

Media Release:

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## Territory Mammals a Hot Topic

Scientists from the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) are sharing their specialised knowledge on Territory mammals at the Australian Mammal Society (AMS) Conference 2008 being held in Darwin until Wednesday 1 October 2008.

NRETAS scientist and conference coordinator Dr Simon Ward said more than 100 delegates have converged on Darwin to discuss the ecology, genetics, habitat, physiology, diet, reproduction, behaviour and management practices of Australian mammals.

“This year’s conference in Darwin has a particular focus on mammals in northern and remote Australia, and a number of scientists from NRETAS are either presenting papers or chairing sessions,” Dr Ward said.

“Yesterday we heard from NRETAS scientist Tony Griffiths on whether fire is a threatening process for small mammals, which is of particular interest to northern Australia where burn-offs are a part of land management practices.

“NRETAS scientist Brydie Hill discussed ‘Developing monitoring protocols for two difficult-to-detect Northern Territory threatened species’ which are the northern hopping-mouse (*Notomys aquilo*) on Groote Eyelandt and the Butler’s dunnart (*Sminthopsis butleri*) on the Tiwi islands.

“Through collaborative work with local Indigenous groups NRETAS has been able to develop methods for local industries to survey these federally listed threatened species.

“We also heard about a collaborative research project yesterday between NRETAS and Charles Darwin University on the environmental relationships of the brush-tailed rabbit rat (*Conilurus pencillatus*), a Top End native mammal listed as a vulnerable threatened species.

“Today there was a session about the diet of the red-tailed phascogale (*Phascogale calura*) in a population re-introduced to the Alice Springs Desert Park (ASDP). This species previously occurred widely across Central Australia but is now considered endangered in Australia and extinct from the Northern Territory.

“The ASDP has been working collaboratively with scientists from a number of universities, including presenter Hayley Stannard from the University of Western Sydney, to broaden the understanding of the natural history of the red-tailed phascogale, and to develop breeding and potential release techniques.

“Tomorrow NRETAS scientists Dr John Woinarski and Tony Griffiths will discuss the successful quoll relocation program currently underway in the Top End.

“The session titled ‘Island translocation of the northern quoll (*Dasyurus hallucatus*) as a conservation response to the spread of the cane toad (*Chauras marinus*) in the Northern Territory’ will be held Wednesday 1 October at 2.30pm.

Dr Ward said he will join other NRETAS scientists tomorrow at 3.15pm to discuss the ‘Ongoing decline in the native mammal fauna of the Top End’ and what management programs are being established to help circumvent this.

Delegates are being treated to a special behind the scenes tour and barbecue at the Territory Wildlife Park this afternoon, giving them the best opportunity to see our native Top End mammals up close and personal.

This is the 54<sup>th</sup> Scientific and Annual General Meeting of the Australian Mammal Society (AMS), which is an interdisciplinary society of biologists who have a common interest in the biology and conservation of Australian mammals.

Ends

**Media Note – for more information contact Dr Simon Ward on 0418 551 190**

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