



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Top End Scientist Returns From South Africa**

One of the Territory's top scientists has returned from South Africa after being invited to assist the development of a biodiversity monitoring program for its largest national park.

Dr Alaric Fisher, a senior scientist with the biodiversity conservation division of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, surveyed a range of small-sized animals in Kruger National Park last month.

Kruger, in South Africa's north-east is similar in size to Kakadu National Park and has savanna environments broadly similar to those of northern Australia.

Dr Fisher's focus was on Kruger's small mammals, reptiles and amphibians that have never been comprehensively studied.

Fellow Territorian Dr Alan Andersen, from CSIRO, focused on the Park's ants while at Kruger with Dr Fisher.

"Scientists in Kruger have developed an extensive data base on their larger animals but not so much on their smaller animals – which is where we came in," Dr Fisher said.

"Our surveys in one small area of the park yielded 11 species of mammals, 10 species of reptiles, four species of frogs and 101 species of ants, across 22 separate plots.

"One of our aims was to test whether the techniques we use to sample small animals in northern Australian savannas could also be applied in South Africa.

"The South Africans had been proposing to use various habitat variables as surrogates of biodiversity and we also wanted to test whether these were likely to work."

Dr Fisher and Dr Andersen's study showed that comprehensive fauna surveys are highly feasible in Kruger and that habitat surrogates performed extremely poorly as indicators of variation in faunal species composition.

"There is no reason why the methods we commonly use in the NT cannot be successfully applied in parks like Kruger" Dr Fisher said.

"Certainly there were far fewer problems than I expected with larger animals like hyenas or baboons destroying the traps.

"There are some major differences though, such as having to be accompanied in the bush by an armed guard at all times".

Dr Fisher said the conclusion from this is that effective biodiversity monitoring needs to include direct sampling of the fauna.

"To meet Kruger's biodiversity responsibilities we recommended that a systematic and comprehensive biodiversity inventory be implemented for the park," Dr Fisher said.

"We also recommended that a representative subset of these sites be selected for dedicated monitoring of a broad range of species, supplemented by broad scale monitoring of a relatively small set of selected species.

"We will keep in contact with the park to provide further assistance and support if possible."

Dr Fisher's visit to Kruger was partly funded by the Tropical Savannas Cooperative Research Centre, to promote international collaboration in savanna management.

**Media Note \_ For more information contact Dr Alaric Fisher on 8944 8454.**

Issued: 5.30pm Saturday, 26 November 2005