

Media Release:

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NRETAS Entomologist on Expedition to El Questro

Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) Biodiversity Conservation scientist Dr Michael Braby, has returned from a research expedition with the Australian Geographic Society, to uncover mysteries of invertebrates in the Kimberley region.

Dr Braby said the expedition was coordinated by the Australian Geographic Society and included experts across a broad range of fields including reptiles, turtles, amphibians, birds and fish.

“The expedition was a valued opportunity to discover more about the biodiversity at El Questro Wilderness Park in north-western Australia with the country’s leading field biologists,” Dr Braby said.

“I was invited as the expert on invertebrates, with my research focused on developing an inventory of butterflies of the region and assessing their abundance, distribution and habitat preferences.

“One of the goals was to collect baseline data for future monitoring before cane toads arrive, as they are expected to arrive during the next wet season and they will have a profound impact on ecosystem function.

“We also trialled some survey techniques with the volunteers in which we compared the diversity of butterflies between ‘wet’ and ‘dry’ habitats, testing the main hypothesis that the wet sites –those with permanent, flowing water – are more diverse than the dry sites due to higher moisture and greater diversity of plants on which the butterflies breed.

“The region has a rich butterfly fauna, with 53 species so far identified in El Questro, including some species that have not previously been recorded in the eastern Kimberley and another that is endemic to the Kimberley.”

Dr Braby said the species point data gathered and specimens collected during the expedition will add significantly to the Northern Territory’s scientific database and enhance the entomology collection at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT).

“This data helps us understand the broader patterns of biodiversity across the landscape of northern Australia, of which the Kimberley and Top End are a part,” Dr Braby said.

“Research opportunities such as this expedition with the Australian Geographic Society and volunteers provide invaluable opportunity for us to share our knowledge to the general public and to collect important data to assess future changes in the landscape.”

Australian Geographic will publish a full feature story on the expedition in issue 105, November-December 2011. More images and information can be found at www.australiangeographic.com.au/society.

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Media Note – for more information contact Michael Braby on 8995 5015.

Images (credit Barry Skipsy):

1. Michael Braby leads the butterfly surveys as part of the Australian Geographic Society’s expedition.
2. The Lesser Wanderer; one of the more common butterfly species at El Questro.

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