



BDTNRM Media Release

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Saving Irwin's turtle

Crikey! The *Eelseya irwini* is a rare turtle named after the late Crocodile Hunter Steve Irwin and his father Bob, who caught one on a fishing line during a family camping trip in 1990. Steve took pictures of the turtle and sent them to world renowned turtle enthusiast John Cann, who identified it as a new species and named it *e. irwini* in 1997.

Irwin's turtle occupies a 100km stretch of the Broken-Bowen river system west of Mackay. Ecologist, Dr. Ivan Lawler, started researching Irwin's turtle in 2004. After spending a year looking for it, Lawler and his team, from James Cook University's School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, conducted a pilot study in 2006 and have been working hard to learn more about this rare species ever since. So far only two nests have been found.

Its yellow head and pink nose make Irwin's turtle a curious looking creature and it has a very strange and somewhat unusual breathing mechanism, even in the turtle world. Irwin's turtle can breathe underwater by taking water into its cloacae, or bum, where it has a chamber with gill-like structures to extract oxygen. This enables the turtle to stay underwater for long periods without taking a breath.

Dr. Lawler's research has found that Irwin's turtle is in decline. Their research indicates that 93% of the turtles are adults. If the population is flourishing there should be lots of young turtles and few adults, but the study found quite the opposite. Dr. Lawler is now looking for the turtles' nesting sites so they can be protected and the species can be given a chance at survival.

BDTNRM is funding tracking equipment to help Dr. Lawler and his team study Irwin's turtle more closely. Dr. Lawler is optimistic that Irwin's turtle can be protected with the help of landholders and agencies such as BDTNRM because once the nesting sites are identified BDTNRM can work with landholders to help them protect the sites and the turtles. Dr. Lawler is also optimistic that with multi-agency funding the project will proceed long enough for us to gain a thorough understanding of this rare river dweller.

For more information contact:

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