Northern Territory Government
Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts

MEDIA RELEASE

Students Help Survey Biodiversity in Local Parks

High School students are gaining hands on experience with biodiversity researchers from the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA), helping to conduct fauna surveys throughout Darwin's parks.

NRETA biodiversity conservation scientist Martin Armstrong said monitoring biodiversity in local parks is an important tool for effective park management and was also a great way to educate students about our unique NT biodiversity.

"This is the second week of a monitoring program to survey the flora and fauna at urban parks including Charles Darwin National Park, Casuarina Coastal Reserve, Holmes Jungle and Howard Springs Nature Reserve," Mr Armstrong said.

"Small teams of students from Casuarina Senior College have been assisting us check traps or spotlight for animals each day of the survey since last week.

"We set out a variety of traps including cage and box (Elliott) traps, pitfall and funnel traps, to catch different kinds of animals including mammals, frogs and reptiles that are checked in the morning with the help of the students.

"It's a great opportunity for them to experience some of our local native fauna that occur virtually in our back-yard that most people rarely get to see."

Mr Armstrong said these surveys would help to improve the management of several issues in parks such as erosion, fire, weeds and the effects of urban expansion on Park boundaries.

"If we can detect negative impacts on parks early, we can tackle the problems quickly and prevent any issues from becoming too serious," he said.

Casuarina Senior College teacher Fran Davies said working with agencies such as NRETA researchers was part of a new course introduced to the school last year called "Sustainable Futures".

"Apart from the sheer delight of being outside in the natural environment, instead of in a classroom, being involved in the wildlife survey has shown the students that they do have a role to play in helping to ensure a sustainable future," Ms Davies said.

"Through the surveys they are learning the difference between feral and native species and how to identify animals such as bandicoots, possums and frogs.

"We were even fortunate enough to see a tiny baby bandicoot inside its mothers pouch."

Ms Davies said watching the scientist's continued enthusiasm and passion about their work, even when they were ankle deep in mud after the recent rain, also taught the students a great deal about workplace skills.

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“Through working with the researchers, in sometimes unfavourable conditions they have learnt to use their initiative and demonstrated remarkable maturity in negotiating as a team,” Ms Davies said.

“The students were up early in the morning before school to check traps and after school could take part in spotlighting for animals in the evening.

“The students learnt that scientific work is meticulous, with each area spotlighted for the exact same amount of time and the recording of each site using GPS technology to ensure the survey can be replicated in the future.

“They will now transfer the GPS information into a GIS program to create a map which will assist their analysis and reporting of the survey work.

Last year, Casuarina Senior College “Sustainable Futures” students were provided with assistance by staff from the NT Herbarium to identify and map the weeds in a foreshore area of East Point Reserve.

Ms Davies said that students’ appreciation of threats to the natural environment was much greater when they were physically involved in the field assessment.

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Media Note _ For more information contact Martin Armstrong on 89955020 or Fran Davis on 8920 1217. Photo available

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