

Greetings to the 2011 Earthwatch Kimberley Turtle Volunteers,

We want to thank you for all so much for joining our turtle team in 2011. We appreciated all your hard work catching turtles, gathering data and helping to make our working turtle family holiday a great adventure. We really enjoyed working with each team and were impressed by how everyone was focused on teamwork by getting along, getting the work done and enjoying their time together. We couldn't have asked for anymore.

As you know, with cane toads approaching, the data you collected is some of the most important for establishing baseline data pre-toads. Highlights from our Earthwatch turtle expeditions in 2011 are:

We captured a total of 538 *Emydura* and 124 *Chelodina* across the below six sites.

| Location | <i>Emydura</i> | <i>Chelodina</i> |
|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Drysdale Station- Teams 1& 2 | 104 | 12 |
| King Edward River- Teams 1 & 2 | 196 | 25 |
| Bell Creek- Teams 1 & 2 | 159 | 51 |
| Annie Creek - Team 1 | 72 | 13 |
| Charley Station- Team 2 | 2 | 15 |
| Mitchell River- Team 2 | 5 | 8 |

In addition Tony conducted 128 laparoscopic exams to determine reproductive condition. To do this we collected genetic samples from 65 turtles as well as dietary analyses by stomach flushing on six turtles from Charnely Station.

Team 1 continued our work with the Wungurr rangers at Bell Creek. They camped near the rangers house and got in three days worth of turtle catching with some new rangers as well as some who have caught turtles with us before. A highlight of our time with the rangers was their presentation on the work they have been doing in the Kimberley, including the turtle work. They set up a PowerPoint presentation and invited the whole campground as well as several elders, friends and family from local communities to listen to their first public presentation. Team 1 also got to visit Annie Creek for a brief, but productive stay.

Team 2 were able to enjoy an extra two nights camping on the Mitchell Plateau, which allowed hiking to the falls for our requisite swim. They also all hiked upstream to our turtle catching spot in order to get photographs of turtle samples to see if there are correlations between the colour of *Emydura* and the genetic type. As a bonus we also caught some *Emydura* that had a range of colours from yellowish to red. We also visited Charney station to recapture turtles at sites we have been to once before. We caught a few more turtles this time and these will add to our genetic sampling for this area.

The troubling thing this year was seeing dead cane toads on the roads in Kununurra. We are worried about cane toads hitching rides on people's cars, or in their gear, as they could get a free lift to some special turtle sites. No word yet of lots of dead turtles in Kununurra, so no news if good news, but it is clear that cane toads are on their way.

All has been well with us. Tony had a good end to his marine turtle season, with more than 20 satellite tags put out on his loggerhead turtles, which can be found here:

http://www.seaturtle.org/tracking/?project_id=602&dyn=1320022335.

Nancy has had a busy teaching semester and soon after returning from the Kimberley decided to quit her job and move to North Stradbroke Island to focus on doing more marine turtle research. Our plans are to switch to running one Earthwatch team per year for a few years and take some time on our own to look for evidence of cane toad impacts on the turtles so we can determine how best to focus our Earthwatch teams into the future.

We hope all is well with each of you and that you are planning new activities that will benefit the wonderful species we share this planet with.

Regards,




Nancy Fitzsimmons

Tony Tucker