



MEDIA RELEASE

Nitmiluk National Park Reopens to Swimming and Canoeing

Parks and Wildlife Service is set to reopen the Katherine River within Nitmiluk National Park to swimmers and day time canoeists on Saturday, 3 June 2006.

Nitmiluk National Park Chief District Ranger Sarah Kerin said extensive crocodile surveys and trapping during the past few weeks detected only one saltwater crocodile, a 3.65m male that was removed on May 4 from the first gorge.

The saltwater crocodile was taken to Coolibah Crocodile Farm near Timber Creek and became the first to be removed from Nitmiluk National Park since 1999.

“Since the 2006 flood we have conducted 61 days of trapping, 17 aerial surveys and 20 aquatic surveys on the Katherine River in the gorge system,” Ms Kerin said.

“Visitor safety is paramount and while we are confident the timing is right to reopen the park to swimmers and canoeists from Saturday, we urge visitors to remain vigilant when in the water.

“Traps remain in place and we will continue our crocodile surveys as per our standard procedures, as well as monitoring water levels.”

Ms Kerin said the behavioural patterns of the park’s resident freshwater crocodiles were also indicative the park was now free of saltwater crocodiles.

“In the days leading up to the trapping and removal of the 3.65m male saltwater crocodile the resident freshies were nowhere to be seen, which usually means there is a saltie in the area and it didn’t take long until we found it,” Ms Kerin said.

“As soon as we removed the saltie the freshies were nervous at first before settling back into their normal routine, such as basking in the sunshine on the river banks.

“What is unusual for this time of year is that there is preliminary activity the freshwater crocodiles have started pairing off which isn’t in line with the Jawoyn calendar.

“Nesting normally begins around the same time the yellow kapok bush is in full bloom, which isn’t expected to happen until later in the dry season, so this is a bit of a surprise.”

Ms Kerin said the bulk of the gorge’s freshwater crocodile population were between 1m and 1.5m in length, with the largest resident freshwater crocodiles about 3m long.

She said there are approximately 29 animals in the lower gorge system.

Ms Kerin urged swimmers and canoeists not to provoke or harass the freshwater crocodiles that are sighted in the river.

“The freshwater crocodiles have become accustomed to human activity, such as swimming, canoeing and boating, and usually take evasive action,” Ms Kerin said.

“The weather is fantastic right now so we are really pleased to once again allow swimming and day time canoeing to recommence, as it is a great time for people to check out their parks.”

Ms Kerin said repair works to environmental toilets located in the gorge system were being carried out after becoming damaged during this year’s flood.

She said night time canoeing would be allowed once repair works were carried out, due to be complete in coming weeks.

Ms Kerin said the 66km Jatbula Trail from Katherine Gorge to Edith Falls would also reopen on Saturday.

Ends

Media Note – For more information contact Sarah Kerin on 8972 1886

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