

TOAD TIMES

Stop The Toad Foundation (Inc)
Muster Newsletter



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The Muster continues ...

After 28 days of toadbusting the Great Toad Muster has caught thirty four thousand toads and the total is rising fast. The initial focus of our effort was on the western-most toads, but as we successfully cleared them we have moved our focus steadily eastward, driving the front-line back toward the Victoria River - the eastern edge of our strategic 'buffer zone'. The Muster continues at least until October 31.

TOAD CAPTURE TOTAL AT END OF WEEK #4 =

34,604

Patron's Progress

Tim Winton reports from the frontline

Having just returned from the STTF base camp at Timber Creek, I want to pay tribute to the **hard work and high spirits of the volunteers who are out in the field night after night during the Great Cane Toad Muster**. These folks, from all over Australia and from many other parts of the world, are doing difficult and thankless work in truly harsh conditions. They're living under canvas in the withering heat of the northern build-up and they work most of the night in snake-infested country, existing on only a few hours' sleep a day and yet there's no complaining, no shirking, and nothing but selfless enthusiasm. **These men and women and children are heroes**. West Australians can thank their lucky stars for such a defending army of volunteers, and my hope is that one day these folks will get the credit and the thanks they deserve for giving up their holidays, their time, their expertise and offering their community spirit to keep WA free from this scourge.



Tim Winton (far right) with Great Toad Muster teams ready to roll into the night – 14 Oct

The Great Cane Toad Muster is the first sustained and strategic landscape-scale operation ever undertaken to stop cane toad incursion and to drive them back eastwards. It's meant a 6 week period of unrelenting fieldwork. It has required an army of volunteers and has been run like a military campaign. The logistics involved in such an undertaking – getting people and equipment into the field safely and effectively in remote and difficult terrain – are mindblowing. Organizing, feeding, inspiring and caring for up to 50 people from diverse backgrounds every day for 6 weeks is a daunting business. It's quite a challenge to maintain the effort while refining our strategy. It's a constantly moving equation. But the team has been up to the challenge. To this point 124 people have been involved and their 925 nights (and days) of activity have removed 34,600 toads from the landscape. Our reconnaissance tells us that the frontline has been hit hard and pushed back many kilometres. When the Wet arrives and breeding season begins again, the cane toad will be starting from scratch a lot deeper into the Territory than when we began. Hopefully this means we've given WA another season of breathing space and that we live to fight another day. And do it all again bigger and better next year while the boffins at the CSIRO and elsewhere work on a permanent solution.

To be out in the field with such a diverse and enthusiastic group of people restores your faith in people. Volunteers are organized into teams of 6 or 8, most of whom have never met before. You might share the cramped seat of a troop carrier with a 72 year-old orthopaedic surgeon, an 18 year-old German backpacker, a chippie from Perth in his twenties, a 7 year old boy who can beat you at chess, a bloke from Kununurra, two girls from Derby and a young woman from Ecuador. You're all wearing equipment that make you look equally daggy and you're all sweating before you even see a toad. Pounding out along rugged station tracks at sunset to reach your target for the night, you might wonder what you've got yourself into, but a few hours later it's a different story altogether. A night of toad mustering has changed you. You drive home as friends and comrades. You're much hotter and sweatier and by now you're sharing the vehicle with thousands of bagged and squirming toads, but you're laughing and singing and carrying on like a pork chop. You've got the bug.



Tim Winton with STTF Regional Coordinator Graeme Sawyer as the field camp teams enjoy a NT sunset 12 Oct '06



The indefatigable Malcolm Hay who set the pace for everyone. Malcolm and his delightful wife Rosemary recently left the Muster after more than 4 weeks of hard slog.

A lot of people have lent a hand in this enterprise and a hell of a lot of toads have been taken out of the landscape. But in the process a lot of friendships have been made and a lot of addresses and phone numbers have been exchanged. It really has brought a lot of folks together, Australian and overseas, indigenous and non-indigenous, and it's proved something important for me – that there is still a special impulse in humans to pull together for a common goal, for a common good. Even though contemporary life has been squeezed down to the level of brutal economics, there is still a stubborn and resilient flame in us that lives on. People will still sacrifice their time and effort for no money, no glory, no ulterior motive. People will still rise to a challenge. People will still work co-operatively. Win lose or draw in the battle against the cane toad, this volunteer spirit is truly something to celebrate. This is good news indeed and I hope it finds its way into the public mind and the powers that be.

To those volunteers who've been and left us, to those still in the field and those who've signed up for the final weeks of the Muster, I thank you on behalf of the Foundation. Thank you for your guts, your spirit, your hard work and your friendship. You're a bloody inspiration.

Tim Winton

In the last two weeks the Muster has had participants from – Kununurra, Timber Creek, Darwin, Broome, Perth, Denmark, Qld, NSW, Canada, Hillbank SA, Derby, Fremantle, Hamburg Germany, Renmark SA, County Waterford Ireland, Unley SA, North Plympton SA, Katherine NT, Dawesville WA, Berwick Vic, Eudlo Qld, Pronten Netherlands, Wangi Wangi NSW, Pickering Brook WA, Abermain NSW.

Comments from participants

I know on one hand it is crazy to drive out into the darkness, walk through the bush and mud, surrounded by spiders and snakes, the only weapon a torch – and try to catch toads. But on the other hand it is great fun and absolutely exciting and its doing something for the environment. Now, after I have met many very nice people in the Toad Muster group, I travel on. And I am sure, the next time I see a toad crossing my way, I know what I have to do: STOP THE TOAD!

Julia (19 yrs Hamburg Germany)



I was at the Great Toad Muster 2006 from 23 Sept to 15 Oct as a volunteer. I helped with collecting toads most nights.

Before I went up to help I assumed that the impact we would have on the toads would probably be small. I was wrong, we had a huge impact on the toads & I believe that with at least 100 volunteers for 6 to 8 weeks late in the dry season we can help greatly in stopping the toads from moving further west into WA.

I would like to see my tax dollars going toward helping stop the toad entering WA. The Stop The Toad Foundation are doing a great job on the ground pushing the front line east, please support them financially so they can continue their fight against the toad.

Carl Danzi (Perth WA)

After Carl left the Muster he sent these comments via email to State, Territory and Aust. Government politicians thru the automated letter page at www.stophthetoad.com/http://www.stophthetoad.com/stt_petition/sttpetition.php



Chair of the STTF board, Robert Edel is issued his gear by John the Muster's Quartermaster.



Kev – the Lightforce mascot guards the batteries which power the 'Predator' lamps – preferred light source for the Great Toad Muster



Support the Stop The Toad Foundation (Inc)

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