



Syd Stirling

MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION & TRAINING

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MANINGRIDA STUDENTS DISCOVER NEW SPIDERS

Three Maningrida CEC students have discovered at least 18 new species of spider as part of their NT Certificate of Education studies, Education Minister, Syd Stirling, said today.

“Year 12 students Moses Watson, Alistair James and Aiden Balirija collected hundreds of spiders around Maningrida, 400km east of Darwin, for their Contemporary Issues and Sciences course,” he said.

“Incredibly, there were 18 previously undiscovered species in this collection – this is a real tribute to the commitment of the students and staff and something they should be very proud of.”

Course leader Mason Scholes said 200 spiders were sent to arachnologist Dr Robert J Raven at the Queensland Museum.

“The museum said the batch included 67 species and at least 18 had not been identified before,” he said.

“While there is no science laboratory at Maningrida, we have the bush, and we used the bush and our environment to conduct a series of scientific surveys.”

Alistair made a comparison between spiders caught in the bush and those caught in grasslands. He reported both a high abundance and high diversity among species.

Aiden’s analysis was made along a diurnal-nocturnal divide. He collected fewer spiders than his colleagues, but the greatest number of new species.

Moses developed a ‘pied-piper’ technique, using vibrations of a motorcar’s idling engine to attract spiders. He parked a vehicle in the bush and spent 30 minutes collecting spiders while the engine was running, then drove the vehicle 200m and spent 30 minutes collecting spiders with the engine off. Moses repeated this four times, collecting 57 spiders with the car idling and just two with the engine off.

“The students thoroughly enjoyed the spider-catching exercise – I am told they were absolutely fantastic and their eye-sight and ability to detect motion was incredible,” Mr Stirling said.

“There is a possibility that some of the ‘new spiders’ will be named after the boys, in keeping with the scientific convention of honouring the discoverer of new species.”

Mr Scholes said that would be a great honour, but that the boys will firstly consult their families and elders about using Indigenous names. He said senior secondary studies at Maningrida include courses relevant to life in the community and that linking these experiences to the broader scientific community is an important way of recognising the value of Indigenous knowledge and environments.

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