the latter part of the dry season.

Deputy Premier Dr Kim Hames and Environment Minister Donna Faragher travelled to the Kimberley and into the Northern Territory in October 2008 to follow through with an election commitment and to experience first-hand toadbusting on the front line.

During the trip, Mrs Faragher reaffirmed the State Government's election commitment to provide \$1.2 million to support the fight against cane toads. The funding is being provided through DEC and gives the Kimberley Toad Busters (KTB) funding certainty for its field work over the next four years. The first payment of \$339,500 has been made to KTB.

Following the announcement, the Deputy Premier and Environment Minister headed across the border to do some toadbusting. About 3000 toads were caught during the bust. The Minister's team put in a stellar performance, catching approximately 600 cane toads.

Since then, DEC officers and community groups have continued with their field trips during the wet season, to keep track of the fast movers on the cane toad front line as they head west.

More funding for the battle against cane toads

Stop the Toad Foundation (STTF) has received \$150,000 under the Federal Government's competitive grants process.

The project proposes to deliver two key outcomes:

- 1) The Great Toad Muster 2009, which will include exclusion fencing around key water locations on a bigger scale. (STTF is planning to run a series of smaller operations on several properties over an extended period of six to eight weeks.)
- 2) National Eradication Week, which will promote a coordinated attack aimed at removing the toads from habitats, households and communities in the Northern Territory, Queensland and northern NSW for one week in the dry season.



Pets and cane toads – not a good mix

- Cane toad poisoning can occur when a dog or cat picks a toad up in its mouth. Small dog breeds, such as Jack Russells and Silky and Fox Terriers, account for three-quarters of poisoning cases.
- Symptoms of pet poisoning may include drooling, shaking, profuse salivation, difficulty breathing, staggering, vomiting and lack of coordination, hindquarter weakness, a fixed trance-like stare and seizures or convulsions.
- Convulsions are usually fatal unless urgent veterinary attention is sought.
- Cane toads are more active at night – do not allow pets to roam unrestrained at night and keep them indoors overnight where possible.
- If a domestic pet bites a cane toad, all traces of the poison must be removed from the animal's teeth and gums – flush the pet's mouth and face with lots of running water using a jet of water from a hose, where possible, directed forward out of the animal's mouth, not down into its throat. Tilt the animal's head down so that the animal does not choke, also wash the eyes.

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Snapshot from the front line



Western Australians need to prepare for the arrival of cane toads, which are now closer than ever to the WA border.

DEC's cane toad project manager in Kununurra, Errol Kruger, said he expected the toads to reach WA (in small numbers) sometime this wet season.

"The length and severity of this wet season will impact on the westward movement of the cane toad front," Mr Kruger said.

"If this wet is average, then it is more than likely that cane toads will not arrive in Kununurra until 2010, however, if we have a prolonged and extreme wet season cane toads could reach Kununurra by as early as April 2009."

New stakeholder reference group

DEC has convened a cane toad stakeholder reference group, comprising State and local government, community action groups, tourism and industry sectors and Indigenous organisations that have an interest in the management of cane toads in WA. The group provides a forum for information exchange and collaboration on cane toad management initiatives.

A key role of the group is to provide advice and guidance on the development of the new *State Cane Toad Strategy* and facilitate collaboration and coordination of the key actions outlined in the strategy. This document will replace the draft strategy that was developed by the then Department of Conservation and Land Management and Department of Agriculture in 2005 and has guided actions under the State Cane Toad Initiative to date.

The updated strategy will provide guidance and recommendations for the implementation of key actions throughout the 2008-09 wet season.



Cane toads take over Ballyangle waterhole in the Northern Territory in November 2008.

Cane toads invade waterhole

A waterhole 140km east of the WA-NT border has become infested with cane toads. Ballyangle waterhole, affectionately known as 'The Croc Tank', on Auvergne Station, once sustained a thriving population of freshwater crocodiles, but cane toads have severely impacted this population since arriving about two years ago.

DEC's cane toad technical officer David Woods said an initial monitoring trip to the site in September 2006 revealed just two toads and an abundance of crocodiles.

"A year later we returned to Ballyangle and found a significant number of cane toads, and destroyed about 600 in under an hour," Mr Woods said.

DEC officers conducted a third trip in November 2008 and found the waterhole swarming with cane toads.

"We destroyed 2000 toads on that particular night, but it didn't even make a dent in the population," Mr Woods said.

"Surprisingly there were still 53 freshwater crocodiles living in this body of water, but that is significantly lower than when we first visited the site and there was evidence of many crocodile mortalities.

"Most of the toads were very thin and five were autopsied, and nothing was found in their stomachs, so things were looking pretty grim for them."

Apart from the Baines River, Ballyangle waterhole is the only permanent body of water in the area, and DEC officers believe this is why the toads migrated to the waterhole.

"There has been a considerable amount of rain in the area since the site was visited and it is possible that the toads have dispersed to other points where water is starting to fill low-lying areas," Mr Woods said.

Did you know:

- Cane toads were introduced to Australia in 1935, in an unsuccessful attempt to control the sugar cane beetle. The toads have since become a major pest.
- Female cane toads can lay 8000 to 35,000 eggs at a time and can produce two clutches a year.
- Eggs hatch within 72 hours.
- Both eggs and tadpoles are toxic to many animals.
- Cane toads are toxic at all stages of their life cycle.
- A toad kept as a pet in Sweden is listed by the Guinness Book of Records as the largest recorded specimen. It reportedly weighs 2.65kg and measures 38cm from snout to vent, or 54cm when fully extended.

What to do if you find a cane toad

- Take children and pets away from the vicinity of the cane toad.
- Wear rubber gloves and have a cloth bag or a sealed container (with air holes) ready to put the cane toad in.
- Be careful when handling cane toads: toxin is produced in their shoulder glands and is present in the skin of the back. If the toxin gets in your eyes, nose or mouth seek medical attention.
- People can then transport suspected cane toads in cloth bags or containers (with air holes) to their local DEC office for identification. Alternatively, send a digital photograph to a DEC office via email, so it can be correctly identified.
- WA residents or visitors who suspect they may have found a cane toad should isolate it and report the sighting immediately by phoning Freecall 1800 084 881.

Additional information on cane toad poisoning is available from the 24 hour Poisons Information Line on 13 11 26.

Funding boost for Cane Toad Research Program

DEC has allocated \$300,000 to the University of Sydney to continue groundbreaking research in the fight against cane toads.

The two-year program undertaken through Professor Rick Shine's Cane Toad Research Program, based near Darwin, builds on a three-year research collaboration between DEC and the University of Sydney, where trials have been conducted to determine which native species can resist toads and which are most at risk.

The new research will investigate if a South American lungworm (a parasite found in cane toads in Australia) can be used as a weapon in the fight against the invasive species.

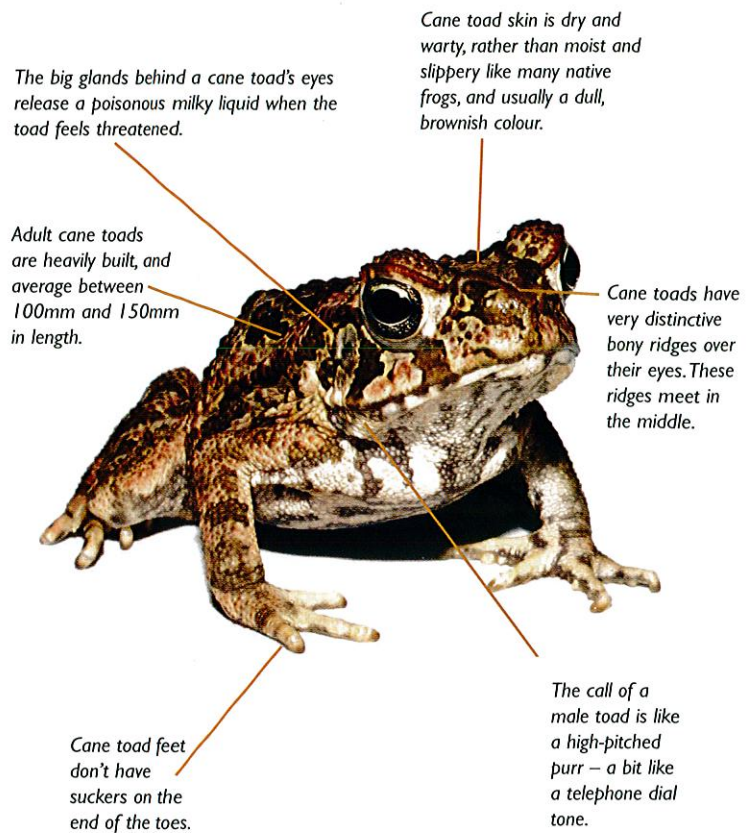
It follows successful investigations by University of Sydney researchers who discovered the lungworm has the potential to reduce toad numbers and fitness.

The program will evaluate if the parasite can be safely used to control toad populations without impacting on native frog species and will involve a series of trials to infect sub-populations of toads.

Mistaken identity

Up to two-thirds of suspected toads turn out to be harmless native frogs, so it is important to correctly identify them.

Here are some tell-tale features:



Welcome to the new Environment Minister

HON DONNA FARAGHER JP MLC

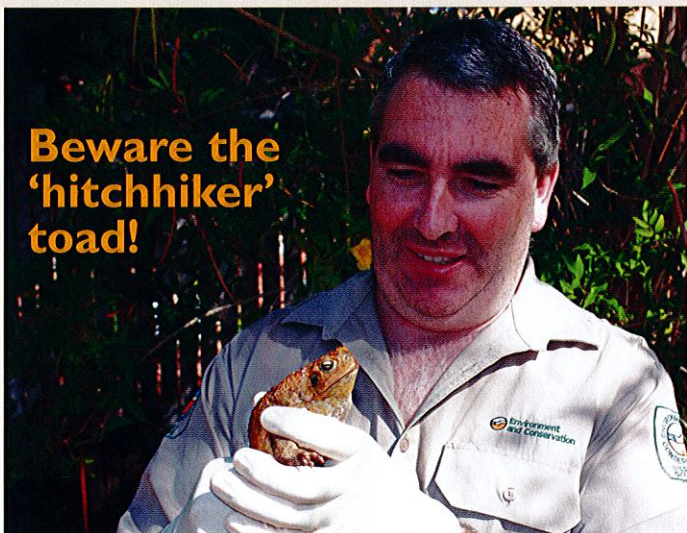
Donna Faragher was sworn in as Minister for Environment and Youth in September 2008.

Mrs Faragher is excited about the opportunities her new role presents, as she recognises the critical importance of preserving the Western Australian environment for present and future generations.

Before becoming a Minister, Mrs Faragher was the shadow spokesperson for Disability Services, Youth and Drug Abuse Strategy.

She started her political career as a policy and parliamentary adviser to the former Federal Minister for Justice and Customs, and a policy adviser and research officer to the Federal Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training.

The Minister is a graduate of The University of Western Australia and holds a Master of Education with Honours. She has also completed a Graduate Diploma in Education in the areas of school psychology and teaching and a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Psychology.



Beware the 'hitchhiker' toad!

DEC Regional Wildlife Officer Brett Lewis with the adult cane toad that was discovered at a Karratha business in November 2008. It's believed the toad may have hitched a ride on a pallet of plants delivered from Darwin.

Introducing Corrin Everitt

DEC's newly appointed community coordinator for the State Cane Toad Initiative, Corrin Everitt, has been living in the Kimberley for the past six years and is passionate about the lifestyle and landscape that the Kimberley offers.



As community coordinator, Corrin will be helping coordinate and encourage information exchange on cane toad management and control across the whole Kimberley community. She will be working with local government, State Government agencies, industry and community group representatives, to encourage collaboration on cane toad issues.

One of Corrin's main priorities will be assisting with the development and implementation of the State Cane Toad Strategy and in providing advice to stakeholders on cane toad management issues.

With an Applied Science degree in Ecology, Corrin is well placed to understand the science behind cane toad issues and has worked in natural resource management as a regional facilitator for the Kimberley, landcare facilitator for the Kimberley and project officer for the Rangelands Natural Resource Management Coordinating Group. Through these positions she has gained an understanding of a wide range of natural resource management issues and projects.

Corrin is looking forward to working collaboratively with the Kimberley community to implement the actions identified in the *State Cane Toad Strategy*, as well as supporting the efforts of DEC, the Kimberley Toad Busters and Stop the Toad Foundation in their operations to deal with the advance of cane toads towards WA.

For cane toad information on the web, log on to www.dec.wa.gov.au/canetoads

