

Media Release:

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Rare Species Battling On

A critically endangered mammal species and an endangered bird species found only within a small area of the Northern Territory have been spotted by scientists from the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) during a recent field trip.

An ongoing monitoring program at the pastoral property Wollogorang Station, located in the Gulf of Carpentaria on the Queensland border, has revealed the Carpentarian rock rat (*Zyzomys palatalis*) and the Carpentarian grass-wren (*Amytornis dorotheae*) are continuing to survive.

NRETAS Biodiversity group senior scientist Dr Alaric Fisher said the station was the only known location of the critically endangered rock-rat and one of the few locations the endangered grass-wren may be spotted.

“Wollogorang Station has beautiful and diverse landscapes including many rugged sandstone ranges,” Dr Fisher said.

“The rock-rat inhabits gorges and gullies within these ranges, which provide the required habitat of cliffs, scree slopes, rainforest vegetation, broad-leaved woodland and a rare source of permanent water.

“The grass-wren favours a rocky Spinifex habitat and whilst many areas around the Gulf have been degraded by extensive and frequent fires it appears parts of Wollogorang Station remain suitable for this rare bird.”

Dr Fisher said spotting the elusive grass-wren, one of the rarest birds in the Territory, at two sites was an added bonus as recent searches have failed to find the endangered species in most of the Gulf regions where it had been previously recorded.

“One of these sites was a completely new location for the species, which suggests that there may be other remote sites where this rare bird persists,” Dr Fisher said.

NRETAS scientists have been studying the Carpentarian rock-rat over the past 15 years, with a systematic monitoring program of the two largest populations in Banyan and Moonlight gorges established in 2005.

“Overall the monitoring trip was highly successful with results suggesting the populations of the rock-rat remain steady. This contrasts with the decline of other small mammal populations in many other parts of the Top End,” Dr Fisher said.

“On this recent expedition we re-sampled these two locations, along with two other remote locations that had not been surveyed since the mid 1990’s, and it was reassuring to find small populations at these sites still existed.

“Now we hope to do some work with the genetic samples we collected, to test the extent to which animals move between the scattered populations.”

Ends

Media Note – for more information contact Dr Alaric Fisher on 8995 5002

Images – 1. Carpentarian rock-rat 2. genetic samples being collected 3. Carpentarian grass-wren

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