



## MEDIA RELEASE

### Lost Butterfly Population Re-located

A recent visit to a remote part of Arnhem Land has begun a new chapter into the known history of the threatened Gove Crow Butterfly.

Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts entomologist Michael Braby and naturalist Ian Morris travelled to the Gove Peninsula last week, which is the only place where the Gove Crow Butterfly is found anywhere in Australia.

Mr Morris guided Dr Braby to a previously unrecorded site where the butterfly is found.

“I was in the company of local children and parents when I first encountered the butterfly in the early 1970s at the Lake Evella (Gapuwiyak) Yolngu community where I worked as a science teacher,” Mr Morris said.

“It was a beautiful big brown crow butterfly that the Yolngu people called “bornba” and I could see it was distinct from other common crow species.

“However, there were no reference books, scientists to ask, or even a museum to refer to in the NT back in those days.

“Many things in this area were new to me and my students and their parents were the only source of information.

“In more recent times, talk of what sounded like the same butterfly and its restricted range and fragile rainforest habitat re-emerged – this time as an endangered species.

“I mentioned this to friends and ecologists about my sightings of a similar butterfly further west of the few known locations of the endangered Gove Crow.

“The area where they occur is quite wild and difficult to access, so you really have to go looking for them and slog through swamps and paperbark forests.

“This information attracted the interest of Dr Braby and an investigation was organised.”

Dr Braby said Mr Morris had no way of realising the significance of his discovery when he first encountered the endangered Gove Crow Butterfly.

“This butterfly was officially ‘discovered’ in 1988 and was not described until 1991, so 30 years ago Ian had no description with which to compare the butterfly and find out what species it was,” Dr Braby said.

“Ian has kindly guided me back to the area where he first saw these butterflies.

“We now have another confirmed sighting of this endangered species and so can extend its geographical range.

“As part of the recovery plan it is vital we locate all populations and essential habitat of the species, and assess any threats to this habitat.

“To ensure these butterfly populations remain intact, we will work together over the next couple of months to further assess the threats facing the species and develop an action plan to address those threats.

“Ian and I talked to secondary school students at Lake Evella who recognised the butterfly and are keen to get involved in a management plan for the butterfly.

“Traditional Owners and community members have also told us about other locations to look for the butterfly and are keen to help to find and preserve the species.”

The Gove Peninsula is the only known area within Australia where the Gove Crow Butterfly lives.

The Gove Crow butterfly is currently listed as endangered nationally under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* and endangered in the NT under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*.

Since 2002, Parks and Wildlife Service and Dhimurru Land Corporation have discovered that many of the sites, identified as habitat of the Gove Crow, are facing several threatening processes, including changed fire regimes due to introduced grasses and/or loss of traditional burning practices, invasion by Yellow Crazy Ants and disturbance caused by feral animals, particularly buffalo and pigs.

Ends

**Media Note – For more information contact Michael Braby on 8944 8488**

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