

Media Release:

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Rangers Capture First Photos of Possum Species in the Wild

Parks and Wildlife Service rangers have captured remarkable first photographs of the endangered Central Brush Tailed Possum in the wild at Ormiston Gorge in West MacDonnell National Park.

Parks and Wildlife Service Ranger Deon Grantham said the photographs are a major breakthrough for rangers as they provide clear evidence that possums are still present in the area.

“Until now, all we had was circumstantial evidence such as tracks, droppings or marks on trees, so we believed possums were present but we didn’t know much about them,” said Mr Grantham.

“We decided to set up an infrared camera and bait station in Ormiston Gorge and monitored the site for a month and half, and we were thrilled to actually see a possum on camera.

“It confirms that the possums are there and that our scented bait will attract them, which opens up the possibility of further monitoring in other areas of the West MacDonnell National Park, as it may be the last stronghold for this type of possum.”

The Central Brush Tailed Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula vulpecula*) has declined rapidly in central Australia in recent decades for unknown reasons and is now listed as an endangered species in the region.

Mr Grantham said a prescribed burning program in the Ormiston Gorge area of West MacDonnell National Park has helped protect the area from recent bushfires, and rangers are now planning to set up a long-term monitoring program to get a better understanding of possum population trends.

“We don’t know if their population is continuing to decline or if it is relatively stable, and the advantage of long-term monitoring is that if we do see a decline, we can then look at the possible reasons why and take steps to mitigate the cause,” said Mr Grantham.

Rangers, Traditional Owners and scientists from the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) have recently launched an extensive biodiversity monitoring program that will see more than 150 sites surveyed across West MacDonnell National Park, Finke Gorge National Park and Watarrka National Park over the next four years.

The program is designed to document floral and faunal biodiversity, investigate the impacts of environmental weeds and fire, and detect any negative trends that may require management.

For more information, go to www.nt.gov.au/nreta/wildlife.

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Media Note – For more information, contact Deon Grantham on 8956 7799 or Chris Day on 8955 1119 or 0427 601 237.

Image – A possum caught on camera in Ormiston Gorge in September 2011.

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