

Most of the ACT is too cold for goannas, and where they can persist, most of the year is too cold. In spring, as the land warms, goanna weather can be patchy. Our trapping was postponed twice this year, due to weather, before we made a start. Then when we had to turn on the windscreen wipers to see the road on Thursday morning at Mt Clear, 400m higher than Canberra, the thought of another postponement was weighing on my mind. By mid-morning the air temperature was still only 11 degrees, less than half what seems to be needed for goannas to be active, and just as importantly, clouds still prevented the sun from warming the ground. I was concerned because time was running out for our borrowed 4WD, trailer, traps, and other equipment, and Christmas commitments had begun to cut into the availability of volunteers.

But in time, things got better, as they do. By the end of the day, our 29 traps baited with smelly chicken frames had yielded up a goanna. And we had released him wearing a GPS pack in a new kind of saddlebag harness draped over his tail. Six GPS packs remained in the car. Importantly, the team had begun to learn about each other (some had never met most of the others before this day) and our procedures for trap checking and animal processing had almost been habituated in the team. I thought that if we got the right weather on the second day, we would be ready enough. And so it was on Friday. In warm sunny afternoon weather, we suddenly had 7 large 'male' goannas in bags waiting to be processed, but time was running out for people to get home to their Friday evening commitments.

Mature workers quickly evolved efficient team activity - the right balance developed between flexibility of roles and constancy. Phil and Rupert did weighing, and Phil controlled the information recording and linking of data in separate systems (a crucial role for our teamwork, as well as for our results). Jason (PhD candidate from the genetics lab at UVC) and Elesha took blood samples (not easy from an anxious, thick-scaled reptile). Kevin and Rupert held animals in the right position, ready for each procedure, and stopped us getting bitten. Enzo took most of the body measurements and helped out with everything. I placed microchips and tracking packs and took face photos. Phew, it was done!

Somehow, from somewhere, Kevin produced glasses of cool champagne when we were almost packed up. Mine was gone before I knew, but it seemed the nicest champagne I ever had. On our way home, in separate cars travelling 15 km up-river and 15 km down-river from the central processing base, we released the seven where they had been caught, five with GPS packs. No one had got

bitten or stuck with a needle. Data did not seem to have got muddled, even with three goannas being processed at once around the same small table, and lots of similar sounding numbers being spoken aloud. Stress levels had remained low (ours and the animals). In fact these goannas were docile, compared to the general reputation for this species. We left the 29 traps in place, ready to complete our task next week. I held back one GPS pack to enable us to try next week to improve the distribution of tracked animals along the valley. That kind of thinking is possible only because of the Environment Grant obtained this year by NPA from EPSDD in the ACT Government, which allowed us to purchase this many GPS tracking packs.

Two of the captured goannas carried painted symbols from our research a year ago. One was Goanna '3', fitted with a tracking pack last year. Last year he journeyed 3.5 km north from his small home range on a hill, spent a few weeks in the new location part-way up the Booth Range, shed his tracking pack deep under some boulders, then returned to his home range where he was photographed by Kevin. This year he was trapped from the place where he was caught last year. Will he make a similar journey, at a similar date as last year?

Somehow, between the daily activities of trap setting, checking, nightly trap closure, and processing animals, a few of us also got a chance to visit the hatchlings, and maintain the nest cameras, or just watch. As you can see from the photos below, the hatchlings are larger, but still beautiful. And so are the adults.

Our next planned event is on Monday when I will visit the hatchlings with people from the EPSDD Comms Team, for media purposes. While I'm there, a malfunctioning camera can be replaced and we may also be able to get radio signals from one or two of the adults. Then on Thursday and/or Friday a small crew will be back to fit the final tracker, but concentrating our trapping effort in the upper valley. After that we will start a roster for radio tracking, to keep a kind eye on our charges and stay in touch with their wandering. Occasionally we will make the extra effort to download their GPS fixes.

The 'female' GPS packs will be here by Christmas, only 35g each, plus maybe 15g for the harness, therefore suitable for animals weighing over 1kg, which is quite small for Rosenbergs Goanna. We have a few ideas how to catch the females which we will start testing in the next few weeks. Traps tend to catch only males. The project plan is to focus on females in 2019-20 but if we can start making progress this season, so much the better. Whereas the 'male' GPS packs are

mainly from the Environment Grant, the female GPS packs were purchased with NPAs own funds.

Our main task over the summer will be to keep touch with the tracked animals, replacing harnesses as needed, then in autumn to retrieve as many of the tracking packs as possible.

cheers

Don Fletcher

The hatchlings are growing



Goanna field lab. I've been told some people say they cant see any of our chairs.



A familiar face. Goanna 3 from last year



Goanna 3 fitted with the new 'saddlebag' GPS pack



Goanna Solid Square



A water dragon

