



May 14, 2009

## Species bonanza unearthed on Charles Darwin Reserve

A SCIENTIFIC expedition to Charles Darwin Reserve owned by conservation group Bush Heritage Australia, has uncovered several new species of insects and amphibians.

Expected discoveries included a nationally endangered (*IUCN 1996*) skink, millipede, freshwater snail, beetle, moth, a frog, a tiny insect called a pseudoscorpion and an insect nicknamed the 'feather-legged assassin bug' and a plant that can only be found on Charles Darwin Reserve.

The species were discovered during a week-long field trip to the Charles Darwin Reserve coordinated through a partnership between BHP Billiton Iron Ore and environmental not-for-profit Earthwatch Australia.

Thirty-five volunteers, including five scientists, descended on the 68,000 ha property to map, identify and name both rare species and those currently unknown to science.

The project was strongly supported by Charles Darwin's great-great grandson Chris Darwin, a long-standing Bush Heritage supporter whose generous gift in 2003 led to the establishment of the Charles Darwin Reserve. Chris both endorsed and participated in the blitz to mark the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth and 150 years since the publication of *On the Origin of Species*.

The vision of Bush Heritage is to protect 7 million hectares of Australian land, water and wildlife by 2025.

CEO Doug Humann said the species discovery expedition had been an incredible success and he hoped it would be the first of many.

'As an organisation, we are committed to protecting and managing some of Australia's most precious and unique flora and fauna,' he said. 'Field trips like this are essential for us to gain a unique insight and better understanding of the biodiversity on our reserves.'

'One of our most interesting finds was an insect called the feather-legged assassin bug,' he said.

'This crafty predator ambushes its prey, pierces it with its curved mouthparts and then injects powerful saliva that immobilises its prey and then dissolves it.

'The discovery of these rare and fascinating species demonstrates the need to protect biodiversity hotspots like Charles Darwin Reserve for the long-term. Support of conservation initiatives not only enables the discovery of new and important species, but a chance at survival.'

'This expedition also provided us with opportunities to spot the vulnerable (*EPBC Act*) malleefowl, a key species that is part of a targeted recovery program on the reserve.'

Mr Humann said the research from the expedition would help inform scientists, governments and the environmental sector on the best ways to protect and manage WA's natural heritage.

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## **NOTES TO MEDIA**

Interview opportunity with CEO Bush Heritage Australia, Doug Humann

Ph: 03 8610 9100

High resolution photos available of discoveries on the reserve and scientists identifying species

## **Notes to editors:**

### **About Bush Heritage Australia**

Bush Heritage Australia, which was founded in 1990, is a not-for-profit organisation that protects Australia's unique animals and plants and their habitats. It owns and manages 31 reserves throughout Australia covering almost 1 million hectares. Bush Heritage Australia's goal is to protect more than 7 million hectares by 2025 through ownership, management and partnership.

### **About Earthwatch Australia**

Earthwatch Australia is an international not-for-profit environmental research organisation whose mission is to engage people worldwide in scientific field research and education to promote the understanding and action necessary for a sustainable environment. Earthwatch Australia supports research that addresses what it believes are the biggest challenges facing our environment, but which also have the greatest opportunity for unearthing sustainable solutions. Priority research areas are: ecosystem services, climate change, oceans and cultures.

### **About BHP Billiton Iron Ore**

BHP Billiton Iron Ore is one of the world's premier suppliers of iron ore, producing more than 122 million tonnes per annum (on a 100 per cent basis) and employing more than 10,000 people. The company's operations in the Pilbara region of Western Australia include seven mines, more than 1,000 kilometres of railway lines, and port facilities located at Port Hedland.

### **About the Charles Darwin Reserve**

The Charles Darwin Reserve is situated on the edge of WA's Avon Valley wheat belt. Formerly a sheep station, the 68,000 hectare property is recognised as a biodiversity hotspot. It lies within the Southwest Botanical Province, an area that covers only four per cent of Australia while providing habitat for 52 per cent of the nation's rare and threatened plant species.

Charles Darwin Reserve protects precious remnant vegetation in a region that once supported impressive expanses of eucalyptus woodlands, shrub land and heath vegetation. Much of this vegetation has been cleared for agricultural activities. As a result, Charles Darwin Reserve stands as a vital refuge for plant and animal species in the region. York gum and mixed salmon gum gimlet woodlands provide important habitat for the Reserve's dynamic bird life.