

Goanna News, Issue No. 52, February 2023

Great news! On 22nd January we started the new year with a great roll-up of people for the camera trapping, so all baited camera traps are now active again. And we were fortunate to extract excellent data from the apparently 'faulty' GPS pack on goanna Rambo. (We even fixed the problem, by following instructions from Telemetry Solutions, so the GPS can now be redeployed without being returned to the USA.) Third, we encountered two new goannas, a male 'Rum' and a female which eluded capture efforts but is thought to be goanna Robin.

On page 7, information about volunteering to help with the project is highlighted. We need a few more people during the next 6 weeks so please check it out. For newcomers to these emails, information about Goanna News and the NPA Goanna Project can be found at the end of this issue.

Molonglo Vet Clinic



I begin with a huge **THANK YOU** to Molonglo Veterinary Clinic in Coombs, where John and I spent the evening of Sunday 22 January. The story is on page 4.

Movements of Goanna Rambo

The previous issue of Goanna News (in January) mentioned that Rambo's GPS pack was providing no data and that he was hard to radio-track due to radio interference. On 17 Jan, John and I managed to find and capture Rambo and replace his GPS pack with a new one. The radio tracking beacon on the new GPS packs uses a radio frequency on which there is little interference in the Ainslie-Majura area, so Rambo is now easier to locate. Rex however is a different story ...

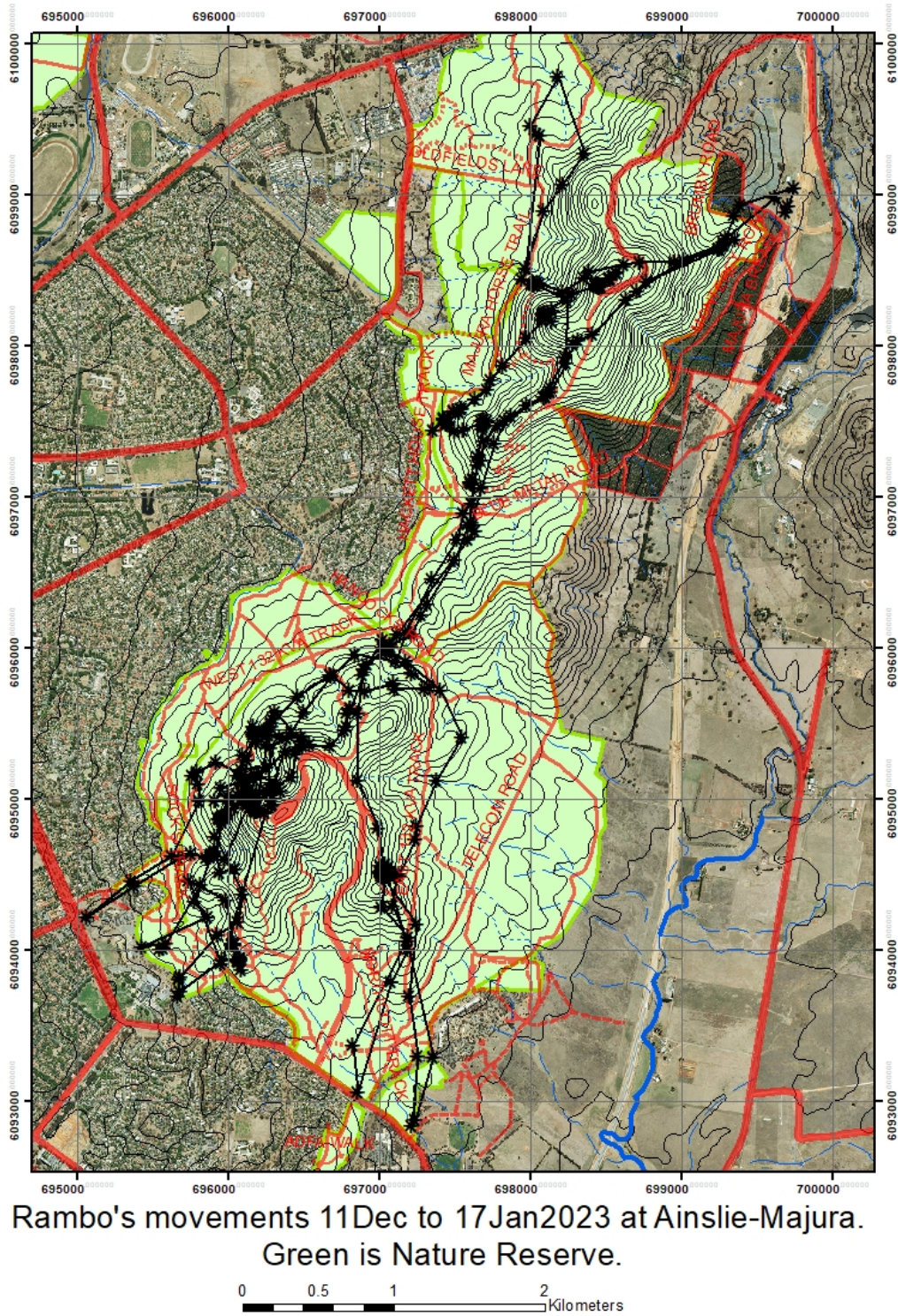
Figure 1: Slicing open a precious GPS unit using a heat gun and sharp blade.



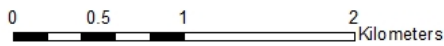
Back home I cut into the apparently faulty GPS that we had removed from Rambo (Figure 1) to connect a computer cable. And we were in luck. Bingo!! There were lots of data (Figure 2). Then

following instructions from Quintin Kermeen, President of Telemetry Solutions, the problem was diagnosed. There was one incorrect digit in the 17-digit 'address code' in our base station for Rambo's GPS. When the errant character was replaced, the GPS communicated with the base station. The big question now is how did Rambo change the code? 😊

Figure 2: Movements of Goanna Rambo back and forth between Mt Ainslie and Mt Majura.

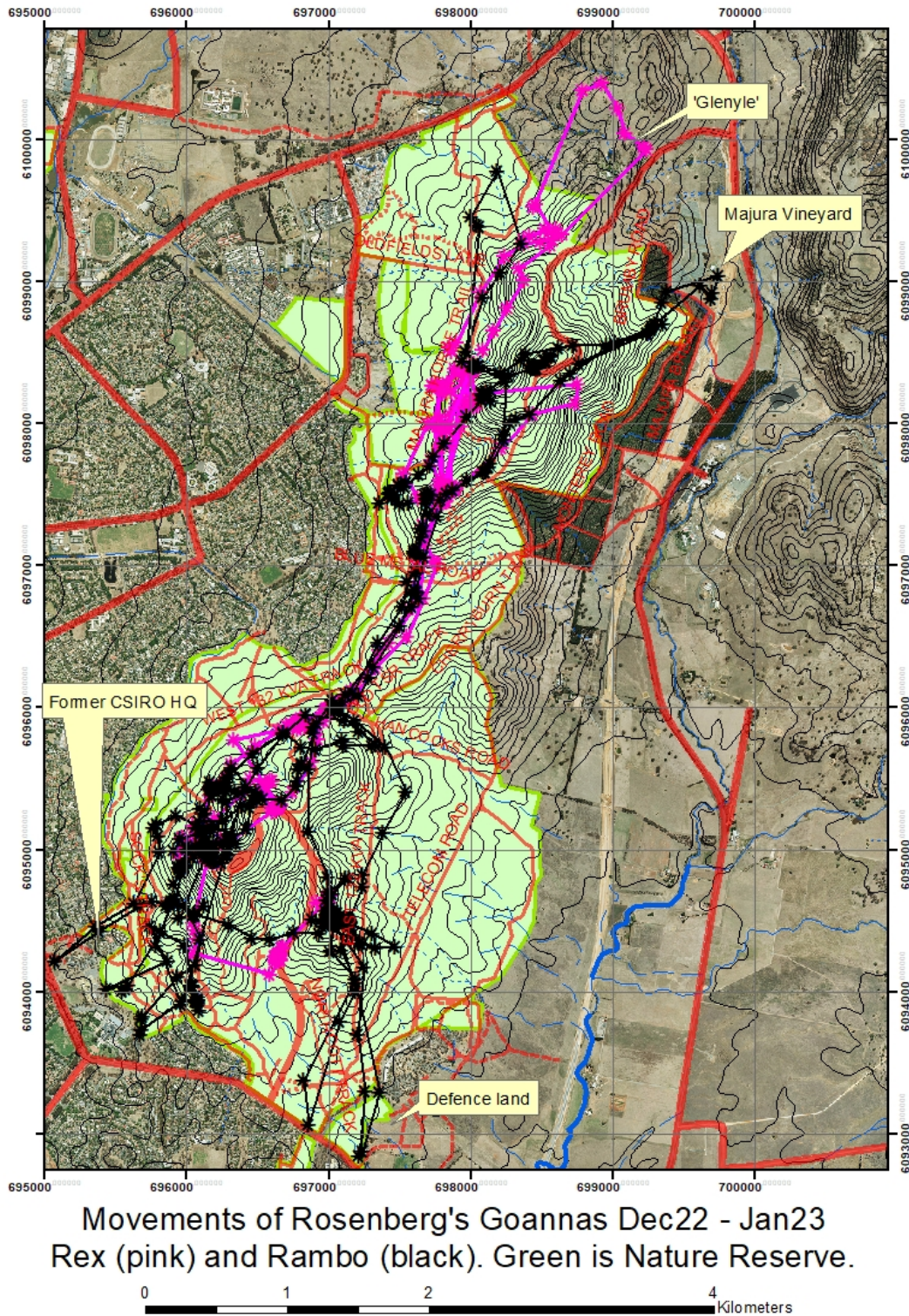


Rambo's movements 11Dec to 17Jan2023 at Ainslie-Majura.
Green is Nature Reserve.



You would be forgiven for thinking Figure 2 was a reformatted version of the map I provided in the previous issue of Goanna News, showing the movements of Goanna Rex, but no, this is Rambo. Figure 3 shows both animals on one map.

Figure 3: Movements of Goannas Rambo (black) and Rex (pink) in the spring and early summer of 2022/23. Excursions outside the reserve are identified with property names.



Movements of Rosenberg's Goannas Dec22 - Jan23
Rex (pink) and Rambo (black). Green is Nature Reserve.

Another piece of good news is that Rambo's wounds, illustrated in Goanna News 51, have completely healed. There are now two scars on each side of his tail base, most likely from the four canine teeth of a fox. The cameras (see below) are showing that Ainslie Majura is currently full of sub-adult foxes. Perhaps one of those learnt something about taking on such a sizeable reptile in the incident that resulted in Rambo's scars.

Goanna Rum

On Sunday 22 Jan, volunteers Meg and Bob spotted a goanna entering a burrow while they were doing camera maintenance. The goanna was missing part of its tail. As with the sighting and capture of Goanna Rambo illustrated in Goanna News 51, we captured this goanna a few hours later to fit a GPS pack, after he had re-emerged from his burrow. Meg christened the new goanna 'Rum', a short name for a shortened goanna, she said, following the tradition of names starting with R.

Rum made only lethargic efforts to avoid capture, and proved to have three gaping slashes on his neck and throat that were leaking blood and other fluid (Figure 4). It was obvious he should not be fitted with a GPS pack. Instead we arranged veterinary treatment to remove grit and dirt, stitch the wounds together and administer an antibiotic suitable for reptiles.

Figure 4: One of the neck wounds on Goanna Rum

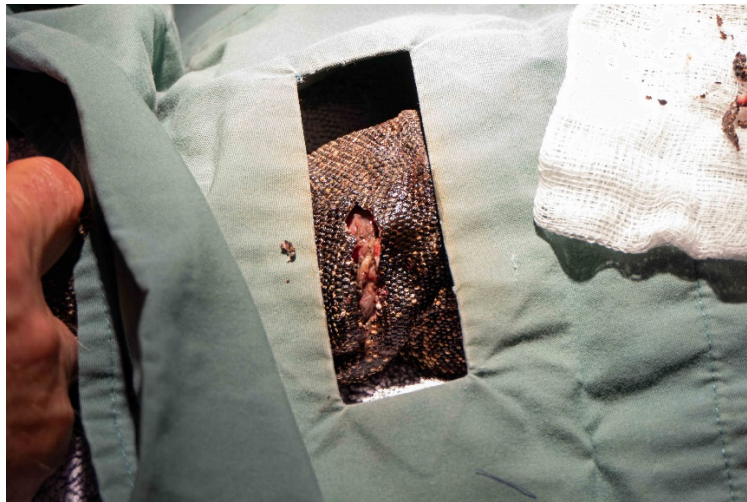
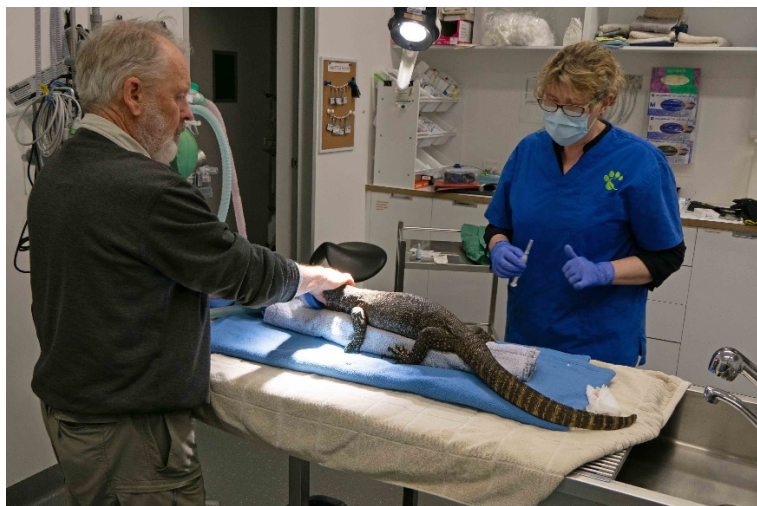


Figure 5: Dr Ariane Lowe (right) treating goanna Rum while John Brickhill assists by holding the anaesthesia mask on the goanna's head



Before releasing goanna Rum, we glued a small radio transmitter to his scales so it would last at least a week. This enabled us to provide follow-up doses of anti-biotic three and six days after the first dose (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Left, field administration of antibiotic; Right, volunteer Frank helped radio track Rum, administer antibiotic and release him into the thicket where he had been resting.



Figure 7: Even Ranger Meg Doepel, seen here releasing Rum after his third dose of antibiotic, who has exceptional knowledge and experience with reptiles, had not previously seen a Rosenberg's Goanna at such close quarters before.



Camera on a burrow used by four Rosenberg's Goannas

After Rum's visit to the vet, volunteers Kim and Frank, and I, released Rum into the burrow that he had been using. We also knew this burrow as the one where Rex had spent the winter. We left fresh chicken pieces inside the entrance as an easy meal for Rum, and set a camera to monitor his comings and goings.

The camera showed that not long after we departed, Rum raced out of the burrow, knocking the chicken pieces aside. A little while later an unknown yellowish goanna appeared, probing inside and all around the burrow. She ate the chicken. And shortly after that, Rambo appeared. As the day went on, Rambo and the female mated on top of the burrow, beside the burrow, below the burrow, and in every possible spot in front of the camera (Figure 8). We have never before recorded four goannas using the same burrow. Of course, we immediately started attempting to catch this female but unlike Rambo, she was not encountered during searches in the area, and did not enter our traps.

Figure 8: Goannas Rambo and a female mating above the four-goanna burrow.

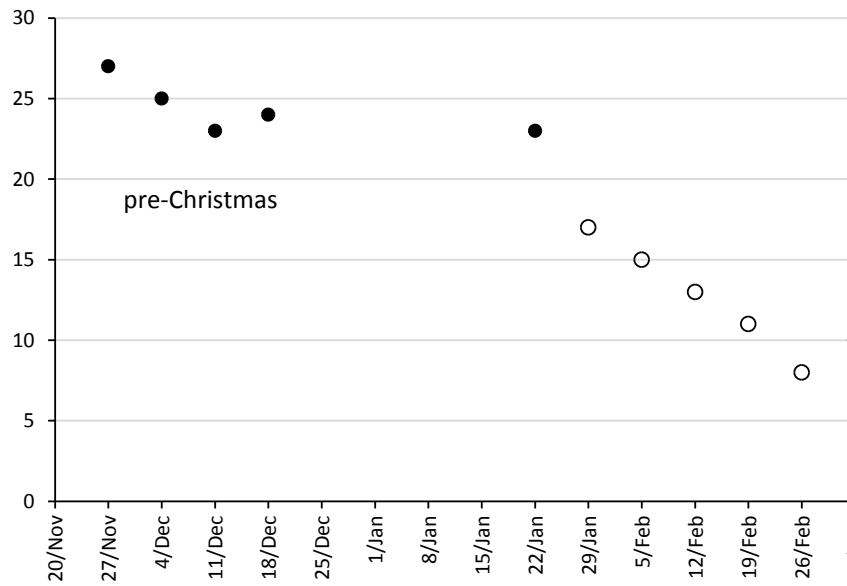


Camera trapping to estimate the goanna population

We have completed five of the planned eleven camera maintenance visits, so we now have photos from five weeks of camera trapping. Quite a few people have volunteered to look through photos so we have quickly made good progress looking through the 484,000 photos taken in the first three weeks.

Even now we volunteers have completed a much greater survey effort than the February 2021 survey which used only 20 cameras for 3 weeks. And (Sound Trumpets! Ta Da!, Ta Da!) not one camera has been left turned off. Nor has there been any vandalism or theft. We are doing quite well. However the number of people signed up for the camera visits during the second half of the survey is significantly lower (Figure 9). To continue, we may have to assign more than one camera walk to each person or pair of people.

Figure 9: Fewer volunteers are signed up for future survey dates (hollow circles) than for sessions completed so far (solid circles).



Its possible that a few people have simply forgotten about the survey over the break and will soon return to it, but more likely they are simply doing other things. So we need to recruit some new helpers. Cynthia Burton and I will try using Facebook for that. If you are interested in helping, contact me for details and sign up at the link [here](#). You'll need to be able to navigate with a smart phone or GPS to hidden cameras.

Goanna Rum entirely consumes two adult male goannas

Re-examination has shown the RIGHT face of Goanna Rum is the same as the right face of what in 20XX I called 'Luke Dunn's Campbell Park Goanna' (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Left, 'Luke Dunn's Campbell Park Goanna'; Right, Goanna Rum, the same animal.



And looking at Rum's LEFT face, it is the same as 'Richard Watt's Majura Summit Goanna' (Figure 11)

Figure 11: Left, Richard Watt's Majura Summit Goanna; Right, Goanna Rum, the same animal.



In statistical terms, Rum has reduced the number of known goannas in Ainslie Majura by 'consuming' two others. That is, Luke Dunn's, and Richard Watt's goannas both are Rum. He has been photographed at Campbell Park, near the summits of both mountains, on the Lower Beacon Track and on the East 132 KV Road. So he gets around, probably a bit like Rex and Rambo.

The female goanna seen mating with Rambo appears to be Goanna Robin, first detected in the 2021 survey, but the burrow camera was too far away to get the kind of photo we need to be sure about individual identification.

NPA membership

If you participate in goanna field activities more than twice, I will suggest you join the National Parks Association, ACT. As well as supporting the ACT community group that lobbies governments about management of protected areas in the ACT region, and supporting the goanna project, there are many other benefits from membership, and it is amazingly cheap at \$22 per year (non-concession) for a family. Have a look at www.npaact.org.au. Also checkout and follow our Facebook and Instagram pages for updates on our activities including walks, work parties, monthly meetings with guest speakers and the goanna project.

About Goanna News and the NPA Goanna Project

Goanna News is an occasional series of emails from me, containing photos and updates from the NPA Goanna Project. They are sometimes prepared with the help of the other members of the Goanna Project Committee – John Brickhill, Enzo Guarino, and Rosemary Hollow. (And Brian Green is a part-time committee member who the other committee members consult on biological matters.)

I have two email groups, this Goanna News one and one about upcoming activities which is mainly for people planning to come out in the field. Please let me know if you would like to be added to, or removed from, either group.

Aside from the emails, there are various other communications about the project. Occasionally there are articles in the NPA Bulletin. We have written 12 so far. They provide a more succinct

account than Goanna News, after a longer delay. Also there are social media posts, talks to community groups and the odd media interview.

Our plan for the NPA Goanna Project is the Project Outline, which is updated annually. It lists project achievements and states our aims and how we intend to achieve them. The Project Outline is available by emailing me.

POSTSCRIPT

I did say 'Goanna Rex is trouble'. Once again he has ripped his GPS pack apart (the only goanna ever to do so), but this time in a different way, dropping both the GPS unit and the radio beacon. There is no way to relocate him now. Therefore when goanna Rum is healthy again we will put a GPS pack on him instead.

During the period when we were administering antibiotic injections, Rum moved 0.5 km from his release point to a burrow under the East 132KV road, then another 0.5 km to a large rabbit warren in a dam wall. Rosenberg's Goannas prey on rabbits and often remain in rabbit warrens during the warmer months. So it is possible that rabbit control activities applied to warrens are responsible for the loss of some Rosenberg's Goannas. (Warrens may be fumigated, destroyed with the tynes on a bulldozer or other heavy equipment, or destroyed with explosives). A Shingleback appeared to be using the same warren as Rum. Perhaps a number of other reptile species are also vulnerable to warren-directed rabbit control. The problem for Rosenberg's Goannas can be avoided by treating warrens in the colder months when goannas use their own burrows exclusively.

Cheers,

Don Fletcher