



Spot Tales Newsletter # 7

Far North Quoll Seekers Network
(FNQSN) – 2012 New Year Report



Photo: Musky Rat Kangaroo and Green Catbird caught on FNQSN camera.

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Sightings

2011 has been nothing short of a spectacular year for sightings for the FNQSN in terms of both volume and location of sightings - particularly for northern quolls. Since commencing the network in 2008, the FNQSN has recorded a total of 279 quoll sightings of which 74 are spotted-tailed quolls and 205 are northern quolls. This year alone we have received 108 records of which 98 were for northern quolls and 10 were for spotted-tailed quolls. A high proportion of the northern quoll sightings were attributed to a study at Mt Emerald which has uncovered a large population of northern quolls in that area. Northern quolls have also turned up at the Lotus Glenn Prison, at Mt Surprise several hundred kilometres inland, at Cape Melville on Cape York and in Bentley Park, a suburb of Cairns. A group of tourists were also delighted to a day time viewing of a spotted-tailed quoll being harassed by birds near Cape Tribulation.

Our sightings register has now been updated to include GPS co-ordinates for all sightings. This assists us in carrying out our reporting requirements for National Parks as well as providing National Parks with accurate locations of quoll sightings for their own mapping and data. Huge thanks must be given to Hannah Pusey (see article below) and Claire Garner for assisting with this enormous job.

Research, Research, Research

Two important pieces of research for northern quolls have been undertaken recently or are about to get underway in North Queensland. One study - by Carol Esson as part of her Masters Thesis for a Degree in Wildlife Conservation and Medicine at James Cook University - has recently been completed. Carols thesis aimed to trap northern quolls and assess their health status to build up a reference data base. Trapped animals were weighed, measured, sexed and blood samples were taken and analysed for basic haematology and biochemistry values to establish reference values for this species. The analysis helps establish what is the normal range of values for these animals as a reflection of their health status. This study is important if there is an outbreak of disease. Without knowing the normal range value for the animal, it is difficult to identify and treat the animal. Great work Carol – the FNQSN commends you on your

efforts, congratulates you on completing your masters and appreciates the information you have provided us.

Another study being undertaken by Hannah Pusey is just getting started and is detailed below.

New research underway to help save the northern quoll

Hannah Pusey, PhD candidate at Deakin University Melbourne is undertaking research to assess the reasons for decline of the northern quoll. In particular, this project aims to evaluate the impacts of the cane toad on the northern Queensland (QLD) quoll populations. Hannah is working in collaboration with Australian Wildlife Conservancy to generate information to better inform future quoll management practices. This project will compare quoll populations in toad affected (northern QLD) and non-toad affected areas (Kimberley). It will specifically examine dietary preferences across their range and in particular, if quolls have learnt to avoid eating all amphibians as a response to the toad. Habitat use and whether quolls are retreating to areas with lower toad abundance will also be studied.



Call for volunteers

The success of this project relies heavily on the participation of volunteers to assist in fieldwork. Fieldwork includes trapping quolls, attaching GPS collars, toad abundance surveys, scat collection and more. Being a volunteer is a fun and rewarding experience for anyone who is passionate about Australian wildlife and enjoys spending time in the bush. Volunteers are needed for fieldwork in northern QLD and the Kimberley's throughout 2012.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, please contact Hannah on 0400 224 302 or email hpusey@deakin.edu.au

The FNQSN would like to highlight the significance of this study and would like to encourage members to get involved in this rare and awesome opportunity to be part of one of the most important studies relating to the conservation of quolls in recent times. Hannah is very keen to get as much help as she can so please let her know if you are interested.

South Cape York Catchment Group (SCYCG)

The SCYCG is a community based Natural Resource Management organisation that carries out activities in the Cooktown, Laura, Lakeland, and Helenvale areas of the Southern Cape York Region. The group engages closely with land owners, communities and local indigenous groups to undertake works including aquatic weed control, cultural heritage protection, revegetation of riparian areas, feral pig exclusion from wetlands, water quality monitoring and threatened species surveys (including quolls). The SCYCG undertakes its work in partnership with Traditional Owners,

Volunteers, Indigenous Rangers and School Students. The group's vision is that the area will be a place where the community is actively engaged in sustainable natural resource management practices so that the cultural, environmental and economic values of the region are maintained and enhanced.

Almost all of our sightings in the Cooktown Region and South Cape York Catchment area come via Jason Carroll of the SCYCG. Jason's information is crucial to the network as it shows the network that there is a strong population of quolls in the area and that in areas that they were thought to have disappeared, they may be holding on or even coming back. The FNQSN would like to thank the SCYCG for sharing with us their experiences, achievements and information with respect to quolls. We hope to collaborate even further with the SCYCG next year as part of our baseline survey of spotted-tailed quolls (STQs). Data from the area with respect to STQs is limited with very few historic sightings or records ever being made in the area. It would therefore be valuable to undertake new research in the area to understand the current status of the STQ in the area.

To read further about the SCYCG and their achievements, have a look at their website at www.scyc.com.au



Northern Quoll caught on sensor camera. Photo courtesy of Jason Carroll, SCYCG

Look what turns up in sensor cameras

One of the most enjoyable parts of being involved in the network is the opportunity to regularly go to a variety of wild areas and set up remote sensor cameras to try and find quolls. The FNQSN is not the only group in the area doing this with individuals and other conservation groups, including the South Cape York Catchment Group and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, actively using the cameras to capture images of wildlife. Often the FNQSN is fed images from these groups which we greatly appreciate. The cameras pick up a variety of wildlife and more often than not don't get any quoll images at all. Unfortunately pigs are very commonly picked up and we

have had a recent image of a cat holding a dead northern quoll in its mouth. Some of the images from our trips are provided below.



Long-tailed pygmy possum



Grey Headed Robin



Northern Brown Bandicoot



Whistling Kite



Brushtailed Possum



Oops – Quoll Seeker



Long nosed bandicoot



Green catbird

Mareeba Wetlands Quoll Discovery Day

A Quoll Discovery Day (QDD) was held in the afternoon of Saturday 3 September 2011 at the visitors centre at the Mareeba Wetlands. An enthusiastic crowd of 20 people attended and were given a 1 hour presentation by Luke Jackson and Claire Garner of the FNQSN. The Mareeba Wetlands was chosen for the QDD because it has a population of northern quolls that is regularly seen by staff and visitors. The aim of the meet was also to show members and interested people how to set up sensor cameras. After the presentation the group headed out into the reserve to set up the cameras. Unfortunately only 2 of our 4 cameras were operating but we were lucky to get a variety of images of wildlife at the reserve, including some great images of northern quolls. The QDD was a great success and thanks must go out to all those who attended and participated. Our thanks also go out to the Wildlife Conservancy of Tropical Queensland for their assistance with making this very successful evening happen. If you are interested in staying at the Mareeba Wetlands (where you have a very good chance of seeing a northern quoll as well as other wildlife including wetland birds, emus, bettongs, wallabies and bandicoots) please check out the website at www.mareebawetlands.org



Northern Quoll – Going for the bait! Mareeba Wetlands, September 2011.

The Eastern Quoll – its time to bring it back

The eastern quoll is one of the most successful quoll species in Australia, despite its loss to mainland Australia several decades ago. The eastern quoll is a medium sized quoll which is probably the most terrestrial of all quolls. It lives in a variety of habitats including forests, grasslands and in agricultural areas. The eastern quoll has two forms with a dark form and a lighter coloured form. Like other quolls, the eastern quoll preys on a variety of animals including insects, lizards, birds and small mammals. It also eats carrion and a variety of seeds, fruits and plant material.

The range of the eastern quoll at time of white settlement was thought to be throughout Tasmania as well as along the Great Dividing Range and coastal areas of Victoria and NSW. The species was quite common in those states in the 1800s until there was a drastic decline in the early part of the 20th century on the mainland. It is believed that the decline was likely to be as a result of a combination of a disease that swept through the colony as well as predation by foxes and loss of habitat to farming. The last known colony of the eastern quoll from mainland Australia survived in an isolated piece of natural bushland that hugs Sydney Harbour in the cities east. Due to their isolation, it is believed that these quolls survived because they were disconnected from the main colony and hence never contracted the disease. Unfortunately this small colony was eventually lost in the 1960s due to the pressure of the surrounding encroaching development, traffic and competition with domestic pets. It is thought that the eastern quoll may have lived in the Barrington Tops area in NSW after this, but there are no verified records of the animal's existence on the mainland for decades.

The eastern quoll is still very common in Tasmania however may become threatened if the introduced red fox takes hold.

Several conservation groups on the mainland, including FAME (Rothwell Station) in Victoria (go to www.mtrothwell.com.au to read more) and Secret Creek in NSW near Lithgow (go to ausecosystems.org.au to find out more) house captive populations of eastern quolls which they hope to release into the wild in an effort to eventually re-establish colonies on the mainland. Given the eastern quoll has not been seen on the mainland for nearly 50 years, it is reasonable to presume it has become extinct there. Much of its former range in NSW and Victoria is now protected in National Parks which have suitable habitat. Eastern quolls could be released into these areas from Tasmanian stock. Naturally it would be preferable to re-introduce them into the areas where they would have the best chance of survival (ie intact areas which have suitable habitat and have had introduced predators suppressed or removed through baiting). It would be wonderful to be able to spotlight through national parks in NSW and Victoria and see these wonderful creatures again and hopefully as easily as they can be seen in Tasmania.



Light phase of Eastern Quoll

Caring for our Country Grant

The FNQSN applied in 2011 for a grant under the Caring For our Country programme run by the Commonwealth Government. A grant was applied for so that the FNQSN could purchase more sensor cameras, a GPS and other equipment necessary to undertake a baseline study for spotted-tailed quolls in North Queensland. It was initially intended that this would take a year, however given the ground that needs to

be covered and the difficulty in reaching some areas, its likely that to obtain adequate data, the research is likely to need 3 years. Unfortunately our request was not granted. Notwithstanding this, we have obtained more cameras through other means and hope to collaborate with other groups in the region to undertake the study, albeit with probably less cameras than we would have hoped for.

Mt Emerald Wind Farm

Ratch Australia Pty Ltd (RATCH) proposes to develop a Wind Farm within the Springmount Station over Lot 7 on SP235244 which is located a few kilometres to the west of Walkamin on the Atherton Tablelands. The site has a good population of northern quolls. The wind farm may have significant impacts upon the population of quolls at the site particularly during the construction phase, as well as through potential impacts from invasive plant and animal species which may spread via the network of roads proposed. Construction of the turbines will also potentially destroy significant denning sites. There are also potential impacts from the noise generated by the turbines. One of the primary senses used by quolls for hunting is their sense of hearing. The noise from the turbines may inhibit their ability to hear prey moving in the vicinity of the turbines and hence reduce their hunting success. The proposal is being assessed by the Commonwealth Govt under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. We urge members to read the information available at the following website and provide input into the process. Submissions must be made by 9 January 2012. Submissions can be made to epbc.referrals@environment.gov.au. Detail of the proposal is at:

http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/epbc/epbc_ap.pl?name=referral_detail&proposal_id=6228

What's happening next?

2012 is looking to be a bright year for the network with Hannah's research kicking off early in the year. The network will be giving Hannah all the support we can and we certainly urge people who are interested in participating in this study to get involved and contact Hannah.

We are likely also to generate our own calendar to begin the task of undertaking a baseline study of the distribution and population of the Spotted Tailed Quoll in North QLD, with the help of QSN members and other conservation groups. So please let us know if you are interested in participating with this research.

Naturally we will continue to gather more sightings data and we urge anyone who hears about a sighting or sees a quoll themselves to contact us with the details so we can make a record of it

Wishing everybody a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year

Luke Jackson and Glenn Kvassay
Far North Quoll Seekers Network