

The Toon Trust and the Asian House Gecko

Since October 2008 a small band of people has been out in the dark twice each week (less frequently in the cooler months) hunting the Asian House Geckos that have established a small breeding population in Burnt Pine. Sharp eyes, quick hands (and sometimes feet) and determination to eradicate these exotic pests are required, and great progress has been made thus far. While the original estimate was 150 geckos in the main population in 2006, over 350 have been caught since trapping began in 2008.

It's important to remove these exotic pests before their numbers become unmanageable because (1) they can cause breakdowns in telephone exchanges, computers, printers and other electrical equipment where a safe, warm breeding environment is found; (2) they carry salmonella and if they become established in restaurant and coffee shop kitchens could become a public health issue; (3) if global temperatures do increase sufficiently they might be able to breed away from the protection provided by buildings and become established in the island's forests, upsetting the ecology there by eating important insects and snails which are essential to the proper functioning of the forest; and (4) if their numbers increase so does the chance that they will inadvertently be introduced to Nepean or Phillip Islands where our own rare, endemic gecko lives.

Asian House geckos have shown elsewhere that they readily outbreed and compete with native gecko species, quickly displacing them simply by sheer force of numbers and aggressive behaviour. It is our responsibility to do all we can to protect the unique species we live near, and eradicating this potential problem is one way of providing that protection.

Working in the dark, peering into crevices and cracks searching for small and cunning lizards is demanding work, and without the best possible equipment to support the hunters the best results are difficult to achieve.

The NI Flora & Fauna Society which originated this program and continues to manage the eradication work, applied to the

Toon Trust for funds to provide best quality headlamps and torches for the eradication team. Although the gecko numbers are greatly reduced, eradication has not yet been achieved and monitoring must be continued for 1-2 years after the 'last' gecko has been caught, as there are likely to be a number of 'last' geckos out there.

After some time of trapping being undertaken by volunteers, and then with some funding provided by the Administration and a grant from the Commonwealth's *Natural Heritage Trust*, the Flora & Fauna Society also applied for funding to enable the continuation of the trapping and monitoring though the important 'mopping up' period.

In any pest extermination program it is a well-acknowledged fact that 95% of the problem animals can be removed with 5% of the resources, but the remaining 5% of the population can use the remaining 95% to ensure complete removal.

The Flora & Fauna Society is grateful for the support received from all the abovementioned sources, and looks forward to the day when Asian House geckos are no longer scampering around the buildings in Burnt Pine.