



# Newsletter

Edition 6 - May 2005



Green tree frog

## NT Parks and Conservation Masterplan: *About the Draft Masterplan*

**The primary goal of the Masterplan is to provide the basis for passing on to future generations the full range of biodiversity now present in the Northern Territory, together with the priceless legacy of our park system, not only intact but expanded and improved.**

The Masterplan aims to provide a framework for a sustainable future where development takes place within a context of land and seascape conservation.

At the core of the Masterplan is the identification of terrestrial areas of highest priority for the conservation of biodiversity. Areas of international and national significance are identified through analysis of:

- concentrations of threatened plant and animal species
- concentrations of endemic and restricted range species
- wetland habitats
- important aggregations of wildlife
- sites of botanical significance

### What the Masterplan will seek to achieve

The Masterplan will suggest ways in which we may work together to look after our natural environments and wildlife as well as maintaining important cultural connections.

The plan will pay particular attention to the Territory's system of parks and reserves. It will focus on their role in conserving biodiversity as well as providing inspiration for present and future generations of Territorians and tourists to enjoy the Territory's natural and cultural heritage.

An important way of protecting the environment is by protecting the features of

the landscape that are critical for sustaining plant and animal life - this can be done managing some of the most important places as parks and also through off-reserve measures.

The Masterplan will outline four broad approaches to protect the most important environments and recommend ways of developing recreational and tourist opportunities. It will identify:

- ways to improve the park system
- the areas we need to manage closely to protect biodiversity and related ecosystem services
- ways of working more closely with Indigenous groups and the Northern Territory's primary producers to achieve biodiversity conservation outcomes (off-reserve conservation)
- enhancing the parks tourism experience

### Timetable

The timetable below shows an outline of the timeline and actions involved from the preliminary stage of the draft to the final published version:

Timeline	Actions
current	the Masterplan is in a final draft stage
early July	the aim is for the draft Masterplan to be launched by the Northern Territory Government for public comment over a 10 to 12 week period
September	all feedback received will be carefully reviewed and the final Masterplan will be prepared
December	target date for the final version of the Masterplan to be published and made available to the public

### What is biodiversity?

*The variety of all life forms - the different plants, animals, fungi and microorganisms, the genes they contain, and the ecosystems of which they form part. Biodiversity is usually considered at three levels: genetic diversity, species diversity and ecosystem diversity.*



Reynolds billabong

Photo: Alan Withers



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## Current state of the Territory's biodiversity ...

The Northern Territory is widely celebrated as the "Nature Territory", and our wildlife and extensive natural environments are an important part of our quality of life, and a fundamental drawcard for most tourists.

While many Aboriginal Territorians have a remarkably comprehensive knowledge of their environments, scientific documentation of our wildlife remains very incomplete. At most recent count, the Northern Territory contains:

- more than 4 200 species of plant
- more than 700 species of fish
- 50 species of frogs
- more than 300 species of reptiles
- more than 420 species of birds
- 150 species of mammals

For many of these groups, the tally increases substantially every year, as more "new" species are discovered. Some groups, such as most invertebrates, are so poorly known that it is impossible to estimate their total richness in the Territory. But this richness is likely to be very great for many of these groups.

For example, did you know that one-hectare patch of bushland in the Top End typically supports about 100 species of ant, a diversity without parallel anywhere else in the world.

A recent revision of the conservation status of Northern Territory plants and animals concluded that the following are threatened (that is, endangered and vulnerable to extinction):

- eighty species of plants
- thirty-five species of invertebrate
- nine fish
- one frog
- eight reptiles
- fifteen birds
- more than twenty mammals (excluding fourteen mammals species that have already become extinct in the Territory)

This assessment shows that there are worrying signs for the future of our wildlife.

*Author: Dr John Woinarski, Principal Scientist, Biodiversity Conservation*



Photos: Alan Withers

## Why should we care about our biodiversity?

There are many good reasons to conserve biodiversity. Our lands, our waters and our species (including ourselves) are dependent upon the maintenance of biological diversity.

Plants generate the oxygen we breathe and help protect the soil from erosion; invertebrates and other organisms decompose waste and aerate and fertilise our soils; insects, birds and bats spread seeds and pollinate our plants; forests protect our watersheds and assist in climate

control and flood mitigation; mangroves help to stabilise our coastline, protecting it from storm surge and enhancing fisheries production; wetlands clean our waters and provide feeding grounds for fish and birds. All contribute to the functioning of life on earth. Without biodiversity, life on earth we would simply cease to exist.

In addition to environmental services biodiversity helps to define our existence - our environment is part of us and we

are part of our environment. It provides us with:

- food, fibre and building materials;
- peace, joy and inspiration;
- significant lifestyle, learning and recreational opportunities; and
- supports our fishing, pastoral and tourism industries.

Additionally, we have explicit legislative and administrative responsibilities for the protection of biodiversity as well as a moral obligation.

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### Register your interest

If you would like to receive a copy of the draft Masterplan once released - you can register your interest by contacting - Linda Kenny on freecall 1800 813 337, via email at [parksmasterplan@nt.gov.au](mailto:parksmasterplan@nt.gov.au) or visit the website at [www.parksmasterplan.nt.gov.au](http://www.parksmasterplan.nt.gov.au).



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Photo: Alan Withers