

## Are traps the answer?

FogWatch North has been trailing cane toad traps around Darwin for about seven months now. Based on those results they now think trapping will be the key element in cane toad control. Deployed traps rapidly caught most or all the toads in a localised area including any new arrivals. No by-catch of other native animals has been reported so far and it appears the toads happily exist in the trap feeding off insects until collected.

A simple cage trap with a one-way gate, using light to attract insects as bait was used at a wetland near Katherine. It caught 224 cane toads within the first week. In the following six weeks numbers slowly dropped until no cane toads were sighted, in total it trapped 543 toads. Locally the Department of Agriculture is working with the Northern Territory Parks to evaluate how best to use traps. This includes evaluating the finalist's traps that were entered in a Northern Territory trap competition. It is likely that a couple of different traps could be used depending on the type of terrain they will be used in.



A trap in the field complete with light to attract insects and shelter for the toads that are amassed between inspections.



A toad at the entrance of the trap about to enter.



Cooliman Creek prior to Cyclone Ingrid



Cooliman Creek after Cyclone Ingrid



Toads threaten native animals

Presentations at the Cane Toad Forum have clearly shown that many of our native animals will be threatened if cane toads invade the Kimberley Region. In all life stages (adults, juveniles and eggs) cane toads are toxic to many native animals and many species will attempt to eat them. Cane toads will also compete with our natives for food supplies and shelter, predate on other animals and raid nests of goannas, snakes and ground nesting birds. Research in the NT has already shown local extinction of well studied Quoll populations. A survey on freshwater crocodiles indicates a significant change in numbers, distribution, reproductive success and survival rates. It further showed a dramatic reduction of goanna (*Varanus*) densities. All goannas seem to be at risk and there is growing concern about some snakes. There also is a real potential for impacts from cane toads on freshwater turtles, fish, native frogs and any predator birds. (Picture left: Northern Quolls a candidate for local extinction)

## Cyclone Ingrid scours local creeks

In one of the heaviest downpours of a decade or more Cyclone Ingrid has made many of the local creeks barely recognisable. A typical example would be Cooliman Creek, situated on Lake Kununurra the creek used to feature large numbers of figs, Cathormion and Leichardt Pines growing from its banks. The creek is a focal point for both tourist sight seeing boats and locals alike.

Now many of the larger overhanging trees that provide shelter and habitat for animals are gone. It will be interesting to see just how the creek recovers and if opportunist plants like cumbungi move in and repopulate the areas where the trees once were.

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# Ord Land and Water Newsletter

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Editor; Dick Pasfield 08 9169 2222 dick@olw.com.au  
PO Box 1804 KUNUNURRA WA 6743

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## Local Cane Toad Forum Success



One of the more innovative and potential ways to stop toads entering the state that was displayed for the forum participants

## Two days of learning

The Kununurra Cane Toad Forum that was held on the weekend of the 19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> March proved to be a highly successful event and perhaps an important milestone in the fight to stop cane toads overrunning the Kimberley.

In what appeared to be a 'first of' both the community and scientists were saying together that given the level of attention required it just may be possible to stop the toad invasion and with some good luck and even better management the Kimberley just might be kept toad free.

Between two and three hundred locals that passed through the Leisure Centre over the weekend heard a variety of people giving up to date information on the impacts of toads in the Northern Territory, where they are currently situated and the current success in Darwin to stop them by using traps. Also showcased were initiatives such as the cane toad fence and CSIRO's search for a biological control, unfortunately at least ten years away, if it can be found.

The event featured a mixture of both local and interstate speakers on the first day including Malcolm Douglas and Tim Winton. The highlight of the day was the presentation by SEEKES (Save Endangered East Kimberley Species) Proposing a Western Front of toad containment marked by the Victoria River.

The second day featured much of the research work currently being done including the known impacts that toads are having on the ecosystem of the Northern Territory. Some animals such as the Northern Quoll and Gould's Goanna have disappeared from areas where they were once plentiful prior to toads arriving. The two days were wound up with seven recommendations coming from the forum, as seen over the page -

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## Report that toad on 1800 084 881!

There is now a phone number in place for people to report suspected sightings of cane toads. If you think you may have seen a toad in an area they are not known to be in you can ring the above number and report the sighting. This will assist with determining the toad's range and movement.

To crackdown on toads hitching a ride into WA border quarantine inspections have been upgraded. cane toads have been caught by staff manning the station over the past few years. It is expected that these incursions will only increase as they become more prolific in the Territory.

## Recommendations from toad forum

1. The Forum has shown that invasion by cane toads into Western Australia will lead to irreversible loss or damage to ecological, economic, social and cultural values, and every effort must be made to prevent their advance.
2. Given the commitment and desire of the Kimberley community to prevent cane toads reaching Western Australia State and Federal Governments must assist and work in partnership with the broader community in achieving their goal by halting the advance of cane toads before they reach the border.
3. State agencies must engage the Kimberley and broader community in the control of cane toads. Specifically; the Kimberley community and the Kimberley Cane Toad Working Group must be represented on the State Cane Toad Advisory Group.
4. Current funding fails to recognise the imminent threat to Western Australia's cane toad-free status. Substantial, additional and ongoing funding must immediately be made available for monitoring research and control. Furthermore, encouragement should be offered to indigenous communities and the corporate sector to support and apply their knowledge to stopping the cane toad invasion.
5. The Western Australian Government support the submission to have the cane toad listed as a Key Threatening Process under the Commonwealth EPBC Act, and encourage the Federal Government to expedite this listing.
6. Recognise all international, national and state obligations for sustainable management of the Kimberley Region with respect to imminent impacts from cane toads.
7. A biodiversity study of the Kimberley region should be funded in the medium term, but this must not detract from funding for the control of cane toads entering Western Australia.

## Where are the toads?

A surveillance team from the Department of Agriculture is currently mapping the extent of the cane toad's movement westward towards Western Australia. As far as can be seen at this time they are still in the Victoria River region. Further surveillance work is being done after the flood in March to try and find out if this has had any impact on their distribution.

There have been consistent reports of a small population of toads a lot closer to Kununurra than their current known position. An intensive search of the creeks crossing the Victoria Highway has failed to find anything apart from native frogs. However as cane toads can and will move around this work will continue.

## Toad id ready reckoner

Many of us are still a bit unsure of how to distinguish cane toads from our native frogs, here are five easy methods to determine if it's a toad or not –

1. Tips of fingers with discs (or suckers): Not a cane toad.
2. No ear drum visible: Not a cane toad.
3. Fingers have webbing: Not a cane toad.
4. No obvious gland or large lump behind head on the shoulder area: Not a cane toad.
5. Eyes smooth with no prominent ridge or brow: Not a cane toad.

If you think you may have seen a toad call the cane toad number on the front page or take the toad into CALM for identification, be careful to use gloves whilst handling

## Neem mapping

Ord Land and Water has started a neem tree mapping program to get an accurate gauge of the extent the pest plant has spread in the local area.

Whilst it is well known that the plant is widespread throughout the home gardens of Kununurra and Wyndham and that it has started to push further out from those initial infection sources, the full range around the two towns is not fully known.

Some work was done a few years ago on Lake Kununurra with an aerial survey that identified a wide range of weeds on the lake's edges including neem. We need to build on this work to develop an eradication strategy.

Anyone who knows where there are neems outside the two town sites can contact Dick Pasfield, the Coordinator on 91 692 222



Now you see it, now you don't. This neem and a few others were found out around Middle Springs, a couple of minutes with a saw and some glyphosate saw them gone.



A couple of cane toads enjoying the urban life in Katherine

## On the hop

A female cane toad, wearing a radio transmitter tagged by scientists in the Northern Territory was found to have moved 21 kilometres in just 32 days.

The research team lost track of the toad around Fogg Dam on February 27, it was later discovered near the Humpty Doo Golf Course!

It is been often reported nationally that toads move about from between five and 200 kilometres in a year. This tends to indicate that under ideal conditions such as the wet their movement towards the Kimberley will be swift unless stopped

## Pesticide Project

The final experiment of the Ord Land and Water – CSIRO pesticide project was carried out on a sugar cane crop in October of 2004. The experiment looked at the ability of PAM (Polyacrylamide) to reduce the movement off the paddock of the very soluble chemicals currently in use such as atrazine. Earlier experiments showed that PAM when used whilst irrigating could quite effectively reduce the movement off paddock of chemicals that attach themselves to soil particles.

Farmers also wanted this experiment to see if PAM pushed pesticides further into the soil profile and potentially into the groundwater. Whilst farmers are keen to pick up on any new technology that will improve water quality they are mindful that in some cases answers to problems create their own.

In a summary of the results it was shown that PAM didn't prevent any atrazine moving off the paddock, however neither did it move the chemical deeper into the soil profile. The use of PAM in this experiment did reduce the movement off farm of soil by 58%



Lily Creek long overdue for a plan to guide development.

## Salvinia arrested in Lily Creek

An earthen wall built around the infestation of salvinia in Lily Creek late last year proved to be work done in just the nick of time. The initial stage was completed just prior to Christmas and survived the 162 mm deluge of New Year's Day. Further work was carried out to repair the damage done by the flooding and to fully enclose the main infestation in January. The rain and associated flooding from Cyclone Ingrid caused very little damage to the structure and it appears that no salvinia has got out into the main section of the lake over the wet.

The infested area is just next to one of the main Lakeside drainage outlets, it's the flood waters from this drain and the risk that they could spread the menace into the lake that has organisations that are combating the weed worried.

With the wet just about over there is a good chance that the weed will close to eradicated by the end of this dry season.

## And Finally

A man walks in to a doctors office with a toad on his head. The doctor leaps up and says:  
"Good grief, how on earth did you get that great ugly thing!"  
The toad looks down and replies:  
"I dunno Doc, it started out as a little wart on my bottom!"



Rai Kookana, project scientist collecting water samples from the sugar cane trial. Samples are stored in ice and analysed back in the laboratory

## Lily Creek community committee meets

The public debate about the Lake Kununurra foreshore looks like it has moved on to a promising outcome. In a response to a Council request for volunteers to sit on a community steering group a number of people put their names forward to be part of a committee to coordinate the development of a plan for the foreshore. The committee first met in late March to –

- Address committee membership.
- Develop terms of reference for the group.
- Begin reviewing the many previous plans and studies relevant to the lake.
- Start considering what will be the process for putting it all together.

The committee comprises of everyone who expressed an interest in being on the committee also a councillor and representative from the Dept of Environment. People with specialist skills and information will be invited to attend as required. The Shire will facilitate meetings and provide administrative support to the committee.

The plan will focus on much of the foreshore from Swim Beach through to the Race Course. Guiding principles will be established for the remaining areas of foreshore on Lake Kununurra. The plan will be presented to Council and other relevant Government bodies for endorsement, upon completion.



Work being carried out to the wall around the salvinia.