

Conservation officers monitor Kimberley fauna



DEC scientists together with staff from the State Cane Toad Initiative, Miriuwung Gajerrong rangers and other DEC staff have been working to develop species lists as part of the east Kimberley biodiversity monitoring project. The team has been assisted by the Kununurra District High School's new Bush Rangers unit.

They have recorded the animal species that are currently present in the new Miriuwung Gajerrong joint management reserves to provide baseline data to help monitor the impact of cane toads when they arrive, and to observe how native species deal with the invasive pest.

MG ranger Leslie releases a rock wallaby at Ningbing Range.



Harold from the Kununurra Bush Rangers unit assisting technical officer Bill Stewart to release a rock wallaby.

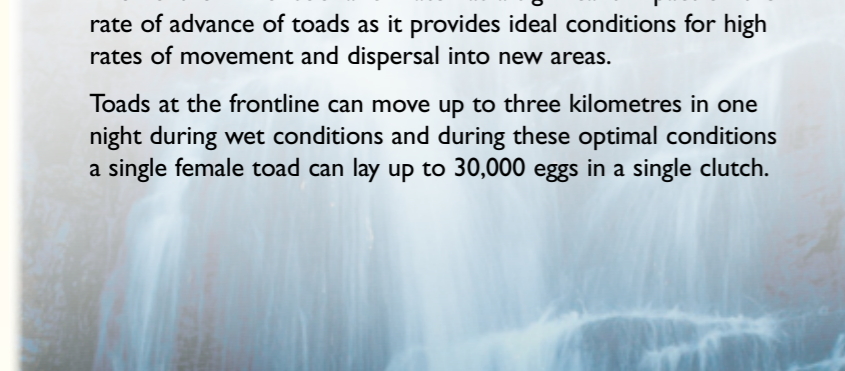
Wet season nears

The Kimberley region is preparing for the upcoming wet season which generally occurs between December and April.

This will be the first wet season since cane toads crossed the WA-NT border.

The northern monsoonal climate has a significant impact on the rate of advance of toads as it provides ideal conditions for high rates of movement and dispersal into new areas.

Toads at the frontline can move up to three kilometres in one night during wet conditions and during these optimal conditions a single female toad can lay up to 30,000 eggs in a single clutch.



Communities lend a helping hand during annual muster

Volunteers were out in force between 12 September and 12 October for the fourth Great Toad Muster.

More than 40,000 toads were collected during the muster.

The event is organised annually by Stop the Toad Foundation, which relies heavily on volunteers from all over the country to help collect and remove thousands of cane toads from the frontline.



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Funding boost

The Federal Government has allocated more than \$1 million, under the Caring for Our Country program, to help slow the advance of cane toads into WA and other parts of the country.

In WA, Perth-based community group Stop the Toad Foundation will receive \$204,000 for community control activities and Kimberley Toad Busters (KTB) will receive \$200,000 for control activities, research and a forum in Kununurra.

The funding is in addition to the \$1.2 million which is being allocated to KTB over four years by the State Government.



WA cane toad update



Department of Environment and Conservation



November 2009

Final State cane toad strategy released

The final Cane Toad Strategy for Western Australia 2009-19 has been released.

The document was prepared by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) in consultation with a Kununurra-based Stakeholder Reference Group.

The State Government received 22 submissions from stakeholders, businesses and individuals on the draft document, after it was released for a six-week public comment period in May.

Environment Minister Donna Faragher said the State Government recognised the need for a new focus on cane toads after they crossed the border into WA earlier this year.

"The final strategy focuses on a number of objectives for managing cane toads in WA over the next decade and aims to minimise their impacts and implement long-term management solutions," she said.

"Our priorities for this coming wet season include carrying out surveillance work to monitor and map cane toad populations

at the frontline, working with community groups to develop and implement action plans for priority areas and cane toad education awareness in local communities."

The Minister said feedback from the public recommended that the final strategy should be action-oriented and be produced as a document that could be updated readily as new information came to hand.

"I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this strategy, particularly those who made submissions on the draft," Mrs Faragher said.

To view the final strategy visit www.dec.wa.gov.au/canetoads.



Cane toad lessons for students and tourists



Jai Latham and Corrin Everitt demonstrate how to radio track large pythons.

what they should do if they saw a toad.

"We encourage the public to report any sightings of suspected live cane toads and to transport them to their nearest DEC office," she said.

"That way, DEC officers can correctly identify the animal. Too often harmless native frogs are mistaken for cane toads and we want to prevent this from happening."

Corrin said the trip was well received by everyone.

"We spoke to a variety of people including staff at tourist information offices to demonstrate ways to correctly identify toads and how to remove them safely from the environment," she said.

"We also traveled to Purnululu National Park to speak to visitors about the issue and to address any questions or concerns they may have had.

"Pre-primary school students in Kununurra were also grateful that we

visited them to discuss cane toads. They were particularly impressed by radio tracking demonstrations, which staff do out in the field to monitor the impact of cane toad populations on native fauna."



Cane toad operations team leader Dave Woods with pre-primary students at Kununurra District School, during a cane toad awareness visit.

Cane toads hitch a ride across WA



DEC is reminding people to remain vigilant, following a number of suspected 'hitchhiker' cane toads that were discovered recently in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions.

In August, a cane toad was found near a cricket pitch in the recreational area at Gap Ridge Village, which is the accommodation site for Woodside's Pluto LNG project on the Burrup Peninsula.

The live animal was captured by camp residents and taken to DEC's Karratha office, where wildlife officers confirmed it was an adult cane toad.

Nine days later, the owner of Lake Argyle Village in the Kimberley discovered a juvenile cane toad on his front doorstep near the caravan park.

In September, another toad was located outside a house in South Hedland.

Cane toad operations team leader Dave Woods praised everyone involved for swiftly contacting the department after locating the toads.

"Quick thinking by residents meant that the areas could be thoroughly inspected for other possible toads, and I thank them for acting so quickly," he said.

Dave said cane toads were very good at hiding in small spaces and he believed these toads were inadvertently transported here by road freight, caravans or other vehicles travelling from interstate.

"That is why thorough checks of vehicles, caravans, camping equipment, pot plants, personal baggage, and even shoes – where toads have been known to hide – is important when people head to WA from areas where cane toads are known to live."

Quarantine inspectors at the Department of Agriculture and Food detected the cane toad front's arrival at the WA-NT border about 40km east of Kununurra in February.

Anyone who suspects they may have found a cane toad should isolate the live animal and report the sighting to DEC immediately on 1800 084 881, or take it to the nearest DEC office.



Check your loads

The commercial transport industry is being encouraged to carry out thorough checks for any cane toads that may be hiding in rail and road freight from interstate, particularly in pallets, before entering WA. In the past, toads have been found in shipments of fruit, poly pipe and fittings, and machinery.

State Cane Toad Initiative coordinator Corrin Everitt urged drivers to be on the lookout for the invasive pest.

"While cane toads are prevalent in Queensland, New South Wales and the Northern Territory, the vast majority of WA remains free of toads," she said.

"Transport industry members have an integral role as environmental stewards in ensuring that cane toads are not inadvertently brought over from other toad-infested areas.

"It's also very important for industry members to report any toads that slip through all the checks and make it into WA. This will result in the removal of the pests, reducing their rate of spread and drivers will also know they have done their bit to stop the invader."



Scientists make inroads with cane toad research

Researchers at the University of Sydney are continuing to investigate biological measures to control cane toad populations.

Professor Rick Shine and his group, 'Team Bufo', are progressing with trials into the biology of cane toads, their ecological impact and control methods.

While the team's work is mostly based at a field station near Darwin, they are spending more and more time close to the current toad front in WA.

Graduate student Ruchira Somaweera is based at Lake Argyle and works closely with DEC technical officers and community groups to study the impact of toads on freshwater crocodiles, while fellow team member Dr Ligia Pizzatto has been exploring whether juvenile native frogs are vulnerable to the species of lungworm that toads have brought to Australia.

Professor Shine said so far things were looking good.

"The parasites manage to infect many of the native frogs, but don't seem able to build a persistent infection, or have much effect on the young frogs," he said.

"This is encouraging for plans to use the worms as a biocontrol for toads, though we still need to check a few more species of frogs."

Professor Shine's group also received a major funding boost recently, with the Federal Government allocating \$621,000 for further research into two projects.

The first project involves investigating how chemicals produced by cane toad tadpoles can be used to help control toad numbers.

"One chemical frightens toad tadpoles and causes many of them to die while another attracts them. So if we can work out exactly what chemicals are involved, we might be able to use those chemicals to kill the toad tadpoles or attract them to traps," Professor Shine said.

"The big advantage is that the tadpoles of native frogs are not affected by either of these pheromones."

The second project funded by the Federal Government will follow up the group's work on changing the behaviour of northern quolls to help them avoid cane toads.

"These iconic marsupials are disappearing from their former range but preliminary studies suggest that if given a chance they readily learn to leave toads alone and therefore can survive even in areas infested by toads," he said.



Dr Ligia Pizzatto conducting laboratory trials on cane toads (Photo by Christa Beckmann).



University of Sydney graduate student Ruchira Somaweera with one of the freshwater crocodiles he is studying at Lake Argyle (Photo by Nilu Somaweera).

