

News from Brooklyn Station, Mt Carbine

- An extract from the December issue of Wildlife Matters, the Australian Wildlife Conservancy newsletter. Whole newsletter available at:

http://www.australianwildlife.org/news_detail.asp?ID=36

CSIRO scientists have made a remarkable discovery at Brooklyn Station, an Australian Wildlife Conservancy property near Mt Carbine on Cape York, locating a population of the little-known Chestnut Dunnart. Listed as rare under Queensland legislation, the discovery of the Chestnut Dunnart population caused great excitement because it extends the animal's known range by several hundred kilometres.

This species is known previously only from the tip of Cape York (500 kilometres away) and Blackbraes National Park, located 400 kilometres west of Townsville. The discovery at Brooklyn is therefore a stunning range extension, confirming the significance of the property as a "biodiversity hotspot". Three dunnarts were caught during the long-term monitoring program that has been established at Brooklyn to examine the recovery of flora and fauna following new fire management and the removal of stock. This work is carried out collaboratively between AWC, CSIRO (Alex Kutt and Eric Vanderduys) and the Queensland Herbarium (Jeanette Kemp).



Chestnut Dunnart (*Sminthopsis archeri*) - a rarely encountered dasyurid.

The dunnarts were captured in Poplar Gum and Mt Molloy Box open woodland with a Kangaroo Grass ground cover on the alluvial flats of the Mitchell River.

The Chestnut Dunnart is an elusive and rarely seen animal. It was initially described from specimens from New Guinea in 1973, though a subsequent review of Australian museum specimens by Dr Steve Van Dyck (Queensland Museum), confirmed that animals collected by A. S. Meek in 1889 and D. Thomson (1933) from Cape York Peninsula were the same species.

Like others of its genus the Chestnut Dunnart is a small, aggressive carnivore, feeding on insects and small vertebrates, often of equal size to itself. Due to the lack of captures and its rarity, its biology is poorly known, although New Guinean specimens are known to breed from July-October. The species appears to have a wide habitat tolerance, since other populations have been found in tall eucalypt woodlands as well as heathlands, and at altitudes ranging from sea-level to 1,000 metres.

The discovery of the Chestnut Dunnart on Brooklyn, which harbours extraordinary levels of biodiversity, reinforces the importance of this sanctuary as a refuge for many of Australia's threatened animals.

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The fourth major survey at the permanent monitoring sites on Brooklyn was completed during November 2007 (see *Wildlife Matters* June 2007 for more detail on this project). In an intense effort over 10 days, the team carried out over 6,000 trap-nights, 400 bird surveys and 100 active searches. As well as collecting a considerable amount of data on the abundance of many species, the team recorded 12 species for the first time in the survey program (these species had been previously observed opportunistically), and a thirteenth species that was new to the sanctuary list - the eastern spiny tailed gecko (*Strophurus williamsi*). Brooklyn lies at the very northern edge of its distribution.