

Dear Earthwatch Volunteers,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your fantastic efforts in your contribution to this year's data collection at Charles Darwin Reserve.

Checking 272 traps at the crack of dawn for seven days straight is no small task and we certainly couldn't have done it without you. All up we caught 312 animals representing 27 species of amphibians, reptiles, mammals and surprisingly a bird! The little button-quails that made their way into the funnel traps were a first both for the survey! I think it's safe to say you have been the luckiest groups in terms of catching exciting animals. Everyone got a chance to see the thorny devils which were out in force this year along with bearded dragons, blue-tongue skinks and goannas.

By surveying the small vertebrates of Charles Darwin Reserve we hope to determine the effects that fox baiting has on these potential prey species. Ultimately we hope to understand relationships between introduced predators and their prey on the reserve and work towards a better understanding of integrated management of introduced predators.

Presently the data we have collected suggests that the fox baiting programme at Charles Darwin Reserve has had little effect on the small vertebrate species living on the property. The same species have been found at both baited and un-baited sites and there has been little difference in the total number of animals caught between the two areas. The fire history of a site seems to have a greater effect on the distribution and abundance of these animals as a number of species were found to occur in either recently burnt or long un-burnt habitats. However, the data set is still relatively small and as it becomes larger, statistical analyses may reveal effects of fox baiting that are not currently evident.

The small vertebrates on the reserve seem to have responded well to good amounts of rainfall over recent months and species diversity in the traps has continued to be high. Additionally, a couple of new species for the survey were caught this year: a pair of young Gould's monitors which managed to squeeze their way into funnel traps on two consecutive days, and a run of Little Button-Quail which were also found in funnel traps.

Most species were found in similar numbers to previous years surveying with a few exceptions. There were records of many young animals amongst numerous species this year indicating a generally successful breeding season. Frogs were also well represented in this year's data after a couple of days of rain during the trapping periods. Thorny Devils, Western Blue-Tongues and Bearded Dragons as occurred in greater numbers this year much to the excitement of the volunteers.

The camera traps have provided an exciting insight into the private lives of the reserve's residents, including the undesirables. The photographs taken suggest that cats are abundant across both baited and un-baited areas of the property with dozens of individuals photographed. On the other hand only a single fox was recorded (surprisingly in the baited area). The presence of single dingo was also recorded in the un-baited area of the reserve. From these photographs we can begin to understand the relative abundance of introduced predators on the reserve.

Thank you for your enthusiasm, commitment and friendship. Working with you all was awesome... nearly as good as Paul's trifle, if not better.

Best wishes for the future.

Joe Krawiec and Rob Davis