

Cane Toad Detection Dogs On The Front Line

Clarence Landcare Inc



Combating the spread of Cane Toads - Are Conservation Detection Dogs another weapon in our arsenal?

The issue

Cane Toads are extremely adaptable and are able to thrive in a wide variety of habitats, breeding quickly and rapidly colonising and dominating large areas. Having a voracious appetite, they predate on many native fauna species whilst being toxic to animals that attempt to eat them. These abilities give Cane Toads a competitive advantage over our native species and create a significant challenge in terms of managing current populations and preventing their spread into new areas. The southern front of the Cane Toad spread is currently within the Clarence Landcare area, with the coastal region from Yamba to Port Macquarie considered to be the most vulnerable to being colonised by Cane Toads.

The solution

Emma a Working Line Cocker Spaniel and Tommy a Springer Spaniel are trained in the detection of amphibians as well as a diverse range of other fauna and biological content. With their trainer Steve Austin, these Conservation Detection Dogs came to the Clarence Valley to demonstrate their skills in detecting Cane Toads in risk areas. Supported by North Coast Local Land Services through funding from the Australian Government's Wildlife and Habitat Bushfire Recovery Program, these dogs and their trainer spent three days traversing 20 kilometres of the Shark Creek Road, just west of the Yuraygir National Park and the current Cane Toad containment line. This site was selected as it provided a survey of Cane Toad movement at the southern front line following the September 2019 Shark Creek fire incursion.

The impact

Whilst no evidence of live Cane Toads were noted, the work of both Emma and Tommy proved positive by the placement and detection of frozen Cane Toads in the field. Prior to the arrival of the detection dogs into the focus areas, cane toads were hidden throughout the area and logged on a handheld GPS. The detection dogs were then utilised individually with a one-way transect along the road and the surrounds. While the dogs had already proved themselves to be up to the task, their suitability was inadvertently tested and further confirmed on the last section of the trail on day three. During the field test, a frozen metamorph (young toad) was unwittingly dropped and was later recovered by one of the dogs.



Key facts

- All detection works were undertaken at the southern fire incursion from 2019 Shark Creek fire.
- Detection dogs covered 20km over 3 days.
- 3 frozen Cane Toads were hidden, 3 times a day.
- Detection dogs achieved a 100% recovery of the hidden toads.

Project Partners



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