



Spot Tales Newsletter # 6

Far North Quoll Seekers Network
(FNQSN) – 2011 mid year report



Spotted Tailed Quoll- Bellenden Ker area
Photo: Luke Jackson, Glenn Kvassay, Claire Garner

Newsletter Snapshot

- Sightings
- Urban quolls
- Survey news
- Papua New Guinea Quolls
- Members Day Out at Mareeba Wetlands
- QSN lends a hand for Mahogany Gliders
- A Quoll eats a Cat
- What's happening next

Sightings

It is encouraging to see our sightings database continues to grow. Currently we have a total of 182 records for Quolls in Far North Queensland. We now have around 72 spotted tailed quoll sightings, 105 northern quoll sightings and around 5 sightings where the species is unconfirmed. The sightings consist of historic and current sightings, both of which are important to determine historic distributions and areas where they have recently contracted or expanded in distribution.

Relatively high densities of northern quolls can be found in areas such as the Mareeba, Walsh River, Granite George, Mt Molloy and Lakeland areas, however it is important to remember that they are still not found in around 90% of their former range in north Queensland. Northern quolls were once found across most of Cape York Peninsula, then disappeared over much of the Cape when cane toads arrived. Only recently surveys have found remanent populations near the Wenlock River, Lakefield and Cooktown areas. Much of this good work has been done by the South Cape York Catchment Group, the general public and Quoll Seekers members. It is hoped that further remnant populations are found, and that dedicated conservation programs can bring them back across the Cape.

Urban quolls

In the sheds, cars and buildings in suburbs, towns and farms in north Queensland, a beautiful and enigmatic spotted carnivorous marsupial makes its home. The northern quoll is the most urban of all quolls and happily lives side by side with man. They live in the suburbs of Cairns and towns and farms within a 200km radius of Cairns. We are continually amazed at some of the stories people tell us about our charismatic and sometimes crazy northern quolls. Over the last few years we have found there are generally speaking three types of northern quolls (please excuse our technical jargon):

- 1) "Hitch Hiker Quolls" that like to live or hitch a ride in cars,
- 2) "Party crasher quolls" that like to live it up in peoples houses or sheds and make a racket,
- 3) "Surprise Quolls" that do random acts of craziness.

Below are some of our favourite northern quoll reports from the publicsee if you can work out what type of quolls they are?

- Aboriginal museum, Esplanade, Cairns. Ran across the esplanade into the store. Caught by shop owner, may have come in on a vehicle or migrated in from the northern beaches.
- Mareeba RSL. Call to rescue centre to advise a 'possum and quoll' were hiding behind pots/rubbish bins at door to club.

- Annan River. We heard a crash, turned our torches to see a quoll fighting a snake (black... not sure what type) the quoll killed it and ran off into the bush to eat it. We saw the quoll for about a minute, it seemed unperturbed by our presence.
- Redlynch. Have seen a couple of quolls on property. Had taken residence under car bonnet at one stage had to check under bonnet each time started car.
- Hungry Jacks Drive through, Westcourt Cairns. We were waiting in the car at the drive through, it came up out of the stormwater drain.
- Moorooloolooloo, Cairns. Living in a car.
- Mareeba wetlands. Family of quolls live in the roof of the visitors centre.
- Mutchilba. 3 northern quolls in roof of house.
- Mareeba. In roof of house - think they climbed the gutters and got under the eaves. Sounds like there are two and need to see if any evidence of nesting as possibly breeding.
- Portsmith, Cairns. Found to be eating peoples smoko in a tearoom at a kitchenware showroom. Quoll is believed to have travelled via car from Mareeba to an adjoining mechanic workshop and into the showroom.
- Bingil Bay. Found on the kitchen bench.
- Tinarroo dam area. Went into the house, next to chest freezer for warmth.
- Walsh river- Quoll lives in house and kitchen.
- Solomons carpets, Cairns. Found in roof.
- Koah/Kuranda. A baby quoll was abandoned his mother. They live in their house in the roof.
- Lakeland. Quoll was sighted within the house for two years up until its death in the wet early 2009. Was in kitchen.
- Lakeland. It is in the kitchen between 6.30 and 7.30 every night. It goes outside around 9pm and returns about 1am. The rest of the time it is asleep behind the dressing table.
- Cooktown. Have located up to 13 individual Northern Quolls from out our ceiling, 2 adults and 11 juveniles over a period of 4 days. There are still an unknown number up there, playing in our ceiling and keeping us awake.
- Mareeba. At least two quolls living in the hut on the property. Several quolls also reside in our shed beside the house. Every night as the sun sets the Quolls come to the hut on the property where I am staying and stay the night eating and playing in the hut. They don't seem to be that worried about sharing the hut with me and my dog, in fact my dog is spooked every night by their presence.
- Wujal Wujal. Saw quoll killing snake
- Westcourt. Found in the car after visiting Dimbulah (Walsh river area).
- Moorooloolooloo, Cairns. Found under car bonnet. Took 3 hours to remove the quoll, however unsuccessfully. The next day the quoll had gone. The car had been in town for over a week and it is likely that it was a local quoll. Dogs had alerted the owner that the quoll was in the car, and had left bite marks on the car body panels trying to get it out.
- Jabiru Safari Lodge. Couple of quolls the other night, one in the kitchen
- Lake Eacham. Quoll in the engine bay of car one morning, after my small dog alerted me to the presence of something there. It took quite a few attempts to remove it from the vehicle, as it kept hiding under the firewall, but not leaving the car, which had been parked in the shed overnight, but managed to do so without injury to the quoll. It scampered off and has not been sighted (or smelt by my dog, in the shed) since. Lake Eacham area not preferred habitat. May have 'hitch hiked' from another part of the Tablelands.
- Wenlock river area. Quoll living in a forty-four which was on its' side, to store small engine parts just outside our living area. We had bowls of dog food and water under a high cupboard in this same area.

We encourage everyone who has ever seen a quoll to send in a sightings form – available on our website: www.wildlife.org.au/quollseekers

Or if you have a story to share about where and when you saw a quoll, send it to ‘Quoll Bites’ on the above webpage - along with a picture if you have one and we may publish it.

Survey News

Network hits Quoll jackpot! (Bellenden Ker Trip)

After numerous field trips across the region, we finally obtain our first images of a spotted tailed quoll from our survey cameras. Six cameras were set up near Bellenden Ker and we obtained around 150 photos of spotted tailed quolls. We have identified at least three quolls to date, and the possibility of a fourth.



Spotted tailed quoll, Bellenden Ker. Photo: FN QSN Camera trap

Bellenden Ker appears to have a stable and healthy population as the network has observed or taken photos of quolls here on every trip (three to date). The last member to photograph quolls near Bellenden Ker was Jack Leighton (photos in newsletter #4- mid 2010).



QSN stake out: Glenn Kvassay (background) and Luke Jackson (foreground) , Claire Garner (photo on right)

Trips to Mt Windsor Tableland, Lamb Range & Granite George

In the first half of the year the network made other trips in the area including Mt Windsor Tableland, Lamb Range (Mt Edith/Tinaroo area) and Granite George.

Lamb Range & Lambs Head. Lots of spotted tailed quoll scats were found in several locations at the top of Lambs Head – surprisingly right on the exposed part of the rock which may be a latrine. Several spotted tailed quoll scats were also found at the Mt Windsor Tableland. Unfortunately no sightings were made by us or our trigger cameras at Lambs Head or Lamb Range. The wetter than usual conditions may have had something to do with this.

We have made two trips to Mt Windsor Tableland in the past year. Our first trip was unsuccessful however our second trip with Scott Burnett was highly successful with both northern quolls and spotted tailed quolls turning up on the cameras. We were lucky enough to see many other species of animals in our travels, which we also document for National Parks, including at Mt Windsor Daintree River Ringtail Possums, Greater Gliders, Yellow Bellied Gliders, Dingos, a large River Turtle, Australian Bustards, Boyds Forest Dragons and many frogs, lizards and other birds and mammals.

We conducted a camera free spotlighting trip to Granite Gorge and the Lamb Range. This trip was one of our most successful by far with two northern quolls being sighted as well as a brush-tailed phascogale, two rufous bettongs, a northern bettong, many Mareeba rock wallabies, squatter pigeons, babblers, agile wallabies and bandicoots.

Quolls of Papua New Guinea

Steven Hamilton is from the University of New South Wales and has undertaken research of quolls in Papua New Guinea. He presented his findings at the Quoll Workshop in Sydney, 2008. Below is a summary of his presentation:

Steve outlined the key factors relevant to quoll conservation in New Guinea. He noted that two of the six quoll species occur in New Guinea: the Bronze quoll *Dasyurus spartacus* and the New Guinea quoll *D. albopunctatus*, and that the TransFly biota of Southern New Guinea is ‘typically Australian’.



A wet bronze quoll

In relation to pest animals as a threat to quolls, foxes do not occur in New Guinea, however cane toads are established in several areas of PNG and are present on Daru Island (1km offshore of the TransFly region of PNG). A new shipping port is currently being constructed on Daru that may increase the likelihood of toads establishing themselves in the TransFly area. Anecdotally an increase in domestic cat presence has been observed in remote villages where they weren't previously kept. This is

concerning as it has the potential to facilitate the establishment of feral populations. Cats have become established as feral populations in the TransFly in the last 30 years. Anecdotal evidence suggests New Guinea quolls *D. albopunctatus* have become less frequently sighted following establishment of domestic cats in villages elsewhere in New Guinea. Oil palm plantations are also an increasing threat to lowland forest areas, through clearing and habitat fragmentation.

Steve described quoll trapping that was carried out in New Guinea with prototype light weight transportable traps designed for travel and local conditions. Despite intensive trapping over 8 weeks with 100 traps per night, only 8 captures were made of *D. spartacus* in the Transfly region. The New Guinea quoll *D. albopunctatus* has the largest continuous extant distribution of all quoll species. There is currently understood to be one single island wide population, and we are investigating population structure using genetic techniques. The species has been recorded in grasslands through to wet forests and moss forest, from sea level through to 3500 metres elevation.

The New Guinea quoll is absent from southern lowlands where the bronze quoll occurs. The bronze quoll is considered to have the most restricted distribution of all quoll species. The bronze quoll inhabits lowland monsoon mixed savannah lower than 60 metres in elevation. The species was first recorded in 1972 and is known only from 12 museum specimens. The bronze quoll is the only TransFly restricted mammal in New Guinea that is not also present in Australia. It is highly likely to have been (or still is) present in Cape York during the periods when a land bridge connected the TransFly with much of Northern Australia as recently as 8000 years ago. The bronze quoll is closely related to the extant subspecies of western quoll *D. geoffroii fortis*.

The subspecies of western quoll *D. g. geoffroii* that extended into the Northern Territory and Queensland that is now extinct may be even more closely related. The relationship between these two species is being investigated using DNA from museum specimens of *D. g. geoffroii*. This research will determine how similar the bronze quoll is to this extinct subspecies. Already the genetic relationship between the bronze quoll and the extant SW WA western quoll is almost as close as the same genetic species, genetic similarity with populations across the former range of *D. g. geoffroii* are likely to be even greater. It may well be that *D. spartacus* is the closest and last remnant of the extinct eastern Australian *D. g. geoffroii* subspecies.

Members day out at Mareeba Wetlands

We are planning to have a field trip with quoll seekers network members and members of the Wildlife Conservancy of Tropical Queensland on 3 September to the Mareeba Wetlands. The aim of the trip is to get to know members of both groups better, to present information about quolls and the network, what the network does and how members can provide assistance. We will then take members into the field and demonstrate how to use the automated trigger cameras. The Mareeba Wetlands has a healthy population of northern quolls so it's a good place to set up the cameras and hopefully get some images as well as potentially seeing wild ones live. If you are interested in this field trip, please contact Luke Jackson on 04213 14070 for details.

Quoll Seekers Network lends a hand for Mahogany Gliders post cyclone Yasi.

A call went out from the National Parks to Wildlife Queensland to assist them with camera survey work for the highly endangered Mahogany Glider and how it survived the impacts of cyclone Yasi. The Mahogany Glider has a very small range in Nth QLD and has specific habitat requirements. The entire Range of the Mahogany Glider was hit and devastated by Cyclone Yasi. The QSN assisted the National Parks in the cyclone ravaged area setting up several cameras in known glider habitat. Unfortunately no images of gliders were taken during the first few weeks after Cyclone Yasi. We have since been buoyed by reports that some gliders hung on and managed to survive. Hopefully as the forest recovers so to will the glider numbers, although their status at present is highly precarious. See www.wildlife.org.au for the latest updates.



Mahogany Glider
Photo: Daryl Dickson

Quoll eats Cat.

All too frequently we hear negative stories of quolls and other native animals being attacked and killed by introduced predators. There is a clear and distinct link between the loss of many native mammals as a result of the threat and impact from introduced predators, mainly dogs, cats and foxes. We were excited to hear a story of a tough old spotted tailed quoll in the Blue Mountains in NSW getting one back for the natives. The following account is provided.

The account is of a Spotted tailed quoll who had made several visits to a local farm house about 8 years ago. It started with a phone call at about 9.30 one cold winters evening, a frost was pending and the caller asked if I was the Quoll man and if I had lost a very large quoll. I said yes I guess I was, I had never been referred to as the Quoll man before, but hadn't lost a Quoll and I was interested in what he had seen.

He lived in an area that backed onto the Blue Mountains National Park not far from where Wollemi Wilderness area joined it. So it was very wild and rough country. His dog had been barking for several nights now and his house cat refused to go out at night and was terrified, I thought ...well not going out was a good thing anyway, but every night the cat food would disappear and the dog was tied up, it wasn't him, he thought maybe it was Brushed tailed possums? but hadn't seen any of those on the back veranda for some time, maybe they were back?

But this night he had seen a big Quoll walk in front of the sliding doors then eat the cat food and described in great detail. Normally he had the curtains closed in winter.

He was very concerned and I reassured him it was ok, please don't harm the quoll, they are protected and we would buy more cat food for it if necessary or even better still, stop putting the food outside and the Quoll would return to the bush when he got hungry. Well that all went well and I hung up.

Well one week went by and the phone rang again and now the dog had, been in a dustup of the quoll and was hiding in its kennel and the Quoll was eating a chicken carcass dinner having run up a tree with it. This quoll was very bold, very hungry and was basically terrorising the wildlife at night around this farm, I hadn't heard of this before. Again the Quoll had walked past the sliding doors on the back veranda, much to the terror of their cat inside. I persuaded farmer and his wife to just not leave any food outside and feed both the cat and dog inside till the quoll moves on, looking for a food source elsewhere. It was then the owner mentioned that his chickens had been killed some 6 weeks ago and they had blamed a fox at the time and as it turned out might have been this old, scared and very bold quoll.

It was about another week later I received yet another phone call, the farmer had not fed outside for all this time, locked up the garbage and hadn't seen the quoll at night for all this time. I thought this was good and to be sure of their pets safety, still feed inside for a few more days. I thought, problem solved.

Would you believe it, one more phone call, several nights latter, this time the cat was missing, whoops, I reassured them that the cat might be up a tree or just enjoying being outside after being locked inside all this time. I said just check up the trees and in ,under & around the house, you might find it. Well the next call was the last call and I had to go see this for myself, they found their cat up a tree hanging like a leopard kill, mostly consumed. I tried to hold back my delight, a cat being taken by a Quoll, great, they are fighting back, and at the same time as trying to console these people and also I trying to believe it might have been a powerful owl or another predator , I couldn't. I was so pleased to see that the Spotted tailed Quolls might regard these furry fluffy clawed animal, out at night feeding, as fair game, a cat just might pass for their favourite prey the Brushed tailed possum. Lots of questions arise from this account, like, was the quoll hanging around all along to get the cat? The Quoll hasn't been back since. Maybe it was mission accomplished by the quoll.

What's Happening Next?

Naturally our camera survey work will continue. We are looking at moving further a field now and collaborating with other wildlife and land management groups who also have an interest in ascertaining if there are quolls on their properties/estates. In particular, we are looking at doing survey work in the Mt Finnigan, Wallaman Falls, Mareeba Wetlands and Paluma areas. We would like to engage as many members as possible to participate in these activities with the aim of training members so that they can conduct their own survey work and feed results back to the network.

The network will be applying for a grant from the Commonwealth Government to further our survey work. The money would be used to purchase more cameras, a GPS, construct more Kvassay bags and purchase more straps.

*Glenn Kvassay and Luke Jackson
Far North Quoll Seekers Network*