

Goodbye Eric



Eric was probably the last 'big' goanna in Darwin and his recent death shows that these animals are not 'learning about toads' if they find a toad the right size and they are hungry they will try to eat it.

Eric weighed in at 3.327 kgs and was 1.335 metres long in 2012-13 and was 3.640 kgs and 1.4 metres long in 2013-14. He was almost exactly twice the body mass of the next biggest goanna of the 63 we have microchipped in Darwin. The next biggest was 1.89 kgs. Eric was in the prime of his life and in a pre toad world would have been a dominant male.

Eric has spent at least the last 6 years of his life living in a place where there are toads and has, like several others from our reptile project, died attempting to eat a cane toad. (if there are no external injuries or other signs of illness this is the most likely cause. Cars, slashers dogs etc leave marks!).

This is further support for the idea that the reason we have these pockets of persistence in Darwin is all about prey size and prevalence of toads. When there are very low numbers of toads (there have been in these areas) and almost no sub-adult toads, small goannas survive. Move to an area with small toads and the small goannas die along with the big ones and you get a full population crash like we have seen on the Adelaide River floodplain, other areas in Darwin and out bush.

Eric will be sadly missed and we are all the poorer from his passing. Hopefully we can work out a way to manage the toad problem well enough for his descendants to have a chance to experience adulthood!

I only wish that our governments were willing to play their part in this mess especially given the economic importance of biodiversity and given that we are almost half way through the UN Decade on Biodiversity. Sadly Australia leads the world, with the greatest biodiversity decline!

For details contact Graeme Sawyer Ph 0411881378