

Media Release:

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Territory Ethnobiologist Receives Churchill Fellowship

Department of Natural Resources, Environment and The Arts (NRETA) Ethnobiologist Glenn Wightman has recently been awarded a Churchill Fellowship to examine programs being undertaken by leading institutions to preserve and pass on traditional plant and animal knowledge.

The senior ethnobiologist, based in NRETA's Biodiversity Conservation division, has spent the past 26 years working with senior Aboriginal knowledge custodians, recording and promoting knowledge to help reduce the amount of biological knowledge lost as elders pass away.

"The Churchill Fellowship will enable me to visit leading international institutions in the United States and the United Kingdom to examine programs being undertaken to preserve and 'pass on' traditional plant and animal knowledge, to potentially use similar programs in North Australia," Mr Wightman said.

"It is hoped that this fellowship will help resolve the issue of intergenerational traditional biological knowledge transfer or passing on of plant and animal knowledge from elders to children.

"It's a wonderful recognition of NRETA's work in establishing a long term project aimed at conserving traditional biological knowledge under the direction of Aboriginal elders.

"The conservation of traditional biological knowledge occur in various places in the Top End, including national parks, where we have been working with elders and a range of Aboriginal people talking about plants and animals and recording the names and uses in different languages."

Mr Wightman has recently completed the most linguistically and biologically complex traditional biological knowledge preservation and promotion project ever undertaken in Australia as part of the new Aboriginal Joint Management Program at Gregory National Park.

"The program undertook scientifically sound and culturally sensitive knowledge recording with elders from eight different Aboriginal languages associated with Gregory National Park," Mr Wightman said.

Mr Wightman has been involved in the recording of biological knowledge associated with 44 Aboriginal languages in north Australia and coordinated the publication of 24 books detailing this knowledge.

Amongst Mr Wightman's work, he has undertaken biological knowledge training courses in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Solomon Islands and was the first Australian to be awarded with the auspicious Slow Food Award in 2003 for his commitment to conserving traditional Australian Aboriginal plant and animal knowledge.

Mr Wightman intends to undertake the fellowship from March to May 2009.

The Churchill Fellowship provides the opportunity through the provision of financial support, to enable Australian citizens from all walks of life to travel overseas to

undertake an analysis, study or investigation of a project or an issue that cannot be readily undertaken in Australia.

Ends

Media Note – for more information contact Glenn Wightman on 8999 4513

Image – Churchill Fellowship Winner and NRETA Ethnobiologist Glenn Wightman with colleague Kerry Daby

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