

Media Release:

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Searching for Snails

While stockmen across the Territory are busy mustering cattle the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts research scientists and park rangers today embarked on the first ever Territory snail muster.

NRETA's Biodiversity Conservation Research Scientist Dr Michael Braby who is coordinating the project said the team will be traversing the Katherine and Victoria River District (VRD) regions by helicopter investigating likely snail locations between 11 – 22 July 2008.

"While the snails will be underground asleep, our land snail expert, accompanied by local Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service rangers will be visiting 50 remote areas by chopper between Katherine and Kununurra where they will carry out an on-ground search," Dr Braby said.

"Land snails are often found around limestone rocks, so once the team is on the ground they will be searching for shell remnants and live snails deep in the soil under those rocks.

"The purpose of the muster is to collect base-line data on the identity and distribution of all species of land snails in the Katherine VRD region, especially those species which have been listed as threatened under Northern Territory legislation."

Available information suggests that the Katherine VRD region is a biodiversity hot spot for land snails due to the extensive but patchy distribution of limestone and dolostone formations on which they depend; however some species appear to have declined in abundance over the past two decades.

Dr Braby said the project will help to determine the land snails' distribution, habitat preferences and identify threatening processes, which will assist in developing recovery plans, monitoring programs and conservation management.

"There has never been a targeted survey of land snails in the Top End, this will be the first detailed survey of the region and indeed anywhere in the Territory," Mr Braby said.

"We therefore expect to discover many species new to science and obtain better information on their ecology.

"Land snails are molluscs, which are invertebrates, and invertebrates collectively make up about 99 per cent of the animal biodiversity, so they are a very important component of the natural biological resource of the Territory."

The project has received \$40,000 in funding by the Australian Government Natural Resource Management Team through the Natural Resource Management Board (NT).

Ends

Media Note – for more information contact Michael Braby on 8995 5012.

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