



# WA cane toad update



Department of  
Environment and Conservation  
Our environment, our future

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## Poisonous pest reaches WA

In February, one of the world's most invasive species made its way onto Western Australian soil despite enormous government and community efforts to slow down its forward march.

Quarantine officials at the Department of Agriculture and Food detected the first known cane toad to hop across the WA-NT border about 40km east of Kununurra on Friday 27 February 2009.

The officers reported hearing the calling of toads at the border that week, indicating their imminent arrival.

The arrival of the poisonous pests in WA received nationwide interest.

Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) Cane Toad Operations Manager Errol Kruger said heavy rainfall early in the wet season propelled their movement across the WA border.

"We knew they were coming, it was inevitable," Errol said.

"Cane toads can travel about three kilometres in one night during the wet season, and they have been moving at about 50 to 80km a year."

Following their arrival, Environment Minister Donna Faragher urged the community to maintain the fight against cane toads.

"It's been an unprecedented joint Government and community effort to stop the toads even before they crossed the border and it has involved hundreds of volunteers alongside DEC wildlife and conservation officers."

The Minister said the issue needed to be tackled on multiple fronts and work continued in research, quarantine and surveillance, biodiversity protection and public awareness programs.

**Toad reaches the WA border**

**Cane toads cross the WA border**

**Cane toads steal a march on WA**

### Have your say...

The WA community is being encouraged to have their say on the future management of cane toads, following the release of the State Government's *Draft Cane Toad Strategy for Western Australia 2009-19*.

This strategy aims to provide an integrated response to reduce the impact of the invasive species on biodiversity, social and economic values.

The six-week public comment period closes 5pm, Thursday 25 June 2009 and submissions can be emailed to [corrin.everitt@dec.wa.gov.au](mailto:corrin.everitt@dec.wa.gov.au) or sent to DEC's Kununurra office, Lot 248, Ivanhoe Road, Kununurra.

The full version of the draft strategy is available online at [www.dec.wa.gov.au/canetoads](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/canetoads).





# Beekeepers beware!

If the opportunity arises, cane toads will feed persistently and voraciously on honeybees. Honeybee colonies can be weakened when these pests congregate near apiary sites where they snap up bees at hive entrances.

Cane toads feed mostly at night. During the day they hide in small holes, under logs and hives.

Losses can be reduced considerably by placing hives on stands about 60cm from the ground. Beekeepers have found that collapsible hive stands are suitable for this purpose. The stands can be assembled and dismantled easily in the field and the components can be easily packed for transport.

Beekeepers should also carefully check their hives before moving them out of cane toad-infested areas to avoid the pest being transported in bee hives to other areas.



# Drop-off zones

The establishment of cane toad disposal sites in Kununurra was another recent initiative in the fight against the invasive species.

With up to two-thirds of suspected cane toad sightings turning out to be native frogs, communities are encouraged to transport suspected toads to a drop-off point for identification.

The toads can be placed into a chute, which leads to a specially designed holding cage that is fitted with a shade cloth and water.

Cane toads are euthanased and disposed of at the designated shire landfill pit by an authorised officer, while any native frogs are released into suitable environments around the Kimberley.

The drop-off sites, and the pit for disposing toads, are part of a range of new measures implemented by the State Government to help the community deal with the invasive species.



# Arming the community

## Information packs

Kimberley residents have received extra ammunition in the fight against cane toads with Cane Toad Packs available.

The pack contains:

- a series of information brochures that provide valuable advice on keeping children and pets safe from cane toads and how to correctly identify and dispose of live toads;
- stickers and fridge magnets identifying six of WA's native frogs, which are most commonly mistaken as cane toads;
- database forms to record cane toad sightings;
- a bag with air holes to transport toads in; and
- plastic gloves to pick up cane toads.

the Packs have been developed by DEC to arm the community with information and equipment to manage cane toads in their area.

Packs are available from the Kununurra Visitor Centre and the local the DEC office.



## MG Rangers in action



*The Miriung-Gajerrong (MG) rangers undertake toad busting activities as part of their training. These skills will help protect the new MG conservation reserves by minimising the impacts of cane toads.*

# Rats turn the tables on cane toads

Scientists are a step closer to understanding the impact of cane toads on WA's native fauna with early findings of laboratory based research proving to be more encouraging than anticipated.

Of 10 mammals identified as likely to be at risk from cane toads, none have so far died as a result of encounters with toads during lab experiments at the University of Sydney facility at Fogg Dam in the Northern Territory.



The native grassland melomys used in the trial flipped a cane toad onto its back to avoid being poisoned. (Photo taken by Jonno Webb from the University of Sydney)

DEC Research Scientist David Pearson said they found some surprising results during their trials.

“Native rock rats, for example, avoid cane toads altogether. So the cane toad may not be a significant threat to that species,” he said.

“One species of marsupial carnivore when offered a cane toad, bit the cane toad on the snout, presumably tasted the bufotoxins, and spat the toad out.

“It learnt very quickly and subsequently, if offered a cane toad it would rush out, investigate and reject it. This was a most encouraging finding.

“At the other extreme, one native rodent grabbed the cane toad, flipped it over and ate the stomach, avoiding the poison glands.”

Dr Pearson said the aim of the research was to ascertain which mammal and reptile species' would be most impacted by cane toads. The research will be used to help identify priority biodiversity areas in the east Kimberley for protection.

## Is it a toad?

Everyone needs to be on the lookout for cane toads, especially hitchhiker toads. However, up to two thirds of suspected toads turn out to be harmless native frogs, so it is important to correctly identify them.

### Cane toad

Cane toad skin is dry and warty, rather than moist and slippery like many native frogs, and usually a dull, brownish colour.

The big glands on the cane toad's shoulder release a poisonous milky substance when the toad feels threatened.

Cane toads have a very distinctive bony 'm'-shaped ridge over their nose. These ridges meet in the middle.



Adult cane toads are heavily built, and average between 100mm and 150mm in length.

Cane toad feet don't have suckers on the end of their toes.

The call of a male toad is like a guttural trill.

### Native giant frog

Smoother, moist skin

Eye stripe from nostril to tympanum

Longer, pointed snout

Fold of skin

Tympanum (ear)



If you see a cane toad:

- Take pets away from the vicinity and make sure children are supervised.
- Wear rubber or gardening gloves and safety glasses.
- Carefully pick up the cane toad by the back legs and put it in a plastic bag or container with air holes and a small amount of water.
- Transport the suspected cane toad to one of the drop-off points where it will be identified and humanely euthanased.
- Sterilise hands and other items that have come in contact with the toad with antiseptic wash.

**Remember, cane toad toxin is poisonous to humans and animals.**

## Two thumbs up for community effort

The fight against cane toads has been an ongoing community effort. The Kununurra-based Kimberley Toad Busters have caught, measured, recorded and dispatched 354,916 mature cane toads and millions of eggs.

The main focus for the Perth-based Stop the Toad Foundation has been its annual dry season 'Great Toad Muster'. The muster occurs in the late dry season, when volunteers can take advantage of the toad's requirement for water to manually collect and dispose of cane toads.

By putting the cane toad issue in the spotlight, both groups have helped raise community awareness about the threat posed by toads and sustained the huge effort by volunteers to tackle this threat.



# Introducing the Kimberley Regional Cane Toad Team

The Regional Cane Toad Team has been a driving force in the ongoing fight against toads.

The group has been operational since 2005 and current team members include Errol Kruger, David Woods, Craig Mills, Sandy Fleisher, Jai Latham, and Corrin Everitt (DEC Community Coordinator).

Over the years, the team's program has focused on:

- fighting the entry and establishment of cane toads in WA;
- identifying and protecting biodiversity assets at greatest risk from cane toads;
- raising public awareness of the cane toad threat; and
- ensuring effective statewide coordination of cane toad initiatives.

The team also participates in fauna surveys of areas in the east Kimberley, assists with front line surveillance by quad bikes and on foot, trials different control methods, including cane toad traps, carries out quarantine inspections at the border checkpoint and trucking yards, and liaises with community groups as to the location of toads.

Field Officer David Woods said the team worked in an area of approximately 66,000 square kilometres, which is about the same size as Tasmania.

"This is one of the most remote parts of Australia," he said.

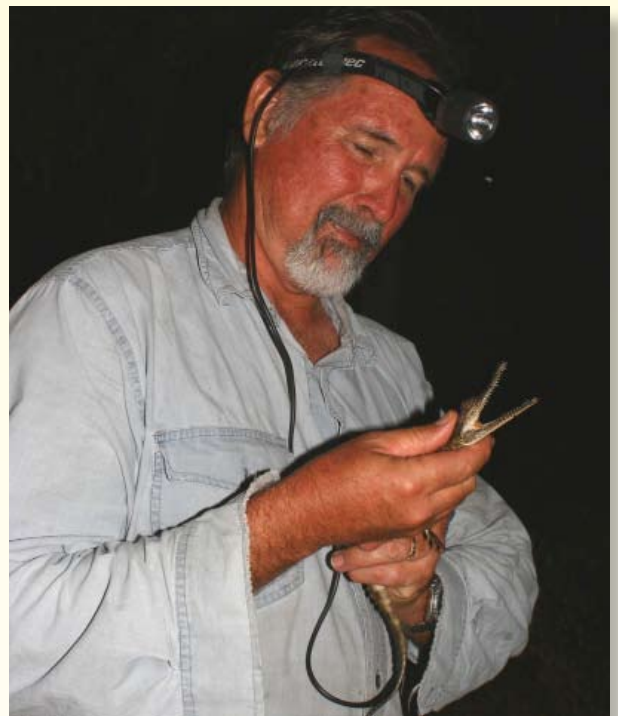
"The job has its benefits in that the team gets to travel to some pretty amazing places and see things that most people would never get the chance to see. We also get to meet some really interesting and unique people who have plenty of stories to tell.

"However, there is a downside to the work as the team needs to keep their wits about them, as much of the country they explore has numerous creatures that aren't very people-friendly."

David said wild cattle, buffalo, venomous snakes and crocodiles were the major threats, but even the climate needed to be taken into consideration when out in the field.

"The east Kimberley experiences temperatures up to 50 degrees celsius with up to 100 per cent humidity during the wet season, and unsealed roads can be treacherous even for the experienced," he said.

The Regional Cane Toad Team is reviewing the program to identify future direction and priorities, including front line surveillance, biodiversity baseline surveys, quarantine, assisting with research projects that are looking at the toad lung worm and native animal taste aversion, and community education.



## Errol Kruger

“ My role with the Regional Cane Toad Team is that of operations manager and I am responsible for the day to day management of the technical officers involved in the cane toad program. I am also responsible for the development and management of the regional cane toad budget. I liaise with community groups and other stakeholders with an interest in the cane toad issue.

I have been with the Cane Toad Program for three years. Before this, I was with the Department of Agriculture and Food in the position of Regional Invasive Species Manager (Northern Agriculture Region). I have been involved in invasive species management for a period of 21 years. ”



## Sandy Fleisher

“ I joined the Cane Toad Team in Kununurra in 2006 and I have not looked back since.

My work allows me to travel and explore the Kimberley and the Northern Territory in search of cane toads. The country here is very rugged and the weather conditions can be extremely harsh at times. It is definitely not everybody's cup of tea, but for me the excitement of exploring this remote part of the world is just the ticket.

I have many roles here on the team and my work can be very diverse. Predominately, I am a field officer searching for toads along the ever moving 'front line'. Then there is the scientific role, which sees me participate in biological, fauna and crocodile surveys.

I am also the handler of Nifty, the one and only cane toad detector dog. Nifty is a particularly smart and clever Belgian shepherd dog and we use her in quarantine, field work and cane toad education. I absolutely love working with Nifty and the rest of the Regional Cane Toad Team. ”