

Media Release:

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Quolls are Cruising on the Island Ark

Indigenous rangers and Northern Territory Government scientists have just returned from an annual survey of northern quolls seeking refuge from cane toads on two remote islands off the Territory coast.

Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) scientists in partnership with Gurmurr Marthakal Rangers from Elcho Island recently spent 12 days on Astell and Pobassoo Islands, located off North East Arnhem Land, capturing and marking the endangered marsupials.

NRETAS Biodiversity North senior scientist Tony Griffiths said preliminary population estimates show more than 2500 adult females on Astell Island and more than 450 adult females on Pobassoo Island.

“This is remarkable considering just 65 northern quolls were translocated in 2003, and after a population boom in the last couple of years, this survey indicates populations appear to have since stabilised,” Mr Griffiths said.

“A total of 404 quolls were captured and marked, and the health and condition of all the animals was excellent.

“Other fauna, including skinks, on both islands are healthy despite the large numbers of quolls now residing there, which indicates that the relocation program is not affecting the delicate ecosystems on the islands.

“The Gurmurr Marthakal Rangers also took this survey trip as an opportunity to conduct ghost net and weed surveys on Astell, Pobassoo and surrounding islands.”

Mr Griffiths said the northern quoll relocation program is a component of a broader ‘Island Ark’ initiative designed to evaluate the conservation significance of Northern Territory islands and to work with landholders to foster those conservation values.

“There have only been a handful of sightings of northern quolls on the mainland over the last few years due to the increasing impact of cane toads,” Mr Griffiths said.

“This Island Ark project has proven to be successful in safeguarding the northern quoll in the Northern Territory and the translocated quolls act as a ‘living gene bank’ for this charismatic species.”

The quoll program is a collaboration between NRETAS, the Gurmurr Marthakal Rangers and the islands’ Traditional Owners with additional financial support from the Australian Geographic, the Threatened Species Network and the Natural Heritage Trust, with in kind support from the Territory Wildlife Park, Parks Australia and Arafura Pearls.

Ends

Media Note – for more information contact Tony Griffiths on 8995 5004

Image – Marthakal Ranger Wayne Dummarangi with northern quoll

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