



## MEDIA RELEASE

### Spotlight Tracks Rare Hopping-Mouse

A rare hopping mouse (*Notomys aquilo*) that has previously eluded capture has been confirmed to exist in new areas of Groote Eylandt, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, 650 km east of Darwin.

Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts biodiversity conservation researcher Dr Simon Ward has been working with the local Anindilyakwa Rangers on Groote Eylandt during the past year to find the best ways to capture and monitor northern hopping-mice, a threatened species in the NT.

“The first signs the hopping-mice existed on the island were discovered by Donald Thompson when he camped on top of a burrow system and caught them in the 1940s, but he noted that hopping-mice were largely unknown to the local Aborigines,” Dr Ward said.

“Tracks and burrows of hopping-mice have since been located in several coastal sand dune sites around Groote and on nearby mainland Arnhem Land, but relatively few have been caught.

“Hopping-mice are rarely seen on Groote, and seem to avoid being trapped in general animal surveys.

“Because they are restricted to a small area, including Groote Eylandt and a few coastal sites in Arnhem Land, the species is listed as Vulnerable by the NT and the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

“Initially, we used various techniques to try to trap and attract the rodents with a variety of bait types, and we searched for burrows, but had no success.

“On a recent trip we concentrated on spotlighting along tracks, both from a vehicle and on foot, and four, possibly five, hopping-mice were seen in areas of sandy woodland, one of which we caught by hand.

“Now we know that northern hopping-mice *Notomys aquilo* are not confined to coastal sand dune areas of Groote and nearby coastal Arnhem Land.

“Sandy woodland areas may be just as important habitat for the species as the dune areas where most search effort has been concentrated.”

Dr Ward said now that they know how to successfully detect the species they can begin to establish their preferred habitat and food sources and perhaps their breeding biology and social structure.

“So far we know that hopping-mice prefer areas that have a variety of healthy vegetation, but previous work also suggests that they don’t like the vegetation to be too thick – it probably makes it too difficult to make a quick hopping getaway” Dr Ward said.

“We can now use this information to plan better surveys of hopping-mice on Groote and develop a monitoring program to ensure their continued survival alongside mining operations and other development on the island.”

Dr Ward said the Anindilyakwa Rangers also have an active community education program on Groote, talking to schools, CDEP workers, visitors to the island and old age home residents.

“The Rangers’ work on the hopping-mice is an integral part of this education program, and it is providing community groups with a better understanding of their lands and their natural heritage,” Dr Ward said.

“Feedback from talks indicates enthusiastic community support for the project. However, some information gleaned from audiences suggests possible confusion about hopping-mouse identification.

“A display tank has been set up in the Anindilyakwa Land Council’s office with two Spinifex hopping-mice (from Central Australia, but look very similar to their northern cousins). These hopping-mice are shown to any groups holding meetings in the office.”

This is a joint project by the NT Department of Natural Resources Environment and the Arts and the Anindilyakwa Land Council’s Anindilyakwa rangers and is funded by the National Heritage Trust.

Caption: Anindilyakwa Ranger Vince Lalara and NRETA scientist Simon Ward excavating an old northern hopping mouse burrow system in sandy woodland, central Groote Eylandt, November 2006.

Ends

**Media Note – For more information contact Simon Ward on 08 8944 8462.**

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