

Cane toads meet their nemesis?



The cane toad invasion of northern Australia may soon come to a halt.

Terri Shine

An Amazonian parasite and a pheromone may be the keys to slowing the rapid spread of cane toads in Australia, according to cane toad expert Professor Rick Shine from the University of Sydney.

Professor Shine's team, with support from the Australian Research Council, studied cane toads in Queensland that lagged behind the invasion front and found they were infected with a lungworm parasite that slows down adults and kills baby toads.

The parasite was originally thought to have come from Australian frogs, but DNA sequencing showed the species came from the Amazon and is genetically different to similar parasites found in Australian frogs, so it can be safely used for biological control of cane toads.

The researchers have also

investigated 'alarm' pheromones released by cane toad tadpoles, which can be used to cause tadpole death or stunted growth in adults. Again, the pheromones do not affect Australian frogs.

According to another University of Sydney researcher, Dr Mike Letnic, the arrival of toads in the Victoria River District of the Northern Territory has caused a reduction of up to 75 per cent in freshwater crocodile numbers. And Professor Bart Currie at Darwin's Menzies School of Health Research says the newly discovered frog-eating 'secretive snake' is also in danger of being wiped out by the cane toad.

Professor Shine notes that his team found a 90 per cent mortality of large goannas and lizards at their study site.

Cures to help protect wildlife

The Australian Government has established an endangered species certification scheme that will enable compliant traditional-medicine practitioners to use an accreditation logo that will alert customers to the fact that their products do not contain ingredients from threatened species.

In some countries, threatened animals such as rhinoceros, sun bears, turtles and tigers are used as ingredients for traditional medicines. The scheme was developed by the government with the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association (AACMA).

Australia in on billion-dollar Asia-Pacific illegal timber trade

An illegal timber trade worth more than \$2 billion is thriving in the Asia-Pacific region, according to a report by the Australian Institute of Criminology.

The report says illegal logging is widespread in Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia and Papua New Guinea, with 73 per cent of timber exported from Indonesia and 35 per cent from Malaysia estimated as illegal. China appears to be the world's largest consumer, with 32 per cent of its timber, pulp and paper imports in 2000 coming from illicit sources.

Australia is the third biggest importer of illegal timber products in the region behind China and Japan, with 22 per cent of wooden furniture imports and nine per cent of all timber



Indonesia is one of the largest suppliers of illegal timber in the Asia-Pacific region. Borneo Orangutan Survival

imports in Australia coming from the illegal trade.

The report points out the consumption of illegal timber is 'not criminalised and largely not regulated' in Australia. 'It is this demand, especially for cheap timber supplies, that fuels the trade in illegal timber and translates into higher levels of illegal logging abroad.'



Coral trout numbers have bounced back in no-go fishing zones on the Great Barrier Reef. Dr Simon Foale

Species recovers in no-take zones

It took less than two years for coral trout numbers in the Great Barrier Reef to bounce back after a strict no-fishing ban was imposed over 33 per cent of the reef in 2004, reports a research team from the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, James Cook University and the Australian Institute of Marine Science.

The researchers found little or no improvement in coral trout population densities on reefs that remained open to fishing. The research, reported in the journal *Current Biology*, has international significance at a time when the UN Food & Agriculture Organization reports that most major fisheries are in decline.