

Dambimangari News

May-June 2020

Dambi Newsletter – ranger bumper issue!



Rangers join forces to protect the Kimberley

Cherylyn and Luke (Wilinggin) planning the next incendiaries run over a quick lunchbreak.

Rangers from across the Kimberley are working on a joint fire control program ahead of this year's northern Australian bushfire season.

In a unique team effort, rangers from Dambimangari and Wilinggin managed an extensive program of controlled burns to reduce the risk of wildfires in the dry season this year.

The joint ranger group included Dambimangari Ranger Co-ordinator

Josh Vartto and Rangers Shorisha and Cherylyn Ozies. They worked with neighbouring Kimberley rangers in partnership with the Australian Wildlife Conservancy.

In the first ever Kimberley-wide lockdown, the rangers were based at the AWC's Charnley River wildlife sanctuary for up to two months. They had to stay put until late May to prevent the potential spread of Coronavirus – at the same time meeting an ambitious program of "cool" burns through dense bushland.

Cassandra McCumstie appointed permanent CEO

The Dambimangari Board has appointed Cassandra McCumstie as full time chief executive for the corporation.

A former senior staffer for the DAC, she was appointed interim CEO in January after the resignation of former management chief Stephen Crook. The Board confirmed her appointment as permanent CEO on 21 April.

Chairman Francis Woolagoodja said Cassandra was an ideal choice for the role of CEO after a period of reorganisation.

"She is well respected by the staff and community – and she has an excellent understanding of the issues facing our organisation," he said.



Rangers join forces to protect the Kimberley



Cassandra McCumstie appointed permanent CEO



From The CEO's desk



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A new era of cooperation and collaboration



The scariest fun ever!



Bushfire strategy tested in the wilderness



Marine ops Mitchell joins the team



Kimberley Toad Muster

Want to keep up with Dambimangari news? Visit <http://www.dambimangari.com.au/contact> to join our mailing list



Dambi rangers joined a team of volunteers for the annual cane toad muster, an exercise which - believe it or not - included the preparation and production of cane toad sausages. Find out why on page 11

From the CEO's desk

As coronavirus continues to savage the globe and change the way we live, work and play, you might be wondering what DAC has been up to? Many Dambimangari People would be aware that the office has been closed to visitors and members since 21 March, but you might not know what's been happening behind the closed doors to ensure we will be in a prime position once we approach business as usual:

The quarterly RPF or "bucket" funds have been released and expended over the course of a few weeks. This was an awesome effort by just a few staff who gave above and beyond expectations! Thanks to Chloe, Jillian, Natashka and the Mowanjum Office Staff for a job well done!

Our Mowanjum-based Rangers have also been hard at it as some of you would have seen around the community tending to people's yard maintenance. If they haven't got to your place just yet, don't despair they are doing the rounds and will get to you as well.

What's happening with the early season fire work? The Premier's Department and DBCA have now declared the early season aerial incendiary work "essential". Prior to this declaration Dambi and Wilinggari Rangers were seconded at Charnley River Station (one of the AWC reserves) along with other crucial personnel for the duration. This means that a number of our rangers were offered to spend the entire fire season in isolation, including a two-week quarantine period to kick off proceedings. This is no easy gig with participants expected to swag the duration of their 6-9

week stay, conducting burning throughout the day and then planning sessions of an evening. All while being isolated from family and friends – especially daunting given what was going on outside of their Charnley bubble! A hearty thankyou to Josh Vartto (Ranger Coordinator) and Rangers Cherylyn and Shorisha Ozies! Really well done!!

Some ranger staff residing in Derby are continuing to deliver important outcomes, albeit at a reduced capacity to alleviate the now ever prevalent risk posed by covid-19 and its relentless march into the Kimberley. The yard, sheds and storage facilities are super clean and super orderly and super organised. Mitch Castellarin, the new Marine Ops Officer has now commenced and is working with those Derby-based rangers to begin/continue their individual journeys towards coxswain qualifications. The fleet and crew will be in immaculate condition ready to set sail at a moment's notice in the coming months.

Planning and development of projects is now a priority for other staff working from home. These types of activities will mean that the capacity of DAC will be improved across the board as everything from forms and policies, to the organisational structure are reinvigorated. It also provides staff with the opportunity to think outside-of-the-box, providing innovative ideas to advance the corporation.

Please take the time to read through this edition and we hope you enjoy the contents!

Cassandra McCumstie

Visitor pass to fund heritage work



A group of visitors returning through the Horizontal Falls by tender.

Dambimangari Aboriginal Corporation is introducing a visitor pass program to support the management of our unique heritage country.

The initiative will help to fund some of the work by Dambimangari Rangers who are responsible for protecting heritage sites and conservation areas.

Most travel in the Kimberley has come to a standstill this year with tight restrictions on access to the region – a result of the world Coronavirus Pandemic. However, the tourism business is expected to rebound next year based on a growing interest in Australian Indigenous culture.

The well-documented network of historical rock art sites and breathtaking scenery has become a popular tourist trail for ocean-going travellers following the coastline from Broome to the Western Australian-Northern Territory border.

Dambimangari Country includes the famous Horizontal Falls and Montgomery Reef. The region was once described by renowned natural historian David Attenborough as one of the natural wonders of the world.

As traditional custodians, Dambimangari people have a cultural obligation to care for country, including the security of important sites and the welfare of its plant and animal species.

The proposed fee for a visitor pass will be \$90 per person for 30 consecutive days to tour Dambimangari country from 2021. At some sites of special significance – where valuable archaeological and environmental treasures are at risk – people will be required to engage accredited guides.

During the past two years Dambimangari Rangers have been establishing depots and short-term bases along the coast to facilitate regular trips and security patrols through Dambi sea Country. The area is inaccessible from the land.

The Dambimangari website includes a map of 41 of the most popular sites for visitors. For cultural or environmental reasons some previous locations have been removed from the schedule to protect the heritage-listed features of the sites. Visitors are not permitted to access the sites which have been removed from previous schedules.

Prior to the unexpected premature end to this year's tourist season, Dambimangari officially launched the new Visitor Pass at the Marine Commercial Tour Operators Workshop in Broome on March 13. Over 50 commercial tour operators turned out to hear about the new program.

The first pass was sold a few days later to True North. Simon Hanrahan, the group's Operations Manager said he was "tickled pink" to be pass number 0001!

More information about the visitor pass program is available from www.dambimangari.com.au.

Jointly managed marine parks proposed for Buccaneer Archipelago

Traditional Owner representatives from Bardi and Jawi, Dambimangari and Mayala with support from the KLC are working with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), to negotiate the potential for creation of three marine parks over sea country in the Buccaneer Archipelago.

The negotiations have been ongoing since mid-2019. A final decision on whether marine parks are to be created will be made by native title holders at ILUA authorisation meetings or similar.

Project Planning During Covid-19 Pandemic

While the negotiation teams can't meet with DBCA face to face at the moment, negotiations have continued. Mayala and Bardi Jawi representatives are meeting fortnightly by videoconference and Dambimangari representatives are keeping in touch through the Board, regular phone calls and email exchanges.

Fieldtrips have been postponed and we are not sure when they will be possible. It is also not certain

whether we can meet the original project timeframes which aimed for ILUA authorisation meetings at the end of 2020 but we are doing our best.

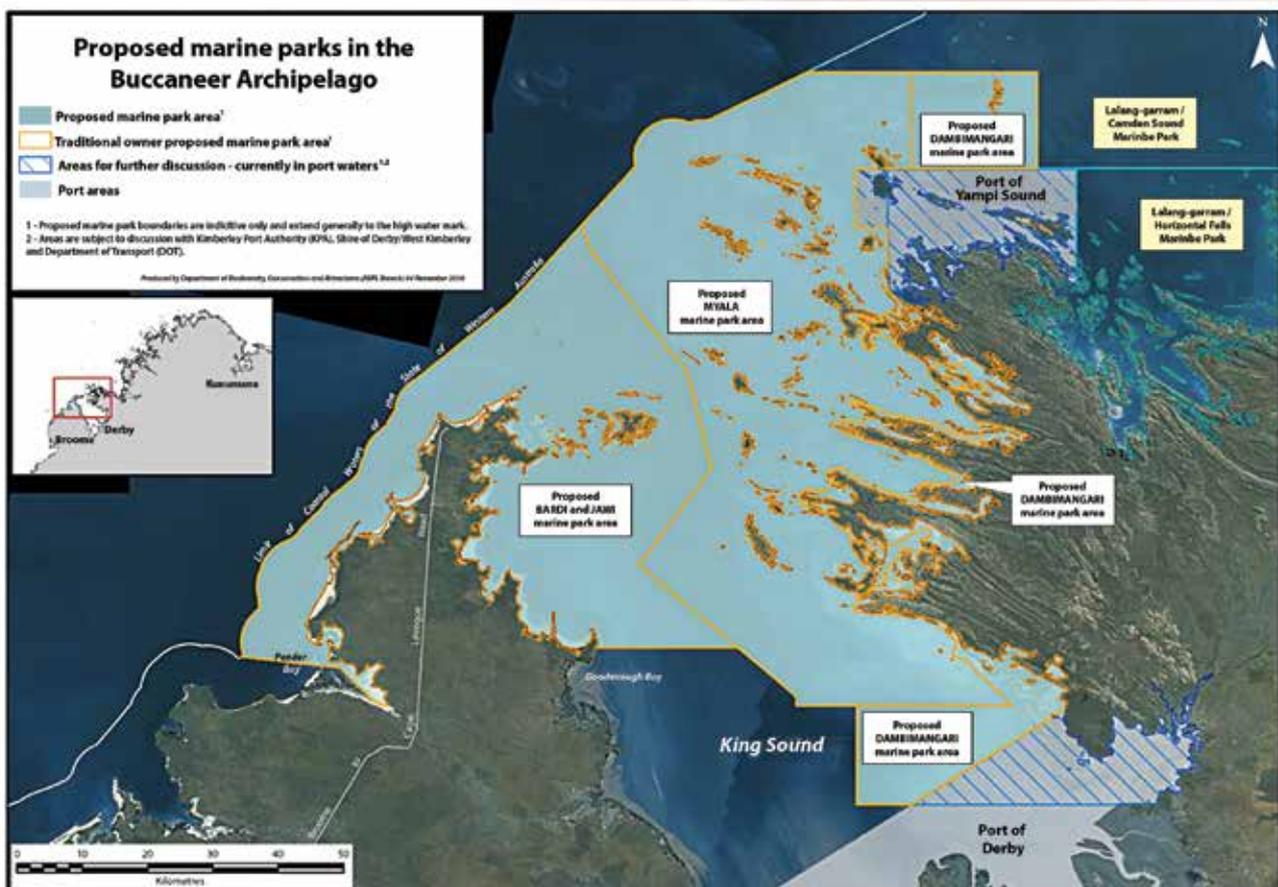
What happens next?

We will continue to hold meetings by videoconference to progress park design and negotiation. Once restrictions on travel lift we will make plans for community engagement, fieldtrips and finalising the project.

We will provide regular updates through these newsletters and meetings with PBCs.

Contact

To find out more about the proposed marine parks or to have your say, please talk to your PBC directors, negotiation representatives or your Healthy Country Program Manager. Alternatively at the KLC Anna Mardling or Catriona Webster can help: 9194 0100 or by email anna.mardling@klc.org.au, catriona.webster@klc.org.au.





Former Director Bronwyn Liddell's time to reflect

Being a Director on the Dambimangari Aboriginal Corporation Board for the past four years (2016-2019), I have experienced an incredible journey. Being a Traditional Owner and in my role as a Director, I was proud to be a part of this organisation and to be in a position to help my people. There were so many highlights during my term as a Director but one of the most memorable was being involved in the Lalang-garram Marine Parks that included on country trips/meetings and working with many genuine people along the way to achieve our goals.

It is truly heartening that Dambimangari has assisted Traditional Owners to establish their own businesses as a means of self-determination, the opportunity to be part of the economic growth and to become financially successful for themselves, families and communities.

Geoff and I had a hectic but wonderful Christmas/New Year in Hedland with our four children and their spouses plus some grannies who could make it. The current restrictions and not being able to see family and friends outside the Pilbara is extremely hard but I see it as a time of reflection

and as I always say, "It will pass" and "Whatever will be, will be."

Gardening is one of my favourite pastime and I must say my yard is coming along nicely but the work is never-ending!!! I can't wait for the cooler months to go fishing and I certainly miss my footy (GO FREO!). I have been busy spring cleaning and catching up on a lot of things around the house that were a bit neglected during my travels as a Director. Also a lot of time is being spent in the kitchen baking and trying out new recipes with the help of you tube.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Dambimangari Directors (retired and current), office staff and the various stakeholders for their support and assistance in matters concerning the operations and aspirations of the organisation. Congratulations and all the best to the new Board of Directors and I look forward to the continued achievements for our peoples.

Finally and most importantly, I must pay tribute to the invaluable contributions that the Cultural Advisors play in their roles in maintaining and preserving the Dambimangari peoples' law and culture.

P.S. Please everyone look after yourself and stay safe with best regards from Bronwyn (Bonny)



Rangers join forces

From page 1

Shorisha at the fire front

Josh Vartto says that without the early season fire program many of Dambimangari's important cultural sites and environmental refuges would be at risk during the dry season.

A successful ground burn was undertaken at Silver Gull creek over two nights 17-18 of April. This was critical as Silver Gull Creek had not been burnt for many years and the stand of Pandanus Palms had never been burned. The work will protect the infrastructure at Silver Gull for at least the next two years.

The joint task force will be reducing fuel loads in a broad area of natural bushland.

The lockdown - and the fire management program - are seen as critical in a time of devastating bushfires throughout eastern Australia, followed by an unprecedented health threat to remote Aboriginal communities in northern Australia.

The prescribed burns are part of an extensive program involving two helicopters and ground crews to control the extensive area of prescribed burns.

Dambimangari Rangers have a well-established tradition of fire management. The rangers use *Right Way Fire* that burns slowly and is not destructive like wildfire - to reduce fuel on the ground and create a mosaic of natural fire breaks. This prevents devastating wildfires from ripping through the Kimberley - protecting plants and animals and preventing the huge carbon emissions that come from wildfire.

The Dambimangari Aboriginal Corporation sells valuable 'carbon offset credits' from the work, reinvesting the money into the ranger program, ensuring this culturally important and spectacular part of Australia stays healthy for generations to come

The project has the backing of Qantas Airways' Future Planet program - a world-wide initiative with a special significance here in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

Every time a passenger "ticks the box" to Fly Carbon Neutral when they book a Qantas flight, the money is invested in a carbon offset program - like Dambimangari "right way fire" which reduces carbon emissions from wildfires in the wilderness.

Savannah Fire Forum

Over 350 northern Australia fire practitioners gathered in Darwin 18-19 February for the annual Savanna Fire Forum to share their intimate knowledge of traditional burning techniques and benefits to the environment and the landscapes where we live, work and play. Our rangers were part of a team representing the North Kimberley Fire Abatement Program along with Wunambal Gaambera, Balangarra, Wilinggan and Kimberley Land Council.

Dambimangari's Pete O'Connor delivered a presentation on the way the burning program has

been informed by Dambi culture that was very well received. Pete's speech was considered a highlight of the session as he explained how traditional cultural burning and the carbon project has helped the rangers to better manage country and better protect cultural sites.

Bringing together traditional knowledge with modern science and technology, Indigenous fire managers have cut uncontrolled bushfires by half, reduced the nation's greenhouse gas emissions and provided much-needed employment in some of the remotest parts of the country.

Dambimangari Ranger Coordinator Josh Vartto said the forum created opportunities to learn and make connections across northern Australia.

A new era of cooperation and collaboration

By Kelly Gardner



Cherylyn ready to reload the raindance incendiaries machine in flight

It may seem like the whole world is on hold at the moment with the insidious spread of covid-19, but things are still happening behind the scenes. There's a full complement of staff now on board at our partners the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, rounding out a great team of individuals who are dedicated to preserving Dambimangari Country alongside our Rangers.

Partner catch-ups are still happening, albeit from a distance! Work plans are being developed in a dynamic setting to allow for an instant roll-out so we can hit the ground running! And thoughts are being channelled into developing long-term strategies that will mean we address and hit our goals consistently and more efficiently.

And our mates at Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions are still raring to hit the water once operations kick-off! It will be a jam-packed program which will see our beloved Manambadda back in full commission and assisting wherever possible to ensure as many positive outcomes are achieved in what so far has been a pretty bleak year for operations thus far.

Some of you might also have been aware that Wilinggan has recently appointed a new Healthy Country Manager, Nathan Cattrell. Prior to Nathan's arrival conversations commenced between DAC and WAC to reinvigorate some joint projects, such as the fire walks (unfortunately now postponed until

next year) and Nathan has reiterated he is keen to collaborate wherever practical and beneficial.

Even with the virus preventing face-to-face introductions we are an adaptable bunch, if nothing else, and are managing to connect like never before! This all heralds well for what will be a frantic period of operations once restrictions are eased and then eventually lifted in the not too distant future.

At Dambi we are focussing on developing our key asset – our rangers. For some time now we have been so busy delivering on-ground environmental and cultural outcomes we have neglected the capacity development of our staff. Our crew is highly trained in a diversity of fields, but only to the point they are able to deliver the required works program – we haven't been stretching their capacity. Effectively this means we haven't been able to expand or even change our focus which means we haven't been responsive to change. Never more obvious than now in these challenging times.

But don't despair good people, things are about to change! Prior to the world going to "hell in a hand-basket", the DAC Board had approved an overhaul of the ranger program, which will see positions restructured, new permanent positions come on board, career pathways established and structured training programs introduced that will allow individuals within our team to specialise in fields they find interesting and are most passionate about.

The scariest fun ever!

It was with a great deal of trepidation that staff approached the office on Tuesday 10 March with the knowledge that training of an unusual nature was going to take place – venomous snake handling! Some had agreed reluctantly to participate with the hope of overcoming their intense fear of our slithery friends, some with the hope of being able to help save some unnecessary snake losses in our community, others just curious. Whatever their reasoning, eight brave souls had agreed to be part of the course being run by Gary Davies of WA Snake Handling for the day.

Our heroes for the day included: Kieran Bangmorra, Pedro Pelacious, Azarnia Malay, Edmund Jungine; Shorisha Ozies, Josh Vartto – and amazingly two admin staff: Natashka Ozies and Kerrissa O’Meara.

Strangely enough, once the course began other staff in the office began to hear laughter rather than the shrieks of terror which was expected. “What’s going on in there?”, CEO Cass McCumstie exclaimed coming out of her office to investigate. Despite the ruckus no one was game enough to crack the door of the DAC Boardroom to find out! Yet the jovial atmosphere continued throughout the day.

It turns out that the trainer Gary is a bit of a charmer and has developed a really fun and interesting way to get people to face their fears and overcome them in a very short space of time creating humour in the situation to set people at ease. So at ease that Kerrissa, who admitted to being very afraid (i.e. petrified!) prior to the course described it as “the scariest fun I’ve ever had!”. Well done Kerrissa and to all those participated.

Josh agreed that the training was a good day and appreciated the skills and new knowledge he’d acquired about our less-liked legless friends, “No doubt we’ll feel more comfortable around snakes when we see them in the bush or if we have to relocate one in the future. It was great to learn about their behaviour and how to handle them correctly”.



Natashka starts off with a small Childrens Python to settle the nerves



Josh Vartto shows a flair for snake handling

And finally, for the record, here is what you can do to keep snakes out of your yard:

- Remove potential food sources, usually rodents. Keep your property rodent-free and snakes will have less to eat.
- Remove open water sources. Snakes do find water attractive and need to drink water regularly to survive.
- Remove shelters, such as sheets of tin on the ground and piles of rocks or firewood.
- Keep a clear area around your house. Make sure grass is cut low, remove fallen branches, and prune overgrown bushes. Most snakes prefer not to move across long stretches of open ground.
- Patch up holes in buildings. Snakes will live under houses or outbuildings where the conditions are warm and dry and can get through any gap larger than your thumb. Place wire mesh with holes no larger than 1cm square over all potential entry points.

Kelly Gardner and Josh Vartto

Bushfire strategy tested in the wilderness



The imprint of a controlled burn in the shape of Australia shows the effectiveness and the accuracy of incendiary fire bombing.

Dambimangari rangers are part of an important national strategy to provide answers to the challenges of bushfire control in northern Australia.

Rangers and fire practitioners from Dambimangari, Wilinggin and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy have just completed a major program of “right way fire.”

The Kimberley fire group is confident that its program will deliver significant improvements to fire management in the next five months leading up to the wet season in the remote north west.

The group had to deal with unusual conditions for a unique fire management program.

They were based in the AWC’s Charnley River Wilderness Camp where the Government imposed a lock-down to avoid any risk of a Corona Virus outbreak.

The area is a remarkable, largely untouched, region of sandstone ranges and rain forests flourishing in the deep gorges of the north Kimberley region.

Dambi’s Ranger Co-ordinator Josh Vartto concedes that it won’t be possible to determine the success of this year’s program until the next rains arrive in November and December.

“But we know that the prescribed burns were more effective this year than they were in 2019 – partly because of the conditions including an improved wet season,” he said.

“There is no doubt that the work of our communities is delivering some important benefits.

“The Traditional Owners have been practising ‘right way fire’ for thousands of years.

“It’s good for the bush because it prevents the late season wild fires which destroy so much of the vegetation and habitat for the unique fauna of the Kimberley.”

The rangers were committed to staying in the refuge for up to two months to manage the program.

“Fortunately, we all managed to get along well and enjoyed our time at the camp,” said Josh Vartto

“In fact, we had some of the best jobs in the country.

“We got to work in some of the most beautiful places in Australia while most other people had to stay in their houses.”

Prior to the early season burning program commencing a week was spent undertaking cultural site clearances to ensure these sites would not be impacted by the aerial incendiaries work. As an adjunct to their stay in the wilderness, the rangers planted a comprehensive and thriving vegetable garden at the camp. Unfortunately, the green thumb rangers didn’t get most of the benefit from their labours. The produce began to ripen a week before they left.

Marine ops Mitchell joins the team



Mitchell Castellarin, Dambi's new Marine Operations Officer.

My Name is Mitchell Castellarin. I am 25 years old and I have grown up in the Kimberley. I have just scored a once-in-a-lifetime position working as the Marine Operations Officer at Dambimangari Aboriginal Corporation.

Having grown up in the Kimberley I love the country and I feel at home on the water. I have been lucky enough to spend a fair chunk of time working on the coastline, three years at Widjingarra bard bard (Fresh Water Cove) and two years at Gurri bay.

Having grown up on the water, I took the opportunity to leave school early and do an apprenticeship as an outboard mechanic. Finishing my trade in 2013 I spent the following year out on the coastline with some time on country. Over the next five years I spent

the dry season soaking up what I believe is the most pristine and sacred country the planet has to offer, then the wet season swinging spanners in Broome with a little bit of travel on the side.

I look forward to working with the ranger team to create a leading marine ranger program. The sea country that we will be taking care of has a great potential to attract a major tourism industry. We need to monitor the native flora and fauna to ensure it stays healthy for years to come.

If you are ever in the Dambi Office please come in to have a yarn, share some information and ideas with me. We all need to work together to keep the people and country healthy and strong.

Kimberley Toad Muster

By Kelly Gardner and Josh Vartto



Dambi rangers Kieran Bangmorra, Phillip Ngerdu and Josh Vartto (in light blue uniforms) take a break with other volunteers at the toad muster.

The 2020 season kicked off at the end of January with our Rangers conducting a joint exercise with DBCA, Bunuba Rangers, and Kija rangers for the annual Kimberley Toad Muster. Our team of super heroes were Kieran Bangmorra, Phillip Ngerdu, Frank Martin and Josh Vartto who travelled across the Kimberley over four days rounding up all toads in their wake for the purpose of making cane toad sausages. That’s right folks, you’re not seeing things – it says sausages! But more on that in a bit.

The four-day event was primarily run across three locations: Fitzroy crossing, Warmun and Kununurra, with a quick trip to Wyndham thrown in for good measure! Day one, or more accurately, evening one was held at Fitzroy where 30 people hit the streets for what proved to be elusive toads, with only 7 being rounded-up. This was well below expectations, but the silver-lining for Fitzroy is that means there’s not many about, meaning less impact on our precious wildlife and domestic pets.

Our crew of intrepid souls were treated the next morning to a tour of the Bunuba Ranger complex and the “Teacher Toad” program. This involves breeding

toads and then releasing them when they are in the least toxic part of their life cycle, when they’ve just changed from the tadpole to small toadlet stage. The hope is that any wildlife eating the toads at this stage won’t be poisoned enough to die, but only enough to get sick. Hence, they are taught not to eat any more funky looking toads

Next stop: Warmun, or at least that was the plan! Luckily the guys had set out on their quest travelling in two separate vehicles, because this is when, quite literally a spanner was thrown in the works with the breakdown of the trayback. As best the mechanics of Fitzroy tried, they just couldn’t fix the ole girl and Frank volunteered to make the tediously slow journey home to Derby. Thanks for taking one for the team Mickey! So that left just three to battle on regardless to Warmun. With the late departure from Fitzroy our team only arrived at 8pm, unfortunately too late to be part of the hunt for that evening. A total of 27 cane toads were nabbed by those who did hunt this second evening.

Next stop Kununurra: the most easterly part of the mission and where you would expect to find the

highest number of the dreaded scourge of the north! Day 3 saw the first lot of cane toad meat processing where our crew powered through 200 toads in preparation for what was pegged to be a busy night ahead. Alas only 30 toads were found in the area assigned to Dambi, with a total of 350 caught by all participants. The next night though our guys sussed out a more likely spot and by themselves caught over 250 toads. Nice one! All up about 2,500 toads were taken off the streets over the 4-nights.

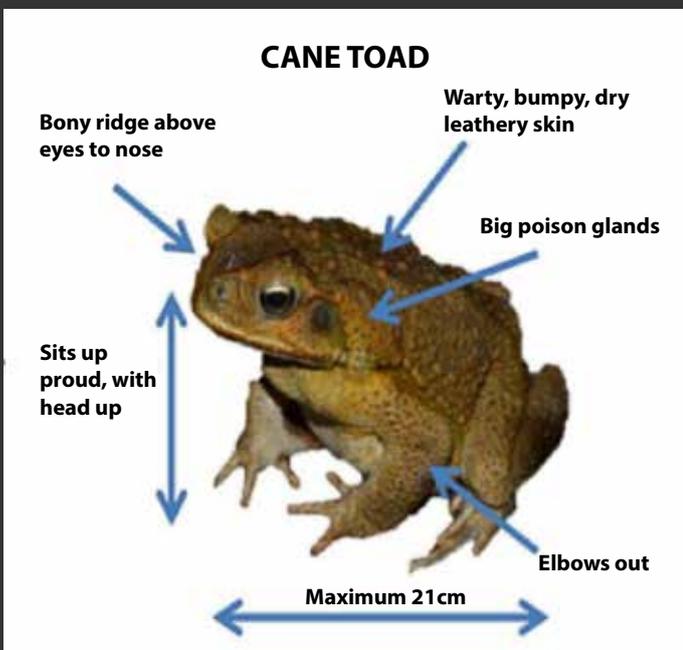
So, why cane toad sausages I hear you ask? We all know cane toads are highly toxic and generally anything that eats a cane toad does so as it's last act (this actually includes the odd silly person who for whatever reason try to sample bits of cane toad anatomy, I kid you not!). Processing involves firstly humanely gassing these notorious little devils, then skinning (the skin is the most toxic part), then removing the leg meat (the least toxic part), and then the meat is sent off to Perth for the magic sausage manufacturing process. Finally, a small amount of

foul-tasting toxin is added in low quantity to the leg-meat and viola! you have a cane toad sausage!!

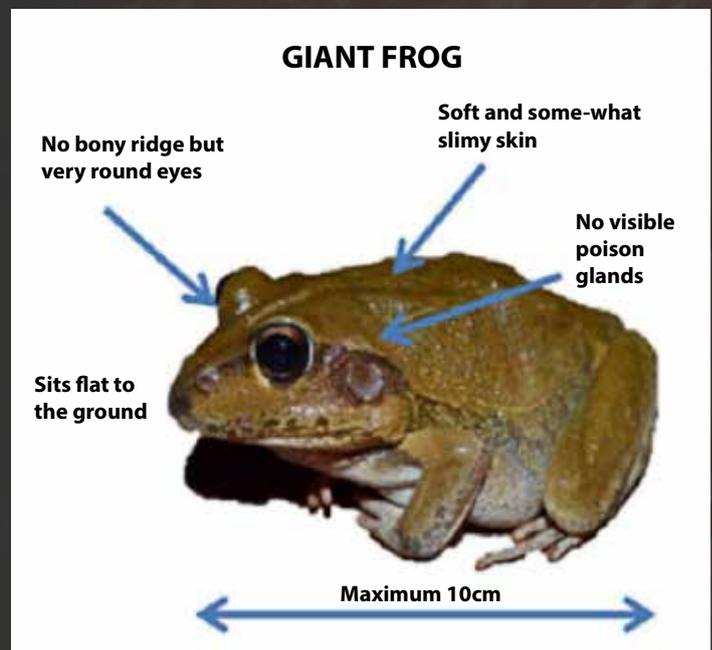
The theory is that our native fauna will eat a sausage, which will have been dispersed across the landscape prior to toad arrival, and get sick but not die. But they'll remember the smell of the cane toad and identify it as something awful to eat. This is called Taste Aversion and the scientists are hoping that it will save many of our highly susceptible quolls, goannas, snakes and even freshwater crocodiles!

Currently the toad frontline is around Fitzroy Crossing, but we know they are heading this way. It's predicted that they will be on our doorstep in the next 2-3 years depending on the wet seasons – unfortunately the better the wet season, the sooner they will be here!

It's important to be able to tell the difference between cane toads and our local toads and frogs, as some look very similar, but our natives are an important part of our environment here in the Kimberley.



A face only a mother could love! Kimberley's most wanted and not for it's good looks!



Our gorgeous Giant Frog, not to be confused with the God awful looking individual to the left.