

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

DATE: TUESDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 2013

ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Top predator ‘rehabilitated’ in Eureka Prize-winning research

Research which is helping to rehabilitate the verminous image of the dingo has proved a winner for University of Tasmania conservation biologist Professor Chris Johnson.

A multi-institutional team led by Prof Johnson last night won a prestigious Eureka Prize for their investigation of the native dog’s role in the struggle to reduce damage caused by kangaroos, foxes and feral cats

They have found that dingoes sustain biodiversity and can help land managers control invasive species.

For their innovative approach to conservation, Prof Johnson and his team have been awarded the 2013 Australian Museum *NSW Office of Environment and Heritage Eureka Prize for Environmental Research*.

Their work shows that dingoes control kangaroo populations and suppress foxes and feral cats. As a consequence they’ve found that ecosystems with dingoes have better vegetation condition and more diverse and abundant populations of small native mammals.

“Australia has a big problem with biodiversity loss,” Prof Johnson said today. “We’ve already lost many native species and many more are in decline, possibly on the way to extinction.

“To turn this situation around, we need bold new approaches, such as using the dingo to help control threatening species like foxes and cats.”

The team—which also includes Dr Michael Letnic of the University of New South Wales, Dr Euan Ritchie of Deakin University, Dr Arian Wallach of James Cook University and Adam O’Neill at Evelyn Downs Station, 850km north of Adelaide —found that dingoes now occupy the top predator role once filled by the Tasmanian tiger.

Prof Johnson is a New Star Professor in the UTAS School of Zoology. His other current research projects include an investigation of the decline of small mammals in the tropical savannahs of northern Australia and another into why Australia’s Pleistocene megafauna became extinct.

A short video made by Prof Johnson about his team’s dingo research can be viewed here:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4jNyQ9xPmU&list=PLEh1S0YpN664wbOk_HMFX8FzikFZHsp2&index=35

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