



MEDIA RELEASE

13 June 2017

Bush Blitz and Department of Defence discover new habitat of secretive fish

Scientists have doubled the number of known global locations of a secretive fish after finding it in an area managed by the Department of Defence.

The Angalarri grunter, a type of bream, was discovered at two new sites in the Bradshaw Military Field Training Area near Timber Creek in the Northern Territory.

Fish experts Dr Michael Hammer, from the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, and Dr Glenn Moore, from the Western Australian Museum discovered the new habitat during a Bush Blitz in the western Top End recently.

Dr Hammer said they'd been looking for more records of the Angalarri grunter for some time.

"This Bush Blitz gave us an amazing chance to sample the Angalarri River that flows through Bradshaw," he said.

"The result was all we could have hoped for. We not only found new records of the fish, which tells us a lot about their habitat, but we found juveniles that have not been observed before."

Dr Moore said the Bush Blitz survey continued to expand their understanding of Australia's unique fauna.

"This is just one of many important discoveries made whenever a Bush Blitz survey is undertaken," he said.

The Angalarri grunter is a large fish with stunning markings and exceedingly rare. It is assessed as a vulnerable threatened species in the Northern Territory due to its highly localised distribution. One of the only other records of the existence of this fish comes from a previous Bush Blitz survey at Judbarra / Gregory National Park, about 50km south of Bradshaw, in 2015.

Drs Hammer and Moore were part of a 16-strong team from museums, herbaria and universities taking part in this Bush Blitz survey.

The team were joined by five science teachers through the Bush Blitz TeachLive project.

Two weeks were spent surveying the Defence property while other discoveries including new species of spiders along with potentially undescribed frog and reptile species and new records of plants, butterflies and dragonflies were found.

These discoveries reveal the environmental values of the site and help conservation planning for species such as the Angalarri grunter.

Bush Blitz manager Jo Harding said building a body of knowledge around new and threatened species was a central component of the Bush Blitz Program.

"This information is crucial for learning more about the species and the habitats required for their protection, and it wouldn't have been possible without Defence's help."

Steve Grzeskowiak, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Defence Estate and Infrastructure Group, said they managed the largest Commonwealth land holding in Australia and took their environmental stewardship responsibilities seriously.

“What a great outcome from this Bush Blitz to find such a rare species,” Mr Grzeskowiak. “We often find that Defence training facilities are havens for wildlife due to the relative lack of human activity.”

The Bush Blitz program is a partnership between the Australian Government, BHP Billiton Sustainable Communities and Earthwatch Institute.

Images and background information on the Angalarri Grunter can be found at www.bushblitz.org.au/media-centre/

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