



# Biodiversity Conservation

2005

## Threatened Species



### What is the project about

The Territory is a wonderland for biodiversity, and for biodiversity scientists. Compared to much of the rest of Australia, and most other areas of the world, the natural environments are vast, largely intact, and functioning much as they have for tens of thousands of years.

But there are problems. Since European settlement, 16 of the Territory's mammal species have been lost, become extinct. In modern times, this is the worst extinction record in the world. Many species continue to decline. About 200 of the Territory's plant and animal species are now listed officially as threatened with extinction. These include such well-known and iconic species as the bilby and gouldian finch. But the list also includes native landsnails, insects, fish, plants and bats, amongst others. In some cases, we think we know why these species are in trouble, whereas for many others there are no obvious causes, or we know next to nothing about them. The factors that threaten these species are generally different to, and more subtle than, those in temperate Australia: here, it is not extensive land clearing and intensive human development that is the primary factor affecting biodiversity.

### Research

The Biodiversity Conservation Unit of the NT's Department of Natural Resources Environment and the Arts assesses the conservation status of the Territory's biodiversity, and works towards ensuring that biodiversity is maintained.

It does this through:

- wildlife surveys, especially into remote areas of the Territory;
- documenting Indigenous knowledge of wildlife;
- targeted research studies of threatened plants and animals;
- monitoring the abundance of representative plants and animals;
- studying the impact of a range of possible threatening factors, including fire, weeds, feral animals, grazing and clearing;
- developing advice for the management of biodiversity.



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## Biodiversity in the Top End

### The Golden Bandicoot

Before European settlement, this small native mammal was found across most of Australia, where it was common in a wide range of environments. By 1950 it had disappeared from most of central Australia, and was rapidly becoming rarer in the Top End. By 1980 it was presumed extinct in the Territory. One small population has been found to have survived, by chance, on an island of NE Arnhem Land. This is the last chance for this species: lose it, and this once common species will have become extinct in the Territory in less than 200 years.



### The Northern Quoll

The northern quoll, a native carnivorous marsupial, and one of the most engaging of our wildlife, may be disappearing at an even faster rate, victim of its susceptibility to cane toad toxins. Our lives are the poorer for its loss: the sight of quolls fossicking around camp sites is one of the joys of camping in the Top End.



Our thin presence in this landscape makes our society somewhat complacent about our impacts. We see the never-ending bush and assume that all is well within it. To some extent, this is a misconception. Our work at NRETA's Biodiversity Conservation unit is about understanding and valuing our natural surrounds, and trying to maintain the environmental legacy that we have been bequeathed. Partly because of its nature, the Territory is a unique place; and we want to make sure that we can keep those elements that make our land different: its wildlife, environments and nature.

