

Report on First Quoll Seekers Survey

By Jane McLean

Nearly 20 trappers met at 8 am at the BP garage beside Stuart Hotel on Sunday 1 June 2008. With cars shared, we drove to a property on the foothills of the western side of Mt Elliot. Russell Warner, Townsville City Council Resource Manager, was pretty sure that northern quolls occurred in the vicinity; he had been told that the owner of the adjacent property had been forced to remove quolls from his kitchen during their night-time raids so it was a logical area for learning how to set the hair traps.

Our first job was to place a strip of double-sided sticky tape, approx 5cm wide, close to each end of an A4 sized sheet of clear plastic. We prepared 10 sheets and they were numbered. Other volunteers prepared the baits – a dollop of chicken mince placed in a tea-egg-like device – to be used for luring the quolls into the hair-trap. The trap parts that we had prepared, together with metal U-hoops for one type of trap, conventional plastic traps, hammer, lures, and tape to mark each location, were placed in buckets for easy carrying. We walked through the farmer's cow paddock and up into the foothills.

As we worked our way up the hill towards a large rocky outcrop, we observed that it was very pretty, grassy country with lots of dark protruding rocks. The vegetation included many well-known Townsville hillside species such as: *Acacia bidwillii*, *Melaleuca nervosa*, iron bark species, *Mallotis phillippensis*, *Grevillea* sp, *Euroschinus falcata*, *Ficus opposita*, *Pogonolobus reticulatus*, and the beautiful grass, *Themeda triandra*.

When the first trap site was chosen, a small patch, no more than about 30cm x 20cm, was cleared of any grass that might get caught in the trap. The prongs of a strong metal U-hoop were hammered into the ground. A chicken lure was set so that it sat in the centre of the U. After removing the protective film from its sticky tape, one plastic sheet was slipped into the U, tape-side down, and secured to the U by more tape on the outside. The result was a short open ended tunnel with two strips of sticky surface inside to catch some hair when a quoll entered to investigate the lure. Pink marking tape was tied to an adjacent tree to guide the collector on a subsequent trip.

The next trap was set about 30 metres further on but this time using a Faunatech Universal Hair Funnel a commercially-made unit. This trap comes with a 'Faunagoo wafer', a removable styrene card coated on the animal-side with a very sticky glue-like substance to which hairs stick. The hair funnel was anchored with metal 'tent-pegs'.



Hair funnel with sticky Faunagoo wafer inside

Thus the two types of trap were set alternately until 20 traps had been set along the route towards the large rocky outcrop. The biggest challenge was finding a little piece of flat ground soft enough to hammer the metal U's into – it was a very rocky slope.

With the traps all set by around mid-day, we headed down the slope to a road which provided an easy walk back to our cars. The plan was to collect the traps towards the end of the following week. I thought it was a lovely outing to an area I would not normally have the opportunity to visit.

For more information on NQ Quoll Seekers Network go to www.wildlife.org.au