

TOAD NEWS



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A project of



frogwatch.org.au

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With support from



**NT Government renews
FrogWatch toad funding**



**SITUATION REPORT –
The western Top End –
Darwin, Palmerston and
surrounds**



**BORDER REPORT
48 000 toads that fell on
the 'Western Front' in a
few weeks**



**Fish kills – local
anglers report lake fish
deaths as toads take over**



FACT: The cane toad
invasion front can expand at over
3km a week.



FACT: In October 2005
the cane toad front was recorded
at 40km from Darwin Central (or
approximately 20 weeks away).



FACT: Today the toad
'front' has still not reached Darwin
Central.



FACT: The residents
of 'rural Darwin' are protecting the
cities of Darwin and Palmerston
from the toad plague – destroying
hundreds of thousands of toads
over the past two years, effectively
establishing a toad control zone
through individual and collective
action.

New Funding announced

Minister for Environment Marion Scrymgour has announced new funding for FrogWatch for the 2006-7 financial year. This announcement followed the review of the previous 18 months work by FrogWatch in generating a community response to minimise the damage caused by Cane Toads in the Greater Darwin region

The NT Government money will ensure the fight can continue and FrogWatch will work closely with Government agencies to maximise the effort against the toad invasion. The renewed funding to FrogWatch will allow for expansion of the forces lined up against the cane toad, says FrogWatch coordinator, Graeme Sawyer. The NT Government and Minister Scrymgour should be commended for their willingness to engage with the community on such important issues in genuine community- government partnerships

"Since the toad invasion reached outer Darwin two years ago, the forces mustered against it have multiplied," he says. "Three years ago there was no effective trap on the market, there were no toad-specific environment organisations and the overall attitude was that there was nothing that could be done about toads.

"Now most people in the community know about toads, many would recognise a toad, and many, many people are making sure that toads don't get a chance to take over our city waterways by killing toads on sight.

"Late dry season checks have shown that inner and outer city waterways are relatively free of toads and the invasion line is pretty much where it was a year ago.

Progress on Toad Fight.

As the 2006-7 wet season commences it is interesting to look at what the community has managed to achieve to date in attempts to stop cane toads dominating the ecosystems across the greater Darwin region.

The last month has been busy with my time divided between the Great ToadMuster in the Timber Creek region, the Darwin area, with a few interstate trips thrown in for good measure.

The thing that stands out the most is the staggering difference between the numbers of cane toads in the area around Darwin compared to the numbers we found near Timber creek.

During the past 2 months we have had a number of ToadBusts at places like Girraween Lagoon, McMinns Lagoon and similar places in the rural area. We have found less than 20 toads each time with less than a hundred caught in total. Contrast this to the Great ToadMuster where 48,413 toads were caught. Single wetlands smaller than McMinns lagoon yielded over 4000 cane toads!

Even at the FrogWatch research project at Mt Ringwood, wetlands that have had no control work or traps on them have huge numbers of toads. A recent count on one wetland, with a shoreline of about 1 km revealed 1200 toads. The system probably holds 3 to 4 times that many.

Why the huge difference?. the answer is the impact of people. The work people have done in removing cane toads from their backyards and from their local parks and wetlands has had a huge impact on the cane toads. So next time one of the nay-sayers says your wasting your time make sure you point out a few home truths to them.

Our challenge for the next 4 months is to keep up the good work and increase our efforts to get everyone involved. If we do it will be a great boost to the chance our wildlife has of surviving. We still have goannas along the Darwin foreshore and around the Botanical gardens, sadly you have more chance of seeing a goanna in such areas than you do in places like Kakadu National Park or even Litchfield it seems.

I get lots of questions about this and a fair number of people who inform me that we are wasting our time as you cannot stop toads! I challenge the view and the "accepted wisdom" as it is not only wrong on a factual base it is also morally wrong. As the politicians in this country begin to wake up to a thing called global warming I get great comfort from the fact that people around Darwin have shown that people can act and make big changes when they are informed.

Cane toad control would seem to be feasible when you have an environmentally aware and committed population like we have in the NT.

CRC workshop report published

The report from the Cane Toad workshop in Brisbane in June has now been published on the invasive animals CRC's website. It can be downloaded at

<http://www.invasiveanimals.com/index.php?id=156>.

RURAL RESIDENTS STOP TOAD TAKEOVER IN TOP END LAGOONS

Inner city and outer city lagoons, Giraween, Lambells, McMinns, Knuckeyes, Marlow have not been colonised by cane toads – due to the

efforts of local LandCare and other volunteers.

Using their growing knowledge of cane toad habits the volunteers have been striking at the toad at its most vulnerable times.

The pattern of toad invasion is now well understood.

The stronger male toads invade new territory first, seeking water for breeding grounds.

After finding a suitable site the male toad begins calling. This is a first opportunity for ToadBuster groups to strike at the toad – the males are easy to see under spotlights and are easily collected. With no human interference other males are attracted and in time a resonance of male calling is established, hundreds of males wait deep at the water's edge calling the females in.

Females arrive when they are ready to lay, and deliver some 10 000 to 30 000 eggs each into the water.

The eggs are poisonous and the water body suffers its first fish kill – rainbows, glass fish, smaller species belly up.

Within three days the toad tadpoles are schooling in the shallow water near the banks. The 'sea of black', when hundreds of thousands of tadpoles darken the water, is an opportunity for daylight tadpole busting. The toad tadpoles' habit of schooling in shallow water makes scoop nets effective. There is some evidence that the toad tadpoles are attracted to light at night, as are their parents. The next stage is the emergence, within three to four weeks of a 'plague' of tiny toadlets, black, delicate and vulnerable but still toxic.

The toad's 'Achilles heel' is its inability to retain moisture. Unlike native frogs who endure long dry seasons successfully, the toad, without water for a few days, is a dead toad.

The toadlet is so moisture reliant that it will remain in the damp areas next to water for the first weeks of its life.

Even venturing a few metres into dry grassland will mean desiccation for these tiny toads.

Breeding outbreaks occurred at Marlow Lagoon, McMinns, an outer city drainage ditch, Humpty Doo Golf Course and many dams in the rural area.

The toadlet's moisture reliance confines its existence within a bare, damp water border – and this is the time for the third strike against the toad.

Observations are that the toadlets emerge at one or two places around water, gentle sloping, weed and grass free sites. ToadBusters can improve the count of toadlets rounded up by placing a low set cover, such as a packing case lid, a few centimetres off the ground to provide a toadlet refuge within the damp area. In the morning the lid is lifted and the toadlets are conveniently gathered. Ducks, it has been observed, may scoop these toadlets up without any apparent short term ill effect.

But for reptiles in particular, the apparent easy meal of small toads becomes a second wave of wildlife poisonings.

The big lizards, goannas, monitors, are victims of the first year of toad invasion – when they tackle the adult toads. The smaller lizards, Frill Necks, Blue Tongues, are victims in the second and successive years, when the young toads emerge.

The Rum Jungle and Jabiru Lakes are highly visible examples of what happens when toads are allowed to flourish without human intervention.

Local fishermen report almost 100 per cent fish kills, the 'critical' species, quolls, goannas, monitors, elapid snakes are already gone or in serious decline, local residents are battling the toads on their doorsteps – all events that would be happening in Darwin today if the inner and outer city lagoons had become established breeding sites.

Darwin and Palmerston residents owe Darwin's rural population a huge vote of thanks.

The residents of places as far away as Adelaide River and as close as Freds

Pass have collectively come close to stopping the toad on its march north.

A few toads are getting through individually and they are about to launch a second wave city invasion when the rains set in.

But because of the tireless effort of local residents the toad will start this year's invasion effort from about the same frontline as was established 18 months ago.

Dry season bust End of Dry Busts round up few toads – except at Darwin River Dam,

Local MLA's Ted Warren, Terry Mills, James Burke and Chris Natt led Dry Season ToadBusts variously at the waterways within their electorates in the mid-dry season.

Offering book prizes for those who found the biggest toad and the most toads, the politicians led fellow torch bearers into the wilds of Marlow Lagoon, a private dam in Virginia Road, Sanctuary Lakes, Palmerston Golf Course and Freds Pass. Another effort at Humpty Doo Golf Course brought the total count of captured toads to more than 300, including Marlow Lagoon, 63; Freds Pass, 41; Virginia, 30; Sanctuary Lakes, 101; PALMESTON Golf Course, 45 (plus 9100 toadlets); Humpty Doo Golf Course, 59.

POWER AND WATER HELP DAM ROUND-UP

Volunteers at Howard Springs and Darwin River Dam removed more than 200 toads from the rural area in two hours in an October ToadBust.

ToadBusts at the two locations saw more than 50 people turn out with torches and plastic bags to tackle the pest.

With assistance from Power and Water Corporation, 18 volunteers captured 181 adult, and a single juvenile toad, at the Darwin River Dam Reserve.

"It was a great result," says local LandCare President and FrogWatch worker, Robbie Robinson.

"Particularly helpful were Power and Water, allowing us through the gates after dark and even helping with the round-up.

"Power and Water's Greg Brown and a mate collected more than 50 toads on the night while the rest were caught by volunteers, mostly local residents."

He said it was a site that would become a regular ToadBust venue over the next few months.

At Howard Springs 26 volunteers found 30 adult toads at the Reserve.

FrogWatch coordinator, Graeme Sawyer, said he was 'pleasantly surprised' at the relatively low number of toads caught.

"It's a smaller count that I'd expected. It means that local residents are individually ensuring that toads don't get a chance to reach the plague proportions other parts of Australia have experienced – and that's very significant for the preservation of local native wildlife."

Mr Sawyer says more ToadBusts would be carried out in key areas, and identified breeding sites eliminated in the final weeks of the dry season.

"Our aim has been to drive the toads back out of the cities and, as far as possible from populated rural areas, so that they start the coming wet season from the same 'frontline' they were at a year ago.

"The Howard Springs count suggests that we're coming close to achieving that. It shows that where there are enough people the toad plague can be stopped."

End-of-dry-season ToadBusts at lagoons near Darwin has shown that the cane toad is having trouble colonising rural and urban Darwin.

FrogWatch coordinator, Graeme Sawyer, says that volunteer ToadBusts at McMinns and Girraween

Lagoons last week saw just 22 toads captured.

"Just five were found at McMinns on the first night plus two in a permanent 'SuperTrap' and five again on the second night. At Girraween the first ToadBust caught 10 but none the second night.

"That's pretty extraordinary, particularly when you contrast it with the more than forty eight thousand toads captured near Timber Creek in six weeks.

The rolling ToadBust, involving hundreds of people, is fighting the toad's march towards the Western Australian border."

"If people stay on the job the toad invasion of the cities will remain an annual toad 'trickle'," says Graeme.

Several individual toads have turned up in Darwin over past weeks – including two in Karama, several in Leanyer, one in Millner, two at NorthLakes and one in Cavenagh Street, City. In Palmerston people on the 'front line' are battling toad breeding outbreaks at Sanctuary Lakes and repeated attempts at breeding in Marlow Lagoon. Individual toads continued to arrive in the suburbs of Roseberry, Farrer, Moulden, and other residential areas near Mitchell Creek and Marlow Lagoon. Residents at Dundee Beach – 170km west of Darwin are reporting the arrival of the first toads over the past month.

BERRY SPRINGS BUSTS SCHOOL

Geoff Stewart and Mary Willems sent us this message:

Subject: Re: ToadBust

Hi Frog Watch Mob, just to let you know, on Friday night Berry Springs Toadbusters set out and retrieved 103 cane toads on the school premises. This was organised as a fundraiser - teams of four enter at \$10 and prizes were awarded to various groups. We

*all had a fun time and the kids were
right into it.*

kind regards mary

LATEST STATISTICS FREDS PASS AND ARCHER DUMP TOAD DETENTION CENTRES

FREDS PASS

Date	Live	Dead
01-05-06	339	4
08-05-06	121	0
19-05-06	376	0
28-05-06	492	0
11-06-06	331	0
24-06-06	339	0
28-06-06	0	10
06-07-06	391	14
22-07-06	215	0
04-08-06	223	0
18/8/06	204	12
21/8/06	67	
4/9/06	260	06
19/9/06	401	7
29/9/06	349	1
10/10/06	407	
31/10/06	657	
18/11/06	427	8
TOTAL	6488	60

**Remember live toads only into
the Detention centres please!!**

ARCHER DUMP - PALMERSTON

22-07-06	9	0
04-08-06	44	
18/8/06	24	
21/8/06	72	
4/9/06	27	
19/9/06	18	
1/10/06	24	
2/11/06	52	
18/11/06	43	
	313	

